

TOWARDS A CRITICAL HISTORY OF  
THE WRITERS' UNION OF CANADA, 1972 – 1992

TOWARDS A CRITICAL HISTORY OF  
THE WRITERS' UNION OF CANADA, 1972 – 1992

By ERIN J. RAMLO, B.A., M.A.

A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfilment of the  
Requirements for the Degree Doctor of English

McMaster University © Copyright by Erin J. Ramlo, June 2021

McMaster University DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (2021) Hamilton, Ontario (English)

TITLE: Towards a Critical History of The Writers' Union of Canada, 1972 – 1992.

AUTHOR: Erin J. Ramlo, B.A, M.A (University of British Columbia)

SUPERVISOR: Professor Lorraine York. NUMBER OF PAGES: xv, 324.

## **Lay Abstract**

The Writers' Union of Canada was founded in November of 1973 "to unite Canadian writers for the advancement of their common interests." Drawing on extensive archival collections – from both the Writers' Union and its member authors – this dissertation offers the first critical history of the organization and its work, from pre-founding to the early 1990s. I argue that the Writers' Union has fundamentally influenced Canadian literature – as an industry, as a community, and as a field of study – as I consider how unionism, literary celebrity, and friendship underpinned the organization's work. This dissertation recuperates and comments on the important volunteer labour of Writers' Union members in the service of literary labour, gender equity, and racial equity over the organization's first twenty years.

## **Abstract**

The Writers' Union of Canada was founded in November of 1973 "to unite Canadian writers for the advancement of their common interests." Drawing on extensive archival collections – from both the Writers' Union and its member authors – this dissertation offers the first critical history of the organization and its work, from pre-founding to the early 1990s, arguing that the Writers' Union has fundamentally influenced Canadian literature, as an industry, as a community, and as a field of study. I begin by tracing the contextual history of the organization's founding, interrogating how union organizing, celebrity, and friendship underpin the organization's work. Chapter One discusses the Writers' Union's programs, reforms, and interventions aimed at 'fostering' writing in Canada as I argue that the Union was instrumental in building a fiscal-cultural futurity for CanLit. In Chapter Two, I consider the role that women played in this important work, as I highlight the labour of female Union members and the all-female administrative staff, who maintained and supported the organization's work through its first twenty years. In Chapter Three I draw attention to the stories of, perspectives of, and experiences of BIPOC authors in relation to the Writers' Union. While the Writers' Union's involvement in race relations is often positioned as having 'begun' with the Writing Thru Race conference in 1994, this chapter uses the archives to reveal a much longer trajectory of racialized conflict within and around the organization, providing important context for the very controversial and public battles about appropriation and race that would explode in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Throughout this work, I look to see how institutional narratives are deployed and upheld, and to what ends; how successful advocacy work is

often effaced and forgotten; how institutional structures function; and how their boundaries and intentions are challenged and developed over time.

## **Acknowledgements**

I have been thinking a lot lately about the term stewardship; to steward; the act of stewarding. One of its many definitions, after helpful service or management is “the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one’s care” (*Merriam-Webster*). I have seen my role in this dissertation as just that – to steward and guide the story of the Writers’ Union onto these pages. It occurred to me recently, though, that it has only been through the kind stewardship of those around me and whom I love, that I was able to help this story come into being. This project, and my life over the last six years, have been made infinitely better by the determined and devoted help – the stewardship – of groups of people on whom I’ve come to depend. Stewards of love and kindness, of health and wellbeing, stewards of thought, analysis and knowledge, stewards of administration and academia, who have surrounded me throughout this project.

For their stewardship of my education and their guidance through this project, I must first thank my committee. To my incomparable supervisor, Lorraine York, who has been a light through this whole process, thank you for the last minute skype and zoom conversations, the encouraging, thoughtful, and enthusiastic responses to my work, and for your reminders to always go gently and be kind to my body. I never knew a doctoral supervisory relationship could be this caring, this generative, and this inspiring, and I remain in awe of you. To my committee members, Daniel Coleman and Roger Hyman, your support and guidance have meant so much to me – from first-year course work through to the completion of this dissertation you have challenged and pushed my thinking with gentle kindness and confidence in my abilities, and I thank you both

immensely. The three of you, along with Mary Silcox, Susie O'Brien, Amber Dean, and Mary O'Connor, trusted me to do this work from afar, and I am so grateful to all of you for your support. My particular thanks to Ilona Forgo-Smith, Aurelia Gatto Pinto, Sophie Goellnicht, Antoinette Somo, and Angela Zaya, whose administrative support also made that possible. I have felt incredibly supported and accommodated over the course of this degree, and that is due, in large part, to all of your kindness and care.

I must also thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and McMaster University, whose financial support for this project very literally stewarded it into existence. Archival research takes a lot of time and money; the detailed, archivally centred stories my research will reveal would have remained hidden if not for the funding this project received – particularly the SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship, McMaster's School of Graduate Studies Grant in Aid of Travel, and the Edna Elizabeth Ross Reeves Scholarship. These awards allowed me to travel to several archival institutions in the course of my research, indelibly changing the shape of this work and opening up valuable new pieces of literary history. This project, then, also owes a huge debt of gratitude to the archivists from those institutions, who have tirelessly helped in my search through thousands of boxes of material. My thanks to: the staff of McMaster's Archives and Special Collections, particularly Renu Barret, Bev Bayzat, Gillian Dunks, Myron Groover, and Rick Stapleton; the staff of Library and Archives Canada, particularly Alexandra McEwan and Sophie Tellier; the staff of The University of Calgary's Archives and Special Collections, particularly Leah Van Dyk and Allison Wagner; the staff of the University of British Columbia's Rare Books and Special



Collections; the staff of York University's Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections; the volunteers and staff of the Mission BC Community archives; and the staff of the University of Toronto's Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, particularly Andrew Stewart – who found a pivotal box which had been misplaced. A special thank you to John Degen, current Executive Director of The Writers' Union of Canada, for your kindness, your encouragement, and your help, and particularly for sending me a copy of Christopher Moore's *Founding The Writers' Union of Canada: An Oral History*, which proved to be a vital source of information and context.

To colleagues and mentors who stewarded ideas, inspiration, focus, and encouragement – thank you. Linda Morra, you gave this work its first chance at publication, and provided such thoughtful guiding comments, that it positively inflected the remainder of the dissertation. Laura Moss, thank you for your enthusiasm for the project at a critical juncture where I wanted to give up – you always know just how to get my heart involved again. To Sherrill Grace, for the opportunity to work with Tiff, which sowed the seeds of this Writers' Union project in the first place, thank you. I have spent the last decade learning from you and laughing with you, and I am thankful for every bit of it. I am also so grateful to friends made while at McMaster – Margaret Boyce, Jeff Fedoruk, Leila Gaind, Constantine Gidaris, Roshney Kurian, Shelby MacGregor, and Emily Scherzinger, thank you for filling my time away from home with inspiration, thoughtful connection, and a lot of laughter.

To the group of people who have stewarded my pained and tired body through the process of this writing – Jenny Abel, Dr. Ric Arseneau and the staff of the CCDP,

Christian Kubas, Melina Mirzaei, and Dawna Silver – thank you. You have invested your own energy into my healing, and have taught me so much about acceptance, balance, and determination along the way. None of this research or writing would have been physically possible without you.

To my dear friends, who have listened and guided and encouraged as only beloved chosen-family can: I adore you. To Meghan Armstrong: your voice on the other end of the phone always kept me grounded, and our visits – after every major archival trip this research entailed – link you, indelibly, to this work. Thank you for always listening to my archival excitement, and for believing in me for so many years. To Alicia Fahey, Rebecca Jackson-Harrop, Vanessa McFarland, Beth Boyle and Suzanne Zilkowsky, thank you, ladies, for always cheering me on.

Finally, to my family, to those still here and to those departed: your love, and your confidence in me, has stewarded me towards my dreams. Mom and Dad, none of this would have been possible without you. I will, forever and always, write with your guiding love and energy behind me. Andy and Noha, Warren – you are the best big-siblings a gal could ever have. Thank you for keeping a roof over my head and for all the help when my weak little bones failed me. Thank you to Lynne, Grant, and Shelly, for the dinners, the encouragement, and the laughs that helped get me through. My biggest, silliest, thank yous must go to my nieces and nephews, who were constant sources of perspective and support, even though they have no idea what being a ‘doctor of books’ – as they called this degree – actually entails. Ella and Grady, your laughter, your stories, and your creativity amaze, overwhelm, and inspire me all at once. Nourah and Taymour, my little

loves: trudging up the hill to hug you when I felt most lost; kissing your smiling screeching faces; listening to your wild stories – you have kept me grounded and sane and present, and I am forever grateful for you two amazing little spirits. And to Adam: my partner, my love. I cannot believe the things we have achieved in these last few years; can't believe the relative grace and humour with which it has all occurred, even in the face of such incredible difficulty and loss. Your faith in me and in this work, your 'of course you can do it' attitude, and – perhaps most important – your hugs, have shaped and stewarded the words that have found their way to these pages.

I remember a day where I showed up to my brother's house defeated, with a little plastic necklace in my hand that my niece had made me for good writing luck. I had come to have it recharged, and along with it, my spirit, my intention, my creativity. I'll never forget the look of concentration and determination on her face as she cupped that necklace between her hands, quietly withdrawing to the other room to work her magic. Every word written here was done with the help of that necklace – a reminder of my community's protection and oversight, of its presence and its love. Somehow it focalized all this devotion, all this labour, and all this care. Its beads reminded me that there was a complex community of support around me, and around this work, that I was both responsible to and a response of.

This dissertation – about a creative community's communal labour – has been crafted with my own community's labour, and it has been written with that care always in mind. I hope that its work honours the love and kindness that has been my dearest luck, fortune, and privilege to receive.

*For all those we lost while I crafted this work –*

*for Brian,*

*for Gary,*

*for Auntie Meg,*

*for Granny Jinny,*

*and for my beloved Bryce*

## Table of Contents

Lay Abstract.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Dedication.....	xi
Table of Contents.....	xii
Archives Consulted and Abbreviations .....	xiii
“Psst! Want to Form a Union?”: An Introduction .....	1
Chapter 1 – Fiscal-Cultural Futurity: “The Fostering of Writing in Canada” .....	72
Chapter 2 – “Status of Women”: Women’s Labour in The Writers’ Union.....	150
Chapter 3 – Invisiblized: Race and the Writers’ Union.....	204
Conclusion .....	284
Works Cited .....	293

## **Archives Consulted and Abbreviations**

AC Fonds – Austin Clarke Fonds. The William Ready Division of Archives and Special Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario.

AM Fonds – Alice Munro Fonds. Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta.

AN Fonds – Alden Nowlan Fonds. Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta.

AS Fonds – Andreas Schroder Fonds. Mission Community Archives. Mission, British Columbia.

AT Fonds – Audrey Thomas Fonds. Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

BM Fonds – Baharati Mukherjee Fonds. Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta.

CB Fonds – Clark Blaise Fonds. Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta.

CH Fonds – Christie Harris Fonds. Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta.

DL Papers – Dennis Lee Papers. Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario.

EF Fonds – Edith Fowke Fonds. Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta.

FM Fonds – Farley Mowat Fonds. The William Ready Division of Archives and Special Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario.

FRS Fonds – F. R. Scott Fonds. Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

GG Papers – Graeme Gibson Papers. Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of  
Toronto, Toronto, Ontario.

GR Fonds – George Ryga Fonds. Archives and Special Collections, University of  
Calgary, Calgary, Alberta.

HA Fonds – Howard Adams Fonds. Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

HH Fonds – Harold Horwood Fonds. Archives and Special Collections, University of  
Calgary, Calgary, Alberta.

HW Papers – Helen Weinzweig Papers. Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of  
Toronto, Toronto, Ontario.

JC Fonds – June Callwood Fonds. Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

JL Fonds – Janet Lunn Fonds. Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

JJM Fonds – Judith Merrill Fonds. Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

JWM Fonds – John Metcalf Fonds. Archives and Special Collections, University of  
Calgary, Calgary, Alberta.

KG Fonds – Katherine Govier Fonds. Archives and Special Collections, University of  
Calgary, Calgary, Alberta.

MA Papers – Margaret Atwood Papers. Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of  
Toronto, Toronto, Ontario.

ME Fonds – Marian Engel Fonds. The William Ready Division of Archives and Special  
Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario.

ML Fonds (1) – Margaret Laurence Fonds. The William Ready Division of Archives and

Special Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario.

ML Fonds (2) – Margaret Laurence Fonds. Clara Thomas Archives, York University,  
Toronto, Ontario.

PB Fonds – Pierre Berton Fonds. The William Ready Division of Archives and Special  
Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario.

RM Fonds – Roy Miki Fonds. University of British Columbia Library Rare Books and  
Special Collections. Vancouver, British Columbia.

RMS Fonds – Roy MacSkimming Fonds. William Ready Division of Archives and  
Research Collections. McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario.

RW Fonds – Rudy Wiebe Fonds. Special Collections, University of Calgary, Calgary,  
Alberta.

SM Fonds – Seymour Mayne Fonds. Library and Archives Canada. Ottawa, Ontario.

TF Fonds – Timothy Findley and William Whitehead Fonds. Library and Archives  
Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

TWUC Fonds – The Writers' Union of Canada Fonds. William Ready Division of  
Archives and Research Collections. McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario.

WOM Fonds – W.O Mitchell Fonds. Archives and Special Collections, University of  
Calgary, Calgary, Alberta.



### **“Psst! Want to Form a Union?”: An Introduction**

The purpose of the Writers’ Union of Canada is to unite Canadian writers for the advancement of their common interests. These interests include: the fostering of writing in Canada; relations with publishers; exchange of information among members; safeguarding the freedom to write and publish; and the advancement of good relations with other writers and their organizations, in Canada and all parts of the world.

– The Writers’ Union of  
Canada Constitution, 1973

About six months before the completion of this dissertation, I realized I would need to add the modifier ‘towards’ to the project’s title. I had, when I started this journey six years ago, naively envisioned my dissertation as a definitive history of The Writers’ Union of Canada, one that traced all the ups and downs of one of the country’s most effective artist-driven advocacy collectives. I imagined capturing all the stories and all the nuances of each initiative, project, committee, protest, policy document, and communiqué the organization had ever produced. As I spent years wading through the extensive archival collections of both the Writers’ Union and its members, I realized the impossibility of this task. The scale of the Union’s work, and, by extension, its impact, were simply too broad to tackle in a project like this one. My committee and I elected to limit the dissertation’s scope, paring the story down to the thematic chapters that make up the shape of this project as it lies, now, in your hands. We decided to bound the analysis temporally, allowing the dissertation to capture watershed moments for the Writers’

Union over its first twenty years – from early meetings in 1972 to 1992’s Appropriate Voice conference. Structurally, we chose to focus only on textual sources, both published and unpublished – rather than interviews – letting the story that emerged in the archives guide this research. But even as I worked towards this end, I was troubled by the lack that these thematic boundaries implied. I was troubled, honestly, by the stacks of archival copies lingering around the edges of my office, whose stories, I knew, would not make it into these pages.

And so, ‘towards.’ ‘Towards’ opens up, rather than forecloses, possibilities. ‘Towards’ signals, immediately, that this dissertation is not the end of this very complex story. The document in your hands is, really, a movement towards beginning to tell the myriad and entwined stories of The Writers’ Union of Canada and its membership. While this dissertation arrives at some important conclusions about that membership, its labour, and its efficacy, ‘towards’ allows us to remember, from the outset, that there are many more stories that remain untold or undiscovered. ‘Towards,’ however, frames this not so much as a limitation of the project, but suggests the possibilities that lie beyond it: for continued inquiry into the productive labour of literary and cultural producers; for more sustained research into how collectivity has helped shape Canadian cultural policy; for broader considerations of who gets included in that collectivity and how it is defined. ‘Towards’ means that this is a project that continues to move and change, even as I present it here, ostensibly, as a finished dissertation.

For now, this dissertation moves towards providing a critical insight into an organization that has, remarkably, remained largely unstudied. When I proposed the idea

for a history of The Writers' Union of Canada, I was shocked to learn that nothing, as yet, had been produced from outside the organization. The Union has kept voluminous archival records; it has, periodically, produced its own short histories listing accomplishments and key dates; for the Union's 40th anniversary in 2013, Christopher Moore and the Writers' Union published *Founding The Writers' Union of Canada: An Oral History*, a series of interviews with several founding members. None of this historical documentary work, however, has occurred outside of the orb of the Writers' Union itself. Indeed, as Christopher Moore wryly notes at the beginning of his interview series, "(full disclosure) I am a long-time member of the Union...and I may not be entirely objective or dispassionate" (5). While they provide valuable information, these histories are often only available via the Union, or in member archival collections, and, in consequence, there is very little publicly available information to draw on, for a student of Canadian literary history, that provides insight into the Writers' Union as an organization, nor about how that organization interacted with the broader landscape of the Canadian literary and cultural industries.

The idea for a history of the Writers' Union came as I worked as a Research Assistant at UBC during my master's degree. Sherrill Grace had hired me to help compile information for Timothy Findley's biography; sitting in her office one day, she asked me to find out more about the Writers' Union and Findley's year as Chairman.<sup>1</sup> I remember that notation in my research journal vividly – "Canadian Writers Union, circa 1977 (?)". At the time, we didn't even have the name of the organization correct. I knew nothing about the Union – indeed, I had never even heard of its existence in my several years of

studying and researching CanLit. This, I think now, is instructive. It is, in part, indicative of the fact that our critical gazes have, largely, been turned towards the output of Canadian authors rather than their input on the structures and institutions that their livelihoods and careers depended on. As I will discuss, the existence of the Writers' Union makes clear that Canadian authors were not only invested in the labour of creative practice, but in the structural labour of crafting, honing, and sustaining an industry for their work. My – and many of my colleagues' – ignorance of the Writers' Union's work speaks to the fact that while the organization has been featured, repeatedly and sometimes controversially, in the public eye and has been largely publicly funded, its presence in our critical lexicon – indeed, its effects upon the way that critical lexicon was supported, nurtured, and shaped – has remained mostly unexamined.

So, I went hunting. I discovered a few passing mentions of The Writers' Union of Canada in *History of the Book in Canada*, and just one in Bill New's *A History of Canadian Literature*. There were a few quick mentions in Roy MacSkimming's *The Perilous Trade: Book Publishing in Canada*, and a 600-word entry in the Canadian Encyclopedia online from Margaret Atwood about the organization. Most helpful were the Writers' Union's own membership books: published in 1977, 1981, 1988, and 1993, they each include a brief history of the organization and provide a sense of its scale and efficacy through the years. But there was still no detailed discussion, anywhere that I could find, of the Union's operational history or of the role that any individual member might have played in its labour on behalf of cultural producers. I discovered, then, that The Writers' Union of Canada's archives were housed in McMaster's William Ready

Division of Archives and Special Collections; moreover, they included several Findley letters. So, to Hamilton I went, in that Spring of 2013, in search of Tiff and some clue to his time with the organization. What seemed like such a small choice at time, has, eight years later, led me here.

I have since discovered that there are clues about the Writers' Union's history everywhere – there are mentions, briefly, in biographies or critical editions of members' work that discuss an individual's involvement and gloss the Union's accomplishments – like Christl Verduyn and Kathy Garay's *Marian Engel: Life in Letters* or Robert Thacker's *Alice Munro: Writing Her Lives*. There are pieces of writing – articles, essays, letters, speeches – from member authors themselves, some published in anthologies or memoirs, and others buried away in their archival files. Most productively, there are Union-produced documents, housed in library and archival collections – very literally – from one edge of this country to the other. There has not, however, been a concentrated study that brings all this information together; there has not been a concerted analysis of why and how this group of Canadian authors came together and the effects their advocacy has had on the shape and structure of the Canadian literary industry. This is the analysis that I offer in this dissertation: a look at the Writers' Union predicated on its own archival traces, that simultaneously critiques the complex entanglements of commerce, celebrity, union organizing, arts advocacy, cultural nationalism, colonialism, and friendship that undergird the organization's structure. I will critically engage the Writers' Union's institutional history to explore how this group of Canadian authors 1) worked together to cultivate an environment within which Canadian literature could flourish and 2) created

an organization that, while it opened up opportunities for Canadian authorship, reified and intervened in existing structural hierarchies of power relating to class, gender, and race.

This introductory chapter will trace and analyse the contextual history of The Writers' Union of Canada, considering how it came into being and for what purpose. It will also outline the main operational imperatives of the organization. The following chapters will then expand on particular initiatives and structures of the Writers' Union, tracing the themes of financial viability and cultural visibility, gender, and race, respectively, from the Union's inception to the early 1990s. These themes asserted themselves over and over as I worked my way through the archival files, and thus, rather than organizing this history chronologically, I've elected to corral my ideas into thematic discussions, allowing me to delve deeper into these three central nodes of inquiry, while simultaneously allowing the archives to guide this work's progression.

Working 'towards' a history of The Writers' Union of Canada, then, also gestures to the process of crafting this dissertation – much of which found me hunched over files in archival reading rooms across the country. As you will see, what I will call the 'labour of literary practice,' and the communal and affective labour of Canadian cultural producers – which centred around and was leveraged by the Writers' Union for its work – is one of my main points of inquiry. As such, an acknowledgement of the labour and structural supports that allowed this project to progress is integral. My own labour in collating and condensing this information would have been impossible without the functional support of the archivists working in the collections I visited, from Universities, to Library and Archives Canada, to community archives. The project's structure,

predicated as it is on the archival traces of the Writers' Union's staff, members, and executives, is indebted not only to those archivists, but to the funding structures that allow those archives to exist and that allowed me to visit them, to the authors who placed their materials within them, and to the people who have allowed me permission to quote from those collections. Invoking 'towards,' though, allows me to mark both the potential and the limitations of this structure. The archives of most authors who were involved in the development and committee work of the Writers' Union are overflowing with information – the number of letters, memoranda, Union-produced documents, and process notes is staggering. There is no way that all of that information could have been captured here. On the other hand, even this extensive information is inherently lacking. The colonial, classist, and patriarchal structures upon which archival collections are based mean that, too often, the documentary traces of women authors, authors of colour, and Indigenous authors remain concealed. While I have been able to turn, in some instances, to published commentary by these authors about the Writers' Union, several member authors have elected specifically not to house their papers in traditional archival structures, and as such, their words may not be reflected in these pages as equitably as I would like. In this way 'towards' notes the work that remains to be done, connections that remain to be made, and stories that remain to be told. Future iterations of this project will need to adopt some of the spirit of collectivity that drives my interest in the Writers' Union, as I turn to interviews, collaborative scholarship, and more public-facing inquiry into our cultural structures within and beyond the Writers' Union. For now, the approach I have taken to this vast assemblage of Writers' Union materials has, I hope, been

sensitive to contextual and cultural nuance; it has been rigorous, archivally; it has been diligent, in its attempts to capture as much information as possible for the use of future researchers. It is, however, not without omissions or faults, as I continue – even now, eight years into thinking about this project – to learn about the Writers’ Union and its members, daily. ‘Towards,’ though, allows me a measure of solace, hoping that the stacks of archival copies that continue to line the edges of my office will not go to waste, as they will find their way into future iterations of this project.

\*\*\*\*\*

There are a number of stories about how the Writers’ Union was founded. Some place the impetus with the Ontario Royal Commission on Book Publishing; others date it to a demonstration against the sale of Ryerson Press in 1970; Writers’ Union member and historian Christopher Moore places it in the Park Plaza Hotel over hotdogs and beer. All of these stories, simultaneously, are true. The Writers’ Union of Canada was formed, officially, on November 3, 1973, at a founding conference at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa. According to the Writers’ Union’s first press release “the prose writers of Canada have organized themselves into a union because only through collective action is it possible to overcome the enormous handicaps faced by writers in this country” (“Press Release” 1).<sup>2</sup> Their stated aims in forming this collective were to “fight to improve the conditions under which [they] work,” including the “improvement of contract terms,” implementing a “minimum standard contract,” and establishing “public lending rights” (1) for the use of books in libraries nationwide. According to the nascent Union, “national survival demands that our people have access to books written by Canadians about



Canada. The book trade must be Canadianized to the point where Canadian books predominate at all levels” (1) of the industry, from arts funding to publishing opportunities to sales to libraries. The statement is adamant in its intentions to align with labour and nationalism to “ultimately... transform completely the system of book publishing and distribution in this country” (1) via collective advocacy work. While these goals might seem grandiose, part of what makes the Writers’ Union’s story so fascinating is that the group, ultimately, did achieve most of those early objectives. Whether their work has “transformed completely” the industry of book publishing and distribution is debatable, but the functional and structural supports that the Writers’ Union and its members were able to implement are undeniable: standard contracts and public lending rights; reforms to tax codes; laws about book remaindering distribution practices; touring and education programs. Add to that anti-censorship advocacy; information dissemination about awards, jobs, and opportunities to members; legal advice and grievance resolution with publishers; and health care coverage; and the labour-rights inflected work of the organization becomes clear. Most important to many member authors was the sense of collective work and obligation to their industry that the Writers’ Union was able to focalize. As Graeme Gibson noted in 2010, “since few writers in the early ‘70s knew more than a handful of their peers, our first substantial accomplishment was the focusing of a country-wide community of professional Anglophone book writers” (“2010 – Graeme Gibson” 389). Following the trail of the authors who were present at that first official Writers’ Union meeting and how they came to be there is productive, as it sets the context for how and why the Union emerged in the way that it did at that particular time.

Moreover, this history helps to reveal threads of challenges that will surface as the Union continues to grow and expand.

According to an early Union history “the moving force behind the idea of a Union was Graeme Gibson. He spoke of organizing writers and excited others about the possibilities” (“History of...” 1).<sup>3</sup> Marian Engel, who would become the Union’s first elected chairman, describes the moment she was introduced to the idea: “Graeme Gibson nudged me at a cocktail party and said, ‘Psst! Want to form a union?’” (“Writers of Canada Unite” 46). This would have been sometime in early 1971. In October of 1971, Gibson wrote to Timothy Findley about the details of an upcoming interview. In a post-script to that letter Gibson asks if Findley would be “interested in a union of Canadian writers” (1).<sup>4</sup> Gibson has “been throwing the idea around with a number of people (Margaret Atwood, Matt Cohen, Jim Lorimer for non-fiction)” and he has “written to several more” (1) to judge their interest. “The idea,” he writes, “is that since prose writers are one of the last to have no organization, is there any way we can get together enough to form one?” (1). Gibson notes that “much needs to be worked out” but that “so far we’ve all felt the emphasis should be on the word UNION,” as they “anticipate it being a political thing, not a club” (1).<sup>5</sup>

This letter, in and of itself, reveals several important nodes of inquiry for my purposes. Gibson reveals that he is rallying a community of cultural producers with whom he is largely already acquainted, pointing to the relationships that were central to the organization’s founding. Inasmuch as this letter to Findley is, ostensibly, about an interview for Gibson’s book *Eleven Canadian Novelists*, published by Anansi in 1973,

Gibson is also directly attaching the Union to that group of writers, and, moreover to Anansi Press itself.<sup>6</sup> Margaret Atwood, Matt Cohen, Austin Clarke, and Dennis Lee – all members of the early group of interested authors that Gibson brought together – were all associated with Anansi Press at the time.<sup>7</sup> Even Alma Lee, the Writers' Union's first Executive Director, was brought on board via Anansi – working off the side of her desk until the Union could secure funding and officially offer her a job.<sup>8</sup> Most importantly, this letter includes Gibson's note that the word Union – highlighted in capitals – is central to the group's articulation of their work. From its very beginnings, this was to be a collective focused on labour, financial equity, and political action, defined in direct opposition to the clubs of writer-craftsmen that already existed in the Canadian context – such as the Canadian Authors' Association (CAA) to which I will return in a moment – and in alliance with other groups of labouring creatives who had founded their own organizations based on their mutual desire for collective action.

A fall 1971 letter from Matt Cohen to Gibson reveals that their discussions about an organization had been ongoing for some time, as Cohen states that he “think[s] that there are probably many things to be done which need doing and that a writer's union might help to do them” (1).<sup>9</sup> Cohen perceives their concerns to fall into three categories “Category 1: relations between writers and readers” as the market “is currently mostly controlled by American firms” (1). “Category 2,” Cohen notes, is all about professional practices; what he calls “careerist problems: writers should probably make more (i.e. some) money and have more leverage with publishing houses” (1), he writes. And finally, “Category 3: the writers union as a political instrument” (1). Cohen notes that “our

conversations have tended to incorporate all these three categories but centre on category 1. Maybe what we should do is consider starting something there” (1), implying, one, that they have been discussing the permutations of the Union for some time (prior to the fall of 1971); two, that the nationalist impetus for the Union’s existence was central to its development; and three, that the branches of the organization’s work – cultural, financial, and political – were sewn into the fabric of the Union from its inception. Moreover, Cohen’s focus on labour-oriented practices for their organization is clear, as he proposes that while “we can’t ‘strike’ it would be interesting to see if everyone writing reviews for the Toronto papers and magazines could,” for example, “be persuaded to refuse to do reviews for a particular paper or magazine until they expanded the space available for reviews” (2). Even while he lays out these intentions, Cohen expresses that he is increasingly concerned about “careerism in writing” and that he sees “deep disadvantages in promoting among writers... a heightening consciousness of professionalism, careerism, power, and status” (1). Here, Cohen reveals both an opportunity for the Union and one of its enduring challenges – while the Union’s professionalization efforts brought practical utility, they have also propped up claims to celebrity, power, and status, things the Union would be critiqued for in the midst of its founding, and indeed, to this day.

I must pause for a moment to consider the broader context of Canadian authorship previous to, and at the time of, the writing of these letters. Consider that, in the twenty years that preceded the founding of The Writers’ Union of Canada, issues of the economics of production and dissemination of Canadian literature were at the forefront of cultural policy discussions. The Massey Commission’s 1951 report had articulated a need

for increased funding for publishers and producers alike, and the Canada Council, established in 1957, was disseminating those grants to authors, publishers, and other literary organizations. Even before that, the Canadian Authors Association, founded in 1921, had been calling for reforms to Canadian copyright laws, highlighting the nationalist importance of supporting Canadian literary arts, and encouraging reforms to the industry. The CAA's aims and intentions at the time of its founding were strikingly similar to the nascent Union – as BK Sandwell noted at the CAA's surprisingly well-attended founding meeting, “the size and personnel of the present assembly affords ample justification for any action... on behalf of Canadian writers as a class” (qtd. in Harrington 24). Note the invocation of labour inflected interests and intentions, even in 1921. In Christopher Doody's recent history of the CAA he notes that while the organization has been largely “written out of Canada's literary history” (3), in its first forty years of existence it “lobbied the government for changes to copyright laws that disadvantaged Canadian authors, organized a yearly nation-wide book week (1921-1957), published the *Canadian Poetry Magazine* (1936-1963), created and ran the Governor General's Awards (1937-1959), and was active in lobbying the government for patronage of the arts” (3) – all important interventions in the shape and structure of the developing industry. The period around Canada's centennial also saw the development of dozens of small presses nation-wide, as well as several provincial arts councils (Ontario in 1963, Manitoba in 1964, the Yukon in 1971, etc.), and localized writers' organizations, such as the Saskatchewan Writers Guild, founded in 1969. Many genre-specific organizations were also birthed around this time, with the precursor to ACTRA, The Association of Canadian

Radio Arts, founded in 1943, The League of Canadian Poets founded in 1966, and the Playwrights Guild of Canada founded in 1972.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, Canadian literature, as a critical discipline, was just finding its legs – the field’s first academic journal, *Canadian Literature*, was launched in 1959 – and there was a growing demand for Canadian literary production. It is important that we always remember this foundational work, which occurred around and largely prefigured that of The Writers’ Union of Canada. While early Union members often conceived of their work as being in direct opposition to already extant organizations,<sup>11</sup> the broader ferment of cultural support and collectivity is inevitably part of what led to the Writers’ Union’s founding in the first place.

Outside of the literary and cultural industries, the period also saw a distinct resurgence of Canadian labour politics, as trade unionism became more and more common into the 1970s. While labour activism and radicalism already had a long and complex history in Canada, with organizing and strikes dating back to the early 1900s, according to Robert Laxer in *Canada’s Unions* (1976), in the 1970s “the broad nationalist movement in Canada contributed substantially to this new mood of labour, but labour’s new activism also strengthened the nationalist movement” (xiii). This reciprocal relationship, along with ferment in the culture industries in the early 1970s, are two integral currents that underpin the founding of The Writers’ Union of Canada. For Laxer, “the[se] two currents of nationalism and labour militancy continued to merge in 1974 and 75...[and] the rapid growth of independent Canadian unions clearly illustrated the vitality of this new period in Canadian labour history” (xiii). While the Writers’ Union is never mentioned specifically in Laxer’s study, I would argue that we can understand it as one of

the central cultural expressions of this growing labour resurgence. Laxer explains that while “working people could do little in the short run to end the ‘monopoly above’” (34) – i.e., corporate control – “by combining into trade unions and bargaining collectively, workers could protect their existing wages, hours of work and job conditions, and press forward to improve them” (34). This description captures writers’ situations during this period well; while authors could protest and voice their dissent against Americanization, as individuals they held very little power over the corporate structures of their industry. As a collective, however, they were able to advocate for structural supports – their equivalents of wages and hours of work – that would come to redefine the precepts of the corporate culture that they laboured within.

In 1970 and ‘71, however, before the Union’s founding, anxiety about the security of Canadian-owned publishing houses and, therefore, the ability of Canadian authors to have their work published at all, was pervasive. It focused, most publicly, around the sale of Ryerson Press to the American branch plant McGraw-Hill in 1970. As Ruth Bradley-St-Cyr describes, the sale caused “a cultural and nationalist crisis in the publishing community” (ii), which would set off a series of events that led, eventually, to the formation of The Writers’ Union of Canada. Toronto’s WJ Gage & Company Press had also recently been sold to American interests, and, just a month later when Ryerson followed suit, it sparked the formation of the Emergency Committee of Canadian Publishers – which included Graeme Gibson and others at Anansi – who vehemently protested the sale. Citing the broader political and cultural unrest at the time – which included the FLQ crisis in progress in Quebec and the ongoing Vietnam War – Gibson

remembers that “many of us felt that our generation lost its political innocence at the time” (“2010...” 386). Thus, “the sale of Ryerson Press to an American publisher caused a modest but transformative Canadian revolution. Canadian publishers quickly formed an emergency committee to protest the sale, and a mixed group instigated by publisher James Lorimer marshaled a protest in front of the Ryerson Polytechnic Institute” (386-7). In an interview with Christopher Moore, Gibson recalled that the protestors “had a big American flag and a ladder...we called the press in, and to our astonishment they all turned up” (*Founding the Writers’ Union...* 39), so he “climbed up the ladder and draped the American flag around the statue of Egerton Ryerson, and we all sang ‘I’m a Yankee Doodle Dandy’... we all rushed home and watched ourselves on television” (39).<sup>12</sup> Gibson credits this protest with “start[ing] the pot boiling” on a collective, politically inflected, authors’ organization as, he says, “we discovered we had influence... that was something we hadn’t known. It hadn’t occurred to us at all” (39). Note the references to acclaim and attention that Gibson registers here. It’s not that Gibson is saying that they chased celebrity, per se, but that they were beginning to realize the power of their collective to marshal attention and, potentially, change. As I will discuss, this ability to attract media coverage will become a skill that the Writers’ Union’s organizers leveraged often and effectively throughout the organization’s existence. And, as Gibson notes, the discovery of this kind of political and cultural influence is what led, in part, to the idea of forming a Union in the first place.

The crisis surrounding the Ryerson Press sale spawned government action in the form of the Ontario Royal Commission on Book Publishing, established in late 1970.



Headed by Richard Rohmer, Dalton Camp, and Marsh Jenneret, the commission took testimony from all branches of the publishing sector, hoping to determine what interventions could be put in place to support the floundering industry. According to Graeme Gibson, one of these commissioners<sup>13</sup> “told writer and playwright Max Braithwaite that they needed prose writers at their hearings. Max got a bunch of us together in his apartment, where we agreed to try and be sensible” (“2010...” 387), meaning that the group came together and tried to lay out a plan for how to approach this potentially very useful and lucrative opportunity. Gibson explains that in that meeting at Max Braithwaite’s the group “swore that we were not going to argue, and we were not going to whine, that we were going to be mature artists” (Moore 40) when speaking to the commission.

On December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1971 the group of authors came together, officially, to voice their concerns for literary producers to the Royal Commission on Book Publishing. The headline in the *Toronto Star* the following day was “Writers Make Fools of Themselves” (Dobbs) – so, clearly, the day did not quite go to plan. The transcript of the testimony, recently published by the *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada*, is worth looking at in some detail here as it reveals several important approaches to the Writers’ Union’s early days.<sup>14</sup> Farley Mowat leads the group, introducing their concerns to the assembled commission and prefacing the authors’ individual comments. He begins by noting that while the group assembled “doesn’t pretend to represent all the writers in Canada” (“The Writers’ Union Meets the Royal Commission” 143), they do come to the commissioners as “a group of fully professional writers and we believe that, because we

are fully professional writers, that our problems are universal problems with the writing fraternity of this country” (143). Note Mowat’s double assertion that professional success confers authority, and the assumption of universality he believes this implies. As we will see, claims to this kind of assumed collective experience will become points of challenge, later, for the Union that these authors will go on to form; note, in particular, Mowat’s invocation of the word ‘fraternity’ to describe authorial collectivity.<sup>15</sup> Mowat acknowledges that the assembled authors, Ian Adams, Margaret Atwood, Max Braithwaite, Fred Bodsworth, June Callwood, Graeme Gibson, Jack Gray, and David Helwig had prepared specific comments that they would each deliver, in turn. The transcript reveals that Al Purdy, Hugh Garner, and Dennis Lee were also in attendance, and it was dissenting comments from Hugh Garner, in particular, that eventually led the testimony into what Graeme Gibson called a “melee” (“2010...” 387).<sup>16</sup> Mowat’s extensive preface – which no doubt took up much of the authors’ allotted time – spells out many of the reasons a union of writers was deemed necessary, and indeed, proposes an important self-mythologizing origin story for the organization.

As Farley Mowat tells it, in his testimony before the commission, the authors’ presence there was “purely accidental” (“The Writers’ Union Meets the Royal Commission” 143). Indeed, Mowat positions their involvement in the commission as “one of the most beautiful accidents that could happen to writers who are, in many ways, inconsequential people” (143). Self-deprecation aside, there is an important point here, inasmuch as writers often felt pushed aside by the broader structures of cultural production in Canada, decrying the fact that their voices – as the makers of important

cultural products – were not at the forefront of policy decisions. Even more important, perhaps, is that Mowat positions himself at the centre of this assembled group, and his own social contacts as having been part of what secured the authors this podium in the first place. As Mowat describes it, it was at a party held by an unnamed publisher in late 1971 that he ran into Richard Rohmer, Chairman of the Royal Commission. “I saw Mr. Rohmer and I was filled with fury,” Mowat describes in his opening testimony, “at... what I thought the Commission was doing, so I dashed up to him, accosted him, and said ‘Look, you [are] neglecting the primary producers. We, the writers of Canada, want to be heard’” (143). Note that the language of labour and production is already present in Mowat’s description of authorial work. Moreover, given what the letters reveal – that Gibson had been organizing a union many months before this testimony – and what Gibson has said about Max Braithwaite being the connection point to this opportunity, we must consider why it is that the group has centred Mowat and his narrative in this hearing. Perhaps it was Farley Mowat’s relative fame – his name recognition – that urged them to have him lead their charge? While Mowat insists throughout his own testimony that the authors assembled “have no power base” (145), and that they “lack status and position” (145), his presence in front of that microphone suggests otherwise. Was this, perhaps, a calculated tactic by this group of authors to confer some added status and power to their words and demands? Remember: this is a group of professional writers who are adept at managing narratives.

Mowat, for his part, insists upon their professionalism: “this group before you today does not include any literary dilettantes” (143) he says; “we are writers of books, if

not always full-time, that is only because we cannot always afford to spend all of our time writing books, because we can't survive on that alone" (143). Again, this reveals another important question about the Writers' Union's work that will echo throughout their founding – what, exactly, defines a 'professional writer'? It is, Mowat avers, certainly not just someone who works full time, and consequently, Mowat positions their petition to the commission as being in the service of emerging writers. "We are asking for our society to produce a condition that will be advantageous to new writers coming up" (144), he says, for, "if there is such a thing as a future for Canada, we believe it will be due mainly to writers. We do not believe that Canada can survive without us" (144). Note the echoes, here, of the Union's very first press release, cited above. Mowat asserts that they are "making [their] voices heard for a demand for the protection of [their] rights as authors, as primary producers" (146) as he claims that "professional writers in this country...are no longer willing to tolerate this situation" (146), and as a result:

we now feel we must organize, not essentially to protect our own position, but to make bloody good and sure that there is a position and the position will exist for young writers, people coming up, one which will encourage imaginative and talented people to take up the pen in increasing numbers and the subsequent effect upon our society which we are sure will be of advantage to society. We are going to form our own union and we are going to work very strenuously. (146)

Both the nationalism and the exasperation that ring through this statement will echo, almost word for word, in early Writers' Union documents produced in the coming years. The pageantry and mythmaking of Mowat's testimony are also clear. As Mowat closes, the chairman asks: "I take it all this has come from your rushing up to me at the cocktail party?" (146). To which Mowat replies: "It is entirely your fault. If there was a Union formed, sir, I may tell you that you will be the man who will have to bear the blame" (146). This, of course, elicits laughter from the assembled crowd, and, subsequently, becomes part of the mythos of the Writers' Union's founding. A 1977 introduction to their members' book, *Canada Writes!*, cites the moment: "Farley Mowat, in fact, tells the story that, during the presentation, Richard Rohmer... suggested that what Canada's writers needed was a union. Obviously," the history continues, "some kind of tribal sense came into focus at this time" (xii), tying the Royal Commission narrative to another one of the Union's rallying myths, the tribe, to which I will return later in this introduction.

There are two final points to make about the Royal Commission, however, before I move on. The conclusion of Mowat's lengthy introduction is where the assured, intentional expression of the group's collectivity begins to degenerate. As each author presents their allotted agenda item to the commission, dissention rises among them; particular points are challenged, personal experiences are foregrounded, and arguments ensue. At one point, as Mowat lambastes the Canada Council, Dennis Lee yells out "Bullshit!" – clearly marking discord among them and the extent of the group's differing opinions about matters of how funding and structural support ought to be administered.<sup>17</sup> The tension in the room was such that, after her own testimony Margaret Atwood notes

that they “didn’t come here to listen to personal comments today” and that if “any more of it” persists, “we are all going to get up and walk out. Enough,” she insists, “of this shooting people down” (175).<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Atwood, Callwood, Gibson, and Adams all walked out shortly thereafter, as Garner and Mowat continued centring their own personal experiences with Canadian funding structures. Adams pops back in to note that “all of this bitter wrangling by the older authors who are here... really demonstrates what a lousy situation the Canadian publishing business is in” and that, from his perspective they will need to “go away and organize a sub-union of writers and then we won’t be riddled with all this... factionism [sic]” (176). It is worth noting that Adams’s statement drew applause from the assembled crowd – the only applause noted in the transcript – and that the chairman closed the day by expressing the committee’s “hope [that] you can all come together and become a stronger force” (178). The breakdown of their testimony is, I think, pivotal. It encapsulates the idea that the Writers’ Union was founded both in collectivity and in opposition. As we will see, writers involved with the organization had widely differing opinions about how the publishing industry’s challenges should be met and addressed, how the organization itself should be articulated, and what structure – particularly for membership – should govern its endeavors. The dissention that is evident in this one hearing is often mirrored in so much of the Writers’ Union’s work in the years to come. The Union that eventually took shape certainly didn’t avoid the factionalism that Adams cites as a concern – the organization was famous for raucous arguments at AGMs, some of which led to mass resignations – but in those early years they did seem to put aside many of their differences to form a collective animated by common concerns. This

episode, though, points to yet another part of the mythology of the Writers' Union: that authors are difficult, opinionated, impossible to organize, but that the Union, through collectivity and compromise, was able to wrangle them into common purpose. This narrative is repeated in many early Writers' Union documents, and, indeed, in much of the early media coverage about the developing organization.

I continue to wonder if it was, perhaps, the dissonance among these writers that actually created the spark that helped the Union to get off the ground. After the disastrous Royal Commission hearing, as Graeme Gibson remembers it, “some of us retreated to lick our wounds in a beer parlour beneath the Park Plaza Hotel, where the idea of a prose writers' organization took hold. A few of us began to talk, to plan, and eventually test the idea with others across the country” (“2010...” 387). According to an early Union history, Ian Adams, June Callwood, Margaret Atwood, and Fred Bodsworth joined Gibson for beers that day, and it was here that the Writers' Union came into being. As the archives reveal, however, the idea for an organization had already been in play – with Gibson set squarely at its centre – for quite some time. As Cohen's and Findley's letters make clear, even the word *Union* was already in their parlance, with the idea having come to light sometime between the Ryerson protests and the authors' testimony to the commission. Perhaps, though, forming an organization had not yet come to a point of urgency. If their debriefing in the King Cole Room in the basement of the Park Plaza Hotel post-Royal-Commission galvanized the group to action, then perhaps that is why it is so often cited as the moment of the organization's inception.

Indeed, it makes for a good narrative – a group of friends came together in frustration to form an organization and protect their rights as producers. And that is certainly, in part, true. We must remember, though, that a significant amount of prior labour had already occurred to bring that group together, that the bulk of the work of forming the actual organization came – via operational, administrative, and volunteer labour – after that fateful day, and that this story is one that has been told over and over again by a group of professional storytellers to ground their indignation about their industry and provide their organization with a grassroots origin story. As with so many institutions, the oft-told narratives generally say as much about what wants to be remembered as they do about what may actually have occurred. In *Working in the Past: Narrative and Institutional Memory* Charlotte Linde calls these types of stories “retold tales” – points of organizational history that operate beyond the original event that “form an important part of the way that institutions remember their past and use that remembering to create current identities for both the institution and its members” (73). Linde observes that there is often “a repertoire of stories active within [an] institution” (73) that props up its articulation of itself. For the Writers’ Union, the confluence of friendship, celebrity, professionalization, collectivity, and labour are focalized in these origin stories, which will continue to be told for the next forty years.<sup>19</sup> Such stories work to support and deploy a particular form of collectivity, rooted in collaboration, commiseration, and collegiality. But it is important to remember that opposition and dissent were also central to how and why the Union was formed in the first place. Ultimately, the people who joined together and worked to form the organization over the



coming years – which included all the authors present at the Commission, with the exception of Hugh Garner – agreed that they needed each other to effect material change and interventions in an industry that, they believed, wasn't valuing their labour appropriately. This conviction, then, becomes the point of covalence around which the Writers' Union is formed; it becomes the structural institutional imperative around which the group's implemental labour coalesced. And this, ultimately, is what I am most interested in – the functional labour that brought the Writers' Union into existence, into efficacy, and into continued operation, to this day.

The meeting over beers that day translated into several years of planning work – much of it centred on this point of collective need, and focalized around groups of friends and colleagues working together in informal committees. Toronto's Brunswick Avenue became a kind of gathering point for the developing organization, as interested authors met regularly at Marian Engel's home, or at Austin Clarke's down the block. The Ontario Arts Council provided a grant in 1972 to begin planning work and to pay Alma Lee, their first administrator and eventual Executive Director, who had already been helping on a volunteer basis. Several important meetings occurred around this time, one, in particular, where Graeme Gibson brought together a small group of interested colleagues from across the country at Ryerson College in December of 1972. As Gibson remembers it, "I was still teaching [there at the time]... and Ryerson gave us a space for nothing" (qtd. in Moore, *Founding the Writers' Union...* 46). He also confirms that that very first informal meeting was funded by the Ontario Arts Council, even though that funding was used to bring together authors from all provinces. Calling the OAC's then-director Ron Evans a

“visionary” (“2010...” 387), Gibson explains that he “bankrolled that first conference” (387). As Gibson recalls, he “said to Ron, ‘We need money to bring together, let’s say, 25 or 30 writers’” and that “many of them would be coming from central Canada, but we also brought them from Newfoundland and Victoria. And he gave me the money” (qtd. in Moore, *Founding the Writers’ Union...* 44-45). The informality of these early and formative days of literary funding is striking, as is the geographical diversity of the attendees, which was a priority from the organization’s inception.

Timothy Findley remembers those early Union days in an essay about Marian Engel called “The Tea Party, or How I Was Nailed by Marian Engel, General Booth, and Minn Williams Burge,” published in *Room of One’s Own* in 1984. He recalls meeting Engel for the first time at that nascent Union gathering: “It was December the sixteenth, 1972. She was making a cup of something (was it tea?) in the galley of the Jorgenson Building at Ryerson College, Toronto. We had gathered there – in the Jorgenson Building, not in the galley – as part of an *ad hoc* committee to explore the idea of a union for prose writers and there were, I think, about fourteen or sixteen of us. It was Graeme Gibson’s doing, pretty well. He had chosen us and invited us and I remember being very nervous because Marian Engel was going to be there” (35). Findley’s recollection is one of the few that survive about this early meeting, and the nerves that he gestures to here help us to position this relatively young and eager group of writers together as they work to form the Union. According to Atwood, who is quoted in an early Writers’ Union history, it was this Ryerson meeting “that decided whether there was going to be a union” or not. “It was there that a lot of the initial stances were hacked out, such as what kind of

membership we would have” (“History of...” 1).<sup>20</sup> Atwood remembers, “there was a lot of debate about the name, whether we wanted it to be a real union, or whether we wanted it to be an association of some kind” (1). Ultimately, the former won out, perhaps not surprising when so much of their articulations of themselves had centred on labour. While the group was still small, writers from across the country attended – Andreas Schroeder from the West Coast, for example, Clarke Blaise from Montreal, Harold Horwood from the Maritimes. The group was, however, vilified by Kildaire Dobbs in the *Toronto Star* afterwards for only bringing together writers that “the founders approved of” (“Birth Pangs of a Union” 28) and for having done so “secretively” (28). While Dobbs concedes that “the idea is still a good one and the begetters should be congratulated,” he asserts emphatically that “a small clique should be avoided” and that “it’s time for the pioneers to make an announcement, and invite cooperation from other writers” (28). Atwood hit back in a letter to the editor, citing the fact that authors from all parts of the country had participated and that “there was nothing secretive about the meeting. But it would have been foolish for anyone to have made public statements on behalf of an organization which did not (and does not yet) exist” (“Writers’ Union Wasn’t Secretive” 7).<sup>21</sup> For my purposes it is important to note that the selection of this nascent group – and their work which followed – was steeped in controversy and critique about inclusion and exclusion, from the very beginning.

At this Ryerson meeting, authors grouped together into working committees to begin the research, planning, and policy drafting necessary to move towards founding. Marian Engel, Austin Clarke, and June Callwood, for example, began work on a draft

constitution, while others, like Gibson, turned their attention to securing funding for more formal meetings of potential members. The committees wrote hundreds of letters, debated over hours of phone calls, and continued to meet at Marian Engel's, when they happened to be in Toronto. As Findley remembered in 1984: "Brunswick Avenue had then – and still has – a kind of mythical aura about it. There are trees. The houses are old. Interesting people live there – writers, artists, actors" ("The Tea Party..." 37). He continues, in detail:

Sometimes, I'd arrive early at these meetings and sit with Marian Engel in the kitchen, while my friend Bill Whitehead was ensconced behind a glass door in the study – where he would set to work on the Engel typewriter, completing a television script. Graeme Gibson and Margaret Atwood lived in the country then (as Bill and I did) and they would arrive in a dreadful, mud-encrusted truck with mysterious bits of machinery lumped in the back. Beer was got out of the fridge. Matt Cohen would arrive, Sylvia Fraser (on a motorcycle, sometimes wearing evening clothes), Rudy Wiebe (who might be staying with the Engels), others. It was wonderful. That's how the Union was born. Over bottles of beer and cups of tea in Marian Engel's living room on Brunswick Avenue. (37)

Can you hear the notes of a mythos developing itself? From the aura of Brunswick avenue to the low-brow community-minded nature of their creative and collective work,

which happened on the fly and among friends. The bottles of beer and cups of tea, in particular, point to the comradery of these early days – and link back to the beers and hotdogs at the King Eddy – clearly situating the Union’s origins, both practical and in its mythos, in a kind of collective movement of friendship.

Soon though, as Kildaire Dobbs’s article had suggested, this group would need to begin to define itself more formally, inviting more authors into their collective work. In this process, several names were ascribed to the developing organization, as they struggled to define its aims and intentions. The first newsletter the group sent out to their growing mailing list was addressed to the “Canadian Writers Union”; the listing for the organization in the appendix pages to Atwood’s *Survival* (1972) is “Union of Canadian Prose Writers in English,” which, she points out is “an unwieldy provisional title for a group which plans to hold its first meetings in the fall of 1972. When it gets underway it should provide contact with many novelists and fiction writers” (266). Note, here, the attention paid to authors of fiction, which signals, however modestly, a tension that will bear itself out as the Union lurches towards formation and defines its membership criteria. An early and tentative draft of a constitution for a “League of Canadian Writers” exists in June Callwood’s files, as do several letters about constitutional requirements and copies of the constitutions of other writers’ organizations, including the Authors League of America. The carbon copy “First Draft Constitution League of Canadian Writers” on onionskin takes a very different form than the constitution that the Union will eventually adopt, but this ‘League’ version retains some of the language that will make its way into the ratified constitution, namely the call to “safeguard the freedom to write” and to liaise

“with other organizations representing writers” (1),<sup>22</sup> both of which are quoted in the epigraph to this chapter. One clause, as written in the initial draft, hints at the collectivity the group saw as essential to the Union’s necessity – “to keep Canadian authors in touch with one another and aware of changing conditions” (1) – while another important clause is noticeably absent from any later iteration of the Union’s constitution: “to advise and otherwise assist young or inexperienced writers” (1).

Just after this draft constitution in Callwood’s files is a letter from Helen Weinzweig, dated August of 1973, that offers some insight into the group’s process: Callwood has been in touch asking for a copy of the constitution of the Canadian League of Composers, which Helen’s husband, John Weinzweig, had been instrumental in establishing.<sup>23</sup> While she does not have the document on hand, Weinzweig writes a detailed letter about why a constitution is necessary and deftly delineates which type of structure will likely be of most use to them, as authors. She also notes that “any lawyer can set up this kind of document, which would deal with matters such as annual meetings, quorums, executive personnel – the usual” (1),<sup>24</sup> and that “the mechanics, such as membership criteria, turn up in bylaws” (1) rather than the constitution. She notes that these documents are, often, vague in their initial articulations, “an advantage, so that the organization remain[s] flexible at this stage, as time and experience will incur decisions you will want to incorporate. John tells me the League had to scrap their first constitution because it was too specific. He thinks anything will do so long as its legal” (1). Since much of the Union’s work was enacted by volunteers, often from their homes, their documents from this time betray a certain haphazardness, a disorganization; Weinzweig’s

letter, however – and, in particular, its casual, assured tone – reminds us that this is a group of practiced, experienced creatives, who leveraged their personal connections and past experience to come together and form an organization that any one of them, alone, could never have conceived. Moreover, Weinzweig’s letter signals the broader context within which the Union’s founders were operating – one in which almost all other creative producers had specific advocacy organizations, except for prose writers.

In the end, the decision to base the structure of their organization on union principles of labour advocacy – rather than forming a league or guild – won out, as the membership positioned their main aims as being financial in nature. This move was not, perhaps, surprising or unprecedented given the climate in which these authors found themselves in the early 1970s. The group did, however, register the inherent irony in their union moniker, as they could not exercise the basic tenet of unionism: the ability to strike. As a list of organizational accomplishments notes, the 1973 founders “argued all day over whether [they] should be a ‘guild,’ ‘association,’ or ‘union’” and that they “agreed we’re probably a guild but would call ourselves a Union because it sounded more militant” (“Ten Years of Union Accomplishments” 1).<sup>25</sup> Note, here, the group’s recognition of the power and potential of the language they employ.

The interplay between these ideas wasn’t exclusive to the Writers’ Union, nor was the tension about what exactly constituted a union for creative makers. According to Robert Laxer, prior to “the 1970s...craft and industrial unions existed side by side in Canada” (35), but in the 1970s “the newly emerging union organizations of teachers, nurses, and other groups which had traditionally been considered purely ‘professional’

were taking shape as a blend of the craft and industrial forms of organization” (35) – much like the Writers’ Union. The history of these two structural forms of unionization is productive to consider for how it influenced the Writers’ Union’s articulation of its aims and membership requirements. Craft unions, Laxer writes, “were organizations of skilled workers such as printers, cabinet makers, plumbers, or machinists, which tried to lessen the competition for jobs by restricting entry into the trade” (34). They “were committed to maintaining high skill levels among their membership, retaining the pride in workmanship that had characterized the craftsmen of pre-industrial days” (35). Industrial unions, in contrast, “relied on the mass power of their membership and their potential to halt production to exert their power during negotiations” (35) with employers.

In Julie White’s contribution to *Equity, Diversity, and Canadian Labour*, she reminds readers, though, about the fundamental disjunction between the craft and industrial forms of unionism – skilled work. Craft unions, when they first appeared in the late 1800s and early 1900s, “organized only the skilled workers at a plant or factory, not all the workers” (26). While a craft union’s power lay in the fact that their workers “could not easily be replaced” (26), this also meant that “the exclusion of unskilled workers was fundamental to retaining th[at] leverage” (26). Because of “protectionist” (26) policies like this, craft unions often ended up representing the “workers who were already among the best paid” (26), while structurally excluding those “unskilled workers [who were] the small number of women and minorities in the workforce” (2) at the time. Thus “employers resisted women’s demands for improved working conditions... given their role as cheap labour” (28), and “the union movement promoted the exclusion of non-



whites from the country, from employment, and from unions” (29), according to White. By the 1930s and 40s, as industrial unionism began to take shape, these organizations “challenged the dominance of the early craft unions, organizing all the workers in a plant or factory” (32), and thus, “the union movement” began to play “a significant part in the demand for equal treatment” (35) by female and racialized workers. The two conceptual articulations of unionism exist in concert in the Writers’ Union, and this tension about the very definition and intention of their collective is at the core of the organization. Indeed, the fundamental potential of unionism to paradoxically promote exclusion is in the background of many member challenges that have arisen over the years.<sup>26</sup>

Most notable, for the developing Writers’ Union, was the tension surrounding membership criteria, as some people wanted exclusivity and a commitment to excellence, while others contended that if they were to be a ‘union’ there was no place for value judgements. The membership committee, which included John Metcalf, Alice Munro, Farley Mowat, Timothy Findley, Clark Blaise, Larry Garber, Rudy Wiebe, and Margaret Laurence, would thus take on one of the most fundamental debates at the centre of the organization – whom it should include. The committee hashed out the details of their work in lengthy letters that articulated their varying positions as they tried to find compromise.<sup>27</sup> As committee chair, John Metcalf remembers that he had, initially, wanted the Union to include only ‘serious’ writers, and to be modelled along the lines of what he called an ‘academy.’ In an interview with Christopher Moore, Metcalf notes that he “was really fascinated...by the idea of gathering together the best writers in the country, and of course this immediately raised a storm of protest about what does ‘the best’ mean?”

(*Founding the Writers' Union...* 29). He recalls that the membership committee “was divided between a small group who were interested in the idea of getting together to be... to use rather a pretentious word, an academy — that is, a group of people who by virtue of the excellence of their work elected to come together for common purposes — and those people who were strictly interested in the Union, which they interpreted in political terms as being an organization concerned with working conditions and pay” (28-29) for prose writers. We can hear the tension, here, between the craft and industrial articulations of unionism.

Alice Munro described her position on membership to Metcalf in a January 1973 letter, explaining: “I think we should throw this wide open to everyone who has published a book... why not people who write kids' books, mysteries, nursebooks [sic], porn? If it's a professional organization it should be open to professional writers, regardless of what they write” (1).<sup>28</sup> Munro's lengthy letter goes on to use successful female children's authors as examples, like Christie Harris, who, she argues “makes more money for her publisher than I do for mine” (2) such that she should, indeed, be taken “seriously” (2). Munro argues that the Union is necessary for “practical reasons, and joining it should be a practical matter, not a recognition of ‘serious work’” (1). A letter from Fred Bodsworth echoes Munro's sentiments as he notes: “if we want a writers' union possessing some bargaining power with publishers, I think we should be admitting some writers on the strength of their ability to sell books, regardless of how we view their literary merits” (1).<sup>29</sup> Farley Mowat, too, sides with the union approach, noting that “if a writer is a professional writer, that is the basic qualification” (1)<sup>30</sup> for membership in his eyes –

echoing some of the language he used at the Royal Ontario Commission. Mowat avers that he has “no intention of joining an organization limited to fiction writers” (1) gesturing to one of the other central membership questions – if the Union should be open to fiction and non-fiction writers alike. Metcalf eventually bowed to these more collective and industrial unionist views of the membership committee, but he has called this tension “a big crack that was papered over” (qtd. in Moore, *Founding the Writers’ Union...* 30) in the Union’s early days – one which sat at the centre of the organization’s articulation of itself.

The Writers’ Union of Canada’s first official public communiqué came from John Metcalf on University of New Brunswick letterhead, announcing the organization’s Spring 1973 planning meeting. The form letter, dated March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1973, and signed by the first “selection committee” (1)<sup>31</sup> – a name that would later be replaced by the less value-laden ‘membership committee’ – was addressed to a list of authors assembled by the founders, and introduced the group’s intentions. The document marks the first time the moniker ‘The Writers’ Union of Canada’ was deployed – a tentative name at the time – as they called for a “a truly professional organization” to “help and protect” them “in relation to contracts, royalties, permissions, foreign rights, TV and film rights, and publicity” (1). Copies of this letter exist in almost every early member author’s archival files, with each person’s name written in by hand in the address line.<sup>32</sup> In inviting authors to join them, Metcalf lays out the six criteria for membership that the committee had agreed upon: 1) to have published a prose work; 2) that the work be published by a professional publishing company “as opposed to a ‘vanity’ press” (1); 3) that the work be

a trade book and not a text book; 4) that the writer be “seriously and professionally engaged in writing” (1); 5) that the application satisfy a board of selection made up of members; and 6) that the writer pay dues. Note that neither the idea of Canadian citizenship, nor even of Canadian residence, appeared anywhere in the original membership requirements for the organization. Being a “professional” writer is here, however, as is a dig at “vanity presses,” and, most controversial, the clause that one’s work must satisfy a selection committee. Metcalf invites participation – these membership criteria are, after all, still malleable – and encourages authors to join them to help craft the organization as this next “meeting will debate, modify, and finally ratify a constitution and policy position” (1) for the Union.<sup>33</sup> Subsequent letters from Metcalf set the dates for this meeting as June 15 to 17, 1973 in Toronto, as he continues to call for authors to join in “defining and establishing the Writers’ Union of Canada” (“Letter to Membership” 1).<sup>34</sup>

The events of this early meeting held by the nascent organization are often confounded with the next, official – founding – meeting held in Ottawa in November of that same year. The confusion occurs, I think, because the meetings were held in such quick succession, and because they discussed and debated most of the same questions – membership and regionalism, in particular, and how these issues would bear out in the still-developing constitution. Poet and constitutional lawyer F. R. Scott chaired both meetings, as he guided the Union’s first executive through crafting an organization for and with their members. While many documents were produced as these meetings were planned, initiated, and debriefed, most of them are undated, reflecting the in-process

haphazardness of a not-yet-fully-formed organization. As an example, there are no fewer than five separate documents that speak to the impending and expected ratification of the constitution, which were likely created over a span of almost eight months and across many meetings. The constitution itself, however, remained in flux and under debate right up until the last minute, and was only completed – on a typewriter Marian Engel’s husband happened to have brought – on the final day of the founding meeting.<sup>35</sup> We must also remember that, for the most part, the details of these meetings exist only in the living memories of the attendees, which, forty-some years on, is fading. Asked to confirm the location of the June meeting for Christopher Moore’s oral history project, Alma Lee responded, for example, “it must have been that one, because I remember the weather being summery” (*Founding the Writers’ Union... 7*). Setting down the dates of when a particular motion was proposed, then, or tracing the debate about it, has proved challenging. Thus, while I will briefly sketch out the program details of each meeting, in the following pages my main focus will be to illuminate the organizational structure that emerged out of the series of meetings held in 1973, which also introduced points of recurring tension and challenge to the Union that would echo through the organization for many years to come.

The June 1973 gathering, dubbed the “Conference of Canadian Writers,” drew 62 delegates from across the country to Toronto’s Neill Wycik College, and was supported by the city of Toronto – which sponsored a dinner for the authors – the Canada Council and Ontario Arts Councils, which each provided \$2500, and the Alberta Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Recreation, which provided \$750 in travel funding for Rudy Wiebe,

W.O Mitchell, and Wallis Kendal to attend the meetings. These funds, along with a \$10 per person registration fee, allowed for travel expenses to be paid for another 20 members who came from across the country, accommodations at Neill Wycik for the entire group, an honorarium for chair F. R. Scott, and all meals for the weekend.<sup>36</sup> A May 1973 letter signed by Alma Lee for John Metcalf includes the weekend's agenda, highlighting that "this will be the first time that serious writers have come together from across the country to discuss their problems" (1).<sup>37</sup> Note that the language of 'serious' authorship is deployed here, again, to signify the importance of their work, and to frame their membership as elite. "We hope," the letter continues, "that a Writer's [sic] Union will come out of the conference to speak authoritatively and effectively on behalf of prose writers" (1), setting up high hopes for the organization, as they note that "this conference could be important to the future of all writers in Canada" (1). This is both positioning and posturing on the Union's part, but statements like this could also be understood as a gesture to futurity – that the group foresaw, or perhaps, were hopeful about, the Union's potential to influence their profession. Moreover, this was a way to rally authors to the cause, as it set up an expectation of future value for current labour. Lee notes: "this is an important meeting. We hope you can come" (1).

Similar language was used to position the November meeting. In the formal announcement of the event Alma Lee (for vice-chairman David Lewis Stein) writes that this next meeting "will probably matter most to the future of our Writers' Union" (1).<sup>38</sup> "What came out of the June meeting," she writes, "was the feeling that there is a great need for a Union of professional writers and a decision to start one" (1). The membership

agreed, then, to “meet again within six months to decide how our Union would function” (1) and thus, they were now “ready to talk about a constitution and set up an organization that will work to further the interests of people who are serious about writing books” (1) in Canada.

Fifty-one delegates attended the Ottawa meeting from November 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup>, 1973 in Ottawa. Thirty-two of them had been present at the previous meeting in Toronto that spring. The meetings were, once again, supported by the Canada Council and Ontario Arts Councils, which provided \$5000 and \$2000, respectively, while the Alberta Minister, Horst Schmidt, added another \$1000 in travel funding.<sup>39</sup> In the Union’s “Newsletter #3”, issued sometime before the founding meeting, Margaret Laurence wrote: “This, our founding conference, is crucially important and we need the views and help of all of you so that together we can establish the union, forge a constitution and set up areas of immediate work to be done” (1).<sup>40</sup> Note Laurence’s call to collective labour, which, she hopes, will make the organization both representative and effectual. Since many of the same writers had already come together in Toronto, though, the Ottawa meetings seem to have been more of a celebration of the launch of the Writers’ Union, rather than about governance. Though important addenda to and, ultimately, ratification of the constitution took place that November weekend, most of the agenda items were social in nature. Arriving on Friday November 2<sup>nd</sup>, members registered for the conference, checking in to the Lord Elgin hotel before an evening off at the Ottawa Press Club, where honorary membership had been granted to the whole group for the weekend. The following day included 3 hours of a general meeting that debated and

discussed the Union's constitution at the National Arts Centre, then a banquet lunch sponsored by the Secretary of State, and a gala dinner at the Aylmer Country Club. Sunday's agenda items included a 'late breakfast' that ran until noon and a two-hour panel to elect officers for the Union's first official national council and executive.<sup>41</sup> I dwell on the details of the agenda to highlight the social nature of much of the time this group of 50-odd authors spent together that weekend. Much eating, drinking, and probably carousing, assembled them into a loose and rapidly defined fellowship. While Alma Lee's invitation to the weekend had noted that this would "primarily [be] a business meeting" ("Letter to Members, September 24, 1973" 1), the group was scheduled to spend just five hours, over the course of that weekend, on business, and, in the same sentence Lee reminds everyone that "of course, the Lord Elgin has three pubs!!" (1).<sup>42</sup> This kind of informality, and the friendships that would come to underpin the Writers' Union, will prove to be both a value and a liability as the organization grows and this fellowship is tested.

The operational structure of The Writers' Union of Canada was proposed at the June 1973 meeting, and was refined into the completed constitution at the following meeting in November. Most important were the discussions about membership criteria and executive structure, which were hammered out in a series of three workshops on the morning of Saturday June 16, 1973. That two-and-a-half-hour session would prove to be imperative in establishing how the organization moved forward, with which type of members, and in service of what concerns. According to a newsletter written just after the meeting, the "first group to speak... was the membership committee, [who] opened up the



most emotional issue of the day: who should belong” (“Newsletter [#1 June 1973]” 1).<sup>43</sup> Note the invocation of the concept of belonging here, and the recognition of heightened affect. That membership criteria discussions were so emotionally charged points to the intertwined dynamics of friendship, professionalism, and prestige at work as the Union formed. Most important, it gestures to the fulcrum point upon which the Writers’ Union was founded: equity. The Union’s defining irony is that equity and inclusion were both its driving operational necessity and its biggest challenge. While the organization sought material equity for cultural makers by engaging those makers in community-driven activism, in so doing, the Union’s structure inherently and inevitably created exclusion. Said another way: by defining particular membership criteria, and inscribing a circle within which someone could belong, someone else was inevitably going to be left out – and indeed, many were.

Prior to the June 1973 meeting, the membership committee had voted 12 to 3 that the organization ought to be limited to fiction writers.<sup>44</sup> This, however, “ran into strong opposition” (“Newsletter [#1 June 1973]” 1), from the authors assembled at the June meeting, many of whom were decidedly not writers of fiction. Pierre Berton led the charge, noting the systemic nature of their need for collective advocacy. As he noted, “a pressure group has to exert pressure... if fiction writers and poets think that they, alone, can exert pressure on entrenched publishers and libraries, they’re living in cuckoo cloudland” (1). Note the tension registered in Berton’s words, between the ‘artistic’ writers of fiction and poetry, and the ‘commercial’ writers of non-fiction and journalism, echoing the underlying tension between craft and industrial unionism. For Berton, the

only way to bring publishing structures in line with their desires would be to “get as many writers who are actively writing books into the organization and then for everybody in the organization to say: sorry boys, but that’s it. We ain’t signing... 50/50 agreements” (1), reflecting the undercurrent of industrial unionism that was so prevalent in Canada at the time. With Berton’s statements, and others like them, the concept of active, professional, prose writers – of any genre – began to define the group’s fellowship. As Timothy Findley noted, they “need[ed] to find a creative way to make [them]selves an easily defined block that would be responsible as a force that was fighting for itself” (2). While the operative drive of this intention is clear and admirable, of course there is nothing ‘easy’ about defining such collectivity. According to the newsletter “an hour of pretty heated debate” (2) amongst the group led to a motion that membership would be open to anyone who “had a trade book published by a commercial or university publisher” (2) that was either still in print, “or had been published within five years” (2). By the time of the founding meeting five months later, these criteria would remain largely in place with one key change – extending the publication deadline to seven years. Still though, what exactly constituted a ‘trade’ book was never explicitly defined, and a membership committee still reviewed each applicant and their publications before acceptance into the collective, an operational point that would continue to cause tension between the craft and industrial camps of the Union’s membership for years to come.

Membership and inclusion challenges were bracketed by another, highly contentious, equity concern: regionalism. The June 1973 exploratory meeting put in place an interim executive for the organization, simultaneously establishing an operational

structure that would come to define the Writers' Union thereafter. In order to combat any potential regionalism which might favour Southern Ontario writers, attendees decided on a geographically representative council structure, wherein one central Chairman and four provincial Chairmen from across the country would work together with an elected National Executive. This structure was refined as the Union grew and developed – with five, and then six, regional chairs being installed in future years – but overall, it has remained largely the same, in an effort to represent the geographical diversity of Canadian authors. Margaret Laurence was installed as the first chairman of the organization at the June meeting, though she wasn't in attendance and lived in England at the time. Laurence's role as the first chairman of the organization was likely a strategic attempt to leverage her fame and success to the collective benefit of the Writers' Union and its membership, much as Mowat had prefaced their Royal Commission appearance two years before. Indeed, as Margaret Atwood has put it, Laurence "lent her name" (qtd. in Moore, *Founding the Writers' Union...* 50), such that Laurence's stature validated the work carried out by the various planning committees, as she became the figurehead around which the developing organization coalesced. As I will discuss in Chapter Two, however, once she had returned to Canada in July of 1973, Laurence's labour became central to the Union's growth.

According to the first newsletter, the attendees at the June meeting "elected Margaret Laurence chairman... and then picked four provincial chairmen – Jerry Newman in British Columbia, Terrence Heath in Saskatchewan, Rudy Wiebe in Alberta, and John Metcalf in Quebec. In addition," the document continues, "we chose a national

executive consisting of Matt Cohen, Marian Engel, James Bacque, Graeme Gibson, June Callwood, Fred Bodsworth, and David Lewis Stein as national vice chairman” (“Newsletter [#1 – June 1973]” 3). This would be the group – along with Alma Lee at the administrative helm – that brought the organization, truly, into operational existence. I dwell on these names because they are often left out when histories of the Union are deployed – while chairmen are recorded, these volunteer executives are often lost in the Union’s institutional narrative. They provided, however, an immeasurable amount of volunteer labour, without which the Writers’ Union – and its various successes – might never have existed. Moreover, I would like to draw attention to the ‘we’ that is employed in the newsletter’s rhetorical structure. We, the group of authors who came together collectively to form this organization, have made these decisions about the operation of our organization, it says. While one must always be attentive to who that ‘we’ includes and excludes, it is also important to recognize that – at least to some extent – decisions about the Writers’ Union and its structure were effected democratically, by the totality of their collectivity.

That collectivity was fostered, in the constitution, by trying to uphold the geographic diversity that the early group of members had insisted was so important. A letter from Margaret Laurence, written sometime in the fall of 1973, introduced the draft constitution to the membership. Laurence takes pains to explain how this document has been made: “a special membership committee worked out the basic membership requirements,” she writes, “taking into consideration all the comments sent in by members on this subject” (1)<sup>45</sup> after the June meeting. “This was then discussed at an

Executive meeting, and has been incorporated into the draft constitution” (1) attached to her letter, which will be up for debate, once again, in November. Note the collective labour Laurence gestures to here, and the operational attempts to represent the views of as many members as possible in the document. Laurence continues, however, noting that:

our greatest difficulty with the constitution was to try to ensure that the union will be, and will continue to be, a truly representative coast-to-coast organization, with writers from all parts of the country having an effective voice. We realized that regionalism is the rock upon which the union might founder. We also recognized that in our writing, regionalism is in fact one of our greatest strengths as Canadian writers. We decided, therefore, not to fight regionalism or pretend it doesn't exist, but to try to discover how we could make use of it in forming a constitution which would ensure a fair voice to all parts of the country and which would ensure that parts of the country such as southern Ontario, where writers are the most numerous, should not be overrepresented on the governing body of the Union. (1)

The efficacy that Laurence discusses here is important, particularly as she ties it to the potential of regionalism. The Union was hopeful that, by upholding regional representation in their constitutional structure, the diversity of points of view represented by different quarters of the Canadian landscape and imagination would be captured in

their operations, and, what's more, that they would be leveraged into effective, useful advocacy.

The constitution thus mapped out 5 broad regions: West Coast, Prairies, Ontario, Quebec, and the Maritimes, that would each have representation on the Union's national council. "We have tried," Laurence writes, "to achieve what seemed a fair balance of representation...so that each area would have an adequate voice. We also provided for an executive, which we visualised as a housekeeping body and spokesman, to carry on the business of the union in between council meetings" (2). Regarding the Union's structure as an organization, Laurence clearly delineates why they have opted to be a Union rather than a non-profit: "we decided it might be better to set up a parallel, non-profit 'writers' foundation' to which people could give money... The trouble with making our union itself a non-profit foundation is that we would not be able to use the word union in our name and we would be prohibited from anything the tax department might construe as political action" (2). Laurence, here, gestures back to one of Matt Cohen's initial operational concerns: that the Writers' Union be able to exert political pressure through collective action. While "having two separate organizations sounds cumbersome," she writes, "it would give us much greater freedom of action" (2). That freedom of action was paramount, inasmuch as it allowed the Union to pursue political action via protests and government lobbying, which would be employed by several Union committees to combat everything from censorship to tax reforms to gender disparity. For me, this arrangement demonstrates the foresight with which the founding members were operating, as they spent nearly a year honing a constitution and operational structure that would function

how they wanted and needed it to. As an example, while The Writers' Development Trust wouldn't officially be founded until 1977, Laurence's letter demonstrates that it was envisioned by the original founding members as a co-productive ancillary to the Union itself, several years before.

These member-driven attempts at organizational breadth and inclusion notwithstanding, challenges to the Union's overall operational structure were evident from its very inception, for a host of intersecting reasons. A November 1973 *Toronto Sun* article by Peter Worthington critiqued the group's nationalism, registering concerns with the anti-American sentiment that underpinned the Union's founding. For Worthington, "to make it an act of patriotism to 'read Canadian' seems similar to the thinking that led to the building of... Soviet Communism" (9), as he registers his concern that "a certain type of person would tend to dominate the union bureaucracy" (9) and, "if its power grew, so would authoritarianism and regimentation" (9). Worthington's communist-fearing argument against the organization is augmented by a call for artistic integrity, as he notes that "such a union would make writers increasingly vulnerable to government controls and influences, since they'd grow accustomed to grants and handouts" which would, he believes, "make the Writers' Union of Canada into the last refuge of the untalented" (9). Note the undercurrent of craft-unionism in Worthington's critique, and his assertion that the organization is, perhaps, too political.

Others, however, critiqued the fact that the Union wasn't political enough, asserting that, by limiting themselves to prose writers, the organization was undercutting labour movement opportunities for all authors. At the founding meeting in Ottawa in

November of 1973, for example, writers Seymour Mayne and James Brown vehemently and publicly opposed the Writers' Union's criterion for membership inclusion, as they charged Writers' Union members with "operating in an elitist and inconsistent manner" ("Poets Protest").<sup>46</sup> Mayne and Brown had been present at the first meeting of the day in Ottawa, but had, by mid-day, been barred from attending further meetings, which they believed they should be entitled to partake in. Union members defended their actions, arguing that Mayne and Brown were both poets who did not meet the criteria to join. Mayne, however, had been on the official list of delegates and was registered for the conference, but had been ejected from the afternoon's meetings by Graeme Gibson, David Lewis Stein, and Jim Lorimer. The incident is instructive, inasmuch as the press coverage that it generated encapsulates the entwined tensions around elitism, genre-ism, professionalism, nationalism, regionalism, and unionism that The Writers' Union of Canada so complexly brought together.

According to the coverage – in articles with titles like "Writers Expel Other Writers" and "Poets Protest" – Mayne and Brown contend that "the new organization is not really a union representing all writers, as its name implies" ("Poets Protest"). According to Mayne, while the idea for a Union is a good one, it would need to be broader to have efficacy and clout: "if they're really serious about building a writers' movement" he notes, "they should know you don't do it by keeping people out... it's a disgrace the way this thing is being run" ("Poets Protest"). James Brown, for his part, noted that "foreign domination of Canadian literature is so bad that Canadian authors can't afford to fool around in elitist organizations. There are about 10,000 writers in



Canada, why do we see only 50 here?” (“Poets Protest”). Brown contends that, through exclusivity, the founders of the Writers’ Union “are setting themselves as the gurus of Canadian literature” (“Local Authors Voice Opinions...” 34). Brown is, in part, registering his concern with the potential canonization of this particular group of authors, which is, no doubt, tied to the elite framing of the membership, and the Union’s use of celebrity and acclaim to prop up their efficacy. For Mayne, the meeting was “indicative of another Toronto-based union speaking for the whole country” (34), as he registers regionalism as an intersecting concern, while a press release written by the two men about the incident charges the Writers’ Union with “deliberately using public money, public facilities, and the media to dis-unite Canadian writers” (Brown and Mayne 1). While critique of the Writers’ Union would come from many quarters over the following years, I draw on this particular incident because it condenses so many of the complex challenges to the Union’s collective that will continue to be raised in the future: elitism and exclusion, most obviously, but also the concept that that exclusivity is embedded in and entwined with nationalism, de-centralization, celebrity, government funding, professionalism, and trade-unionism.

Indeed, Brown’s opposition to The Writers' Union of Canada was so intense that he went on to promote the ‘Canadian Union of Writers (CANUW)’ – a direct backlash to The Writers’ Union of Canada.<sup>47</sup> While information about CANUW is scanty (I only happened upon it, as a few of its documents were incorrectly filed with Writers’ Union papers in a member’s fonds), the organization’s opposition to the Writers’ Union is clear. A May 1974 letter to Alden Nowlan from Jim Brown, then a Regional Organizer,

explains CANUW's position, and its vehement opposition to the Writers' Union: "No doubt you have heard about the formation of the Writers' Union of Canada," Brown opens the letter, "by the Toronto literary Mafia. Their membership at present is 70 and there are many restrictions upon joining" (1).<sup>48</sup> Echoing his dissent to the founding meeting, Brown notes that "the idea of a Union is fantastic, but these guys have formed a private club, not a Union" (1). The nationalist language CANUW employs to describe its aims is almost identical to that of the Writers' Union, as Brown's letter lays out their intentions to "organize all Canadian writers who want to fight for trade rights" against "Yankee interests" (1). Where CANUW seems to diverge from The Writers' Union of Canada is in the integral questions of membership criteria and inclusion. Brown lays it out as such: "we don't make book publication a necessity because it is undemocratic. Thousands of Canadian writers work hard who don't yet have a book out because of the existing conditions" (1). CANUW thus insisted that membership dues be kept low, at "\$3.00 per year, so as not to exclude the poor among us" (1), gesturing to the structural imbalances in the literary industry that excluded potential voices. For my purposes, statements like these help to illuminate the underlying imbalances in the Writers' Union – namely that a large subset of emerging writers, those who did not yet have a book in print, were left out of their definition of collectivity. While the tenets of membership criteria and inclusion would change as the Writers' Union grew and its membership developed, over the years there would be many more organizations and individuals who mounted challenges to the Writers' Union's collectivity, based, largely, on issues of equity, and all asking the same basic question: how can a group founded on the notion of

equity simultaneously enact exclusivity? This, ultimately, becomes the driving question of this dissertation, as I inquire into that inherent tension, which underlies the Writers' Union and its work.

As I ponder this equity question, I am always left wondering: with so many local, regional, national, and international groups operating for the connection and betterment of authors, what compelled people to join the Writers' Union, specifically? Over the last eight years, I have combed through hundreds of archives of Canadian authors, many of whom belonged to more than one collective advocacy organization for artistic producers, defined, variously, by genre, by region, or by membership in a special interest group based on gender, race, politics, or economics. So what compelled authors to join the particular group (or groups) to which they ascribed their allegiance? Technically, the way the Writers' Union defined its fellowship was based on one's having a book published or in print. But, given that there were several other writers' organizations to which such an author could belong, it seems as though there had to have been something else to draw people into the orbit of the Writers' Union and its work. What was that? And why did particular authors end up advocating – sometimes fiercely – for and with a particular group?

For the Writers' Union, I think part of its draw was the efficacy and action embedded in their union rhetoric and logic. In reading thousands of letters between Writers' Union members, I keep seeing the topics of labour and fair compensation dominating their discussions. In reading those letters, I have often also been struck by the intimacy of the group's friendships. Many letters – while ostensibly about business and

committee work – are marked by warmth, encouragement, and affection (and certainly, at other times, by vehement anger and dissent). But there are thousands of letters, spanning decades, that bear out alliances, spats, and ultimately, long-standing connections and relationships. Some letters between members predate the founding of the Writers' Union by decades, implying that established relationships were part of what underpinned the organization's inception. Other letters predate an author's involvement with the Union, suggesting that as new members joined, they encouraged their literary-writer friends to do so as well. Other letters reflect relationships that were built through and around the Writers' Union's own work, as authors came together via meetings, committees, and shared collective labour to form relationships that intersected with and moved beyond their writing lives. Through these letters, I have come to think that what defined membership in any particular group – the CAA, CANUW, TWUC, PEN, or others – was not just the organization's politics and intentions, but its relationships. Indeed, I've come to believe that friendship was an integral part of the operational drive that underpinned the Writers' Union's efficacy, bringing together existing relationships that often blurred the boundaries between professional alliance and personal allegiance. And this, in part, is what made the Writers' Union so successful – member authors labored as a collective for their like-minded friends and contemporaries, taking on rafts of unpaid labour to bring about reforms and change. It is also, however, part of what has driven the Writers' Union to acrimonious arguments and near-failure, from clique-driven partisanship within the organization, from personal acrimony spilling over into the Writers' Union's operations, and, as the Union grew and the structure of Canadian culture changed around the

organization, from questions about what that sense of ‘like-mindedness’ actually entailed. As the initial group’s material concerns were addressed and the Union’s membership grew, the organization was asked to tackle other forms of inequity – like sexism and racism – that challenged the form and structure of the ‘easy’ collectivity they believed that they had established. This dissertation embodies that tension, as it offers both an argument for collective activist labour of artistic producers and, simultaneously, critiques the ways that movement relied on and reified particular structures of power and prestige.

As I’ve mentioned, part of the Writers’ Union’s institutional narrative has always been that the Union was able to focus, coalesce, and harness collective energy – even in dissent – as members came together for their common good. In her announcement about the organization’s founding in the *New York Times Book Review* in 1973 Marian Engel wrote that “it was...said that writers, being egotists, would be too contentious to handle as a group” (“Writers of Canada...” 46). She had, however, “never seen such unity of will as I saw that weekend in Ottawa. Middle aged Prairie radicals sat beside established Toronto essayists; zany West Coast authors teamed up with women novelists from Western Ontario. The five or six writers who do well from their books were as enthusiastic as the bunch of us who publish with the small presses and get \$500 or \$600 a book, if that” (46). Note the word Engel uses for this operative drive: unity – unity defined, here, by Engel, as crossing genre, political, gender, and economic lines.

In the Union’s operations, and in its mythos, this unity becomes formalized in Margaret Laurence’s characterization of the group as the ‘tribe.’ It was in the welcome address to the founding meeting in Ottawa that Laurence first convened the group under

this moniker, and an undated letter she wrote to the membership around the same time details her intentions for the term. “We are a tribe. A union,” Laurence writes, noting that “these two words are similar. We have to stay close together and support one another. We have to acknowledge and respect the privacy of the individual, and at the same time to know that our only strength in improving conditions for our tribe is to speak with one voice” (“Canadian Writers’ Union” 1). This undated document – which shows up in several member archives – may, indeed, be the text of Laurence’s address at the founding meeting, perhaps distributed in the welcome packet to the conference. I simply cannot know.<sup>49</sup> It doesn’t, however, matter much. The *idea* that Laurence addressed the nascent Union with the words ‘we are a tribe’ has become legend in the Canadian literary imagination – it became a rallying point for the burgeoning Writers’ Union, and, by extension, for emerging authors as they sought membership in that group. Timothy Findley described Laurence’s invocation of tribe at that founding meeting as “of course, the best description in the world. Writers come from anywhere and everywhere,” he says, “they come in every colour and sex and – nearly – every age. They hold a myriad of cherished beliefs – and their politics are of every stripe. A tribe is not a race or a faction, but a kind. A family” (“1992: Timothy Findley” 88-89). Note, here, how Findley’s invocation of unity across potential divisions echoes Engel’s, above. Both are reflecting the institutional narrative inscribed by Laurence’s conception of the group as an inalienable community. Indeed, Laurence herself invoked the metaphor of family, several years before Findley’s remarks; in a 1978 contribution to a Union newsletter, Laurence wrote that her “sense of loyalty to the tribe and to its offshoot, the Union, goes deeper

than any other loyalties except those to my family and closest friends” (“Newsletter #31 1). Marking the Union – and its community and its work – as one of the indelible loyalties of her life are strong words from one of the matriarchs of Canadian writing, reflecting the intensity of the relationality that she saw as undergirding the Writers’ Union’s collectivity.

For Laurence, ‘the tribe’ stood in for their community of creative producers, one that was brought together, via the Union, like it never had been before – or so the mythos goes. “When the Writers’ Union was first formed in 1973, I was the first interim chairman,” said Laurence in an interview in 1979. “In the only address that I made, I said that I thought of the writers of this country as being members of a kind of tribe. Even though the Writers’ Union has got much larger and we sometimes argue heatedly at our general meetings, there is still that tremendous sense of belonging to a community. And we all need that sense of community” (qtd. in Twigg, *Strong Voices* 166). What Laurence gestures to, here, links back to the many threads I’ve articulated throughout this introduction: to regionalism, to economic precarity, and to artistic labour. Ultimately, she gestures to the sheer isolation of being a creative literary producer, particularly in Canada, and particularly at this time. Recall Graeme Gibson’s statement which I quoted early on: “since few writers in the early 70s knew more than a handful of their peers,” the Union’s “first substantial accomplishment was the focusing of a country-wide community of professional Anglophone book writers – what Margaret Laurence called ‘the tribe’” (“2010...” 389). This was the community-need that the Writers’ Union focused and

formalized, as it created a structure within which a wider community of writers (and their work) could be nurtured and could grow.

The close-knit, collective security of the ‘tribe’ of Canadian writers has been invoked time and again since those early rallying statements, becoming the main founding myth of the Writers’ Union, and, more broadly, one of the shaky conceptual pillars upon which the Canadian literary establishment built itself. Since Laurence’s first invocation, the concept of ‘the tribe of Canadian authorship’ has been deployed across the board, by Union members, by critics, and by readers, ever since. It appears in newspaper coverage about Canadian literary events, innumerable letters between Union members, in interviews and speeches and critical discourse, now, for almost 50 years. Nick Mount cites it in *Arrival* (2017), calling Laurence “the mother of the tribe” (177, 282). It is invoked by almost every author in *A Writer’s Life*, the anthology of the Margaret Laurence Memorial lectures published by the Writers’ Trust in 2011, and indeed, it is in the first sentence of that collection’s introduction, which notes: “Margaret Laurence referred to fellow Canadian writers as ‘the tribe’ – a group of people collaborating for their shared survival” (1).

Given the multiple and intersecting challenges to the Writers’ Union’s definition of collectivity, however, we must ask: who, exactly, did the tribe include? Whose survival, precisely, was being protected? The optimist in me says, well, of course the material economic survival of creative literary producers – right? But which ones? The realist in me recalls the long colonial history of the Canadian nation and its institutions, which invariably replicate imperialist exclusions. Indigenous author Joshua Whitehead



(Oji-Cree, Peguis First Nation) recently pointed out, in his essay “On Indigenegativity: Rejection and Reconciliation in a Pool of Liberal Tears,” that “new age tribes are everywhere... even while I write this piece I see the Canadian writing community called a ‘tribe’ on the front page of The Writers’ Union of Canada’s website” (11). Whitehead’s piece discusses the limitations of reconciliation in the face of such white liberal tribalism, and indeed, by drawing attention to the colonial resonances of ‘tribe,’ Whitehead has influenced my re-reading of the term, as I now cannot help but see the colonial violence in its invocation. As Whitehead observes, until the spring of 2017 the Writers’ Union still employed the term ‘tribe’ to describe their collectivity, with a quotation from Graeme Gibson gracing the organization’s landing page: “the tribe would be far more vulnerable without the Union.”<sup>50</sup> But the ‘tribe’ was not necessarily a safe space for everyone, nor was the Union. As Althea Prince wrote in an essay titled “Writing Thru Race: The Conference” in her 2001 collection *Being Black*, which reflected on the Union’s role in that famous 1994 event: “I could see that this was not *my tribe*, not by any stretch of the imagination; but I felt committed to changing that” (115). While I will return to race in Chapter Three, where I posit that institutional reliance on the mythos of the ‘tribe’ may well have driven racialized authors away from the Writers’ Union’s particular invocation of collectivity, for now, it is important to register that the concept of the ‘tribe’ meant different things to differently positioned people – particularly racialized people – within, and outside of, the organization. In stark contrast to Findley and Engel’s feelings of rallying and unity, for example, Althea Prince is clear: “on several occasions I wanted to run from this tribe which made my heart ache and my bones weary” (115).

My sense is that what Laurence was trying to articulate with ‘the tribe’ was a politics of coalitional organizing based on the idea of the Scottish Clan system that was so central to her own heritage and work. This does not, however, make it any less pernicious in its inclination or its reverberations. In a November 1973 letter to John Metcalf about the membership committee’s work – sending out the finalized constitution, producing application forms, issuing acceptances – Laurence attributes her use of the word tribe to her “ancient Scots manner” as she “finds [her]self wanting to speak in terms of a motto of clanhood” (2) to help their work along. “The Scots clans had always a war-cry,” she writes, and she suggests, for the Union, “how about RIGHT ON, TRIBE!” (2).<sup>51</sup> Note that this letter directly links ‘the tribe’ with Union membership concerns, which had already been so controversial because of issues of inclusion and exclusion. What Laurence seems to be reaching for, here, is an ancient or atavistic formulation of collectivity, one which existed prior to institutionalization, colonization, and imperialism. Yet this construction of the term ‘tribe,’ in an anthropological sense, is precisely what was deployed *against* Indigenous groups worldwide as they were subjugated by colonial and imperial powers. By pejoratively labelling any group as ‘a tribe’ colonial powers – like Britain and Canada – were able to delegitimize the nationhood and sovereignty of those communities which they sought to control (Sneath).<sup>52</sup> So, for Laurence, while the ‘tribe’ was linked to community, to community care, and to action, for Althea Prince, when she “heard mutterings that *they are a tribe*” she “thought of tribal wars, in Europe, in Asia, in Africa and China, and how they had escalated into veritable blood-baths” (109). For Prince, in the Union of the 1990s, “here was another tribe in motion, fighting a war based on race.

And here was the dominant group in that *tribe* appropriating the language of those who had always fought this war” (109). While Laurence and Prince’s statements are separated by over twenty years, they speak to yet another tension underlying the Union – (anti)colonialism.

The founding members conceived of their work in the Union as being nationalist in orientation, and therefore, anti-colonial – in the sense of its being against the entrenched British-colonial canon of writing, education, and culture. As we have seen, Canadian nationalism ran strong through the Union’s early statements of intention, as the constitution first and foremost oriented their work towards the “fostering of writing in Canada” (“Constitution [1973 – Final]” 1). For many authors who have immigrated to Canada, or for Indigenous writers living in the place that is now called Canada, the concept of anti-coloniality, of course, means something completely different – as in anti-the entrenched coloniality of the Canadian nation-state itself. So, while the idea of ‘tribe,’ did discursive work in support of the founding members’ nationalist collectivity, this same formulation also undercut the work of Indigenous or racialized writers who sought to critique or dismantle colonial articulations of power. Perhaps it isn’t surprising, then, that many Indigenous or racialized writers struggled to see themselves or their needs represented in the imagined community of The Writers’ Union of Canada. And this, of course, replicates the divisive politics of the Canadian nation more broadly, which, like the Writers’ Union, wants to believe and imagine itself as an easy multicultural collectivity, when that is certainly not the case for many of the people who make up its communities.

As we work our way through the Writers' Union's history, then, we must always ask ourselves: how has the concept of the 'tribe' continued to do discursive work since Laurence's first gathering statements in 1973? While it helped solidify a sense of community and coalition for the Union, it has also been employed to catalyze and justify reforms to cultural programs – through the Writers' Union's work – becoming an institutionally sanctioned, institutionally crafted image of collaboration and community, which served a particular purpose for a particular collectivity. If we consider that many of our contemporary literary structures were influenced by and built from the Writers' Union and its collectivity – Public Lending Right, CanCopy, Access Copyright, the Writers in Schools Program, The Writers' Development Trust – the implications of such a seemingly simple word, 'tribe,' and its potential inclusions and exclusions, become far-reaching and structurally embedded, encoded into the very fibres of the publishing industry and into the core of our critical discipline. In a 1986 *Globe and Mail* piece about that year's Union AGM, titled, "Euphoric Meeting Finds 'Tribe' Looking Good After 14 Years," June Callwood reflects on the efficacy of Laurence's call to tribal collectivity. Callwood remembers that, in fourteen years of meetings, "whenever smoke began to rise from the union's fixed volcanos at the springtime annual meeting... the distinguished woman [Laurence] would rise to her feet, her face anxious. A respectful silence would fall, for Margaret Laurence is beloved, and into this seismic recess she would offer in her raspy voice one simple benediction: 'we're all writers here. We belong to a family. We're a tribe. Let's solve this problem'" (A2). Given what we are learning about the Writers' Union, we could look at statements like this either as calls to coalitional organizing and

co-operation, or – to recall one of John Metcalf’s statements about membership criteria – as the ‘papering over’ of the cracks of the Union’s carefully crafted collectivity. Both, I think, are true simultaneously, as no institution ever forms without a mythos and a line in the sand to delineate, inscribe, and sustain its work. Teasing out the details of that work and its tensions is the project of the remainder of this dissertation.

One other facet of the Writers’ Union’s collectivity requires attention here, for the ways that it, too, drew people into the organization: the prestige that I have often mentioned. Margaret Laurence, Farley Mowat, F. R. Scott, Mordecai Richler, Pierre Berton, W. O. Mitchell – these were the big names associated with the organization, and with Canadian literature at the time, which likely bolstered the Writers’ Union’s claims to efficacy and compelled authors to join. In the late 1970s, Pierre Berton took over the position of membership chair, writing long letters inviting authors to join ‘their’ union – what better way to promote the organization than to have a celebrated author and media personality herald their work to prospective members? Less experienced authors in the membership often talked about how much it meant to them to have been included with – and therefore acknowledged by – these heavyweights of Canadian letters, often recognizing how the Union and the ‘tribe’ helped support their work and development through mentorship. Silver Donald Cameron, for example, who joined the Union in 1974, has said of his communication with Laurence that “for someone like Margaret to take me seriously as part of her circle, and indeed part of her tribe, made me stand a whole lot taller. It began to seem possible that I could actually be a writer myself, something I’d only really dreamed of” (qtd. in Wainwright 56). It is perhaps difficult for us to imagine

the – now established, celebrated, and studied – authors of the early 1970s as just-starting-out, but at the time of the Union’s founding, many of the authors involved were only just beginning their prose-writing careers. Atwood, for example, had just three prose books to her name at the time, *The Edible Woman* (1969), *Surfacing* (1972), and *Survival* (1972); Matt Cohen had two novels – *Korsoniloff* (1969) and *Johnny Crackle Sings* (1971) – and two collections of short stories published by 1973; Timothy Findley had only published *The Last of the Crazy People* (1967) and *The Butterfly Plague* (1969). These three member authors alone would produce nearly 100 books of prose between them over the following decades – let alone the thousands of other books written by the ever-expanding list of Union members as the years went on. I draw attention to this scale of production to highlight the idea that while the Union was not directly involved in the publication of Canadian literary products, its reforms, advocacy, and even its community, indirectly supported the production of all these works of literary art. Asked by Roy MacSkimming what the best things about the Union were, Atwood quickly answered “information exchange” (qtd. in MacSkimming, “History of Modern Canadian Book Publishing, Interview...” 9), as she pointed out the structural value of having a community where authors could share their experiences.<sup>53</sup> Regarding, say, something like royalties on contracts, Atwood points out that “nobody knew” what the conventions were, “because all of the publishers would say to the writer, well, this is standard for the industry...[and] nobody had any way of checking” (6) prior to the Union. The community that was formalized by the Union and its collaborative mentorship made that possible. In that same (joint) interview, Graeme Gibson ties this kind of structural efficacy directly to

the prestige of member authors, noting that the “fact that the Union was speaking on behalf of a whole bunch of established writers not only empowered the individual author in negotiating, but it... revealed to the publishers that this was indeed something that they were going to have to deal with” (6). This, then, was the functional utility of the Writers’ Union’s collectivity – influence. And this operative potential, for Gibson, was then further bolstered by the group’s social efficacy, which could similarly support authors in their work. Gibson notes: “I can think offhand of two or three instances when people who thought they were finished writing would be at the AGM of the Union and late at night, they would sort of be sitting with somebody who would be willing to have a few drinks and someone was saying ‘Stick with it. Give it time’” (10). Here, Gibson articulates one of the intangibles of the Writers’ Union’s collective – how supportive relationships might have materially affected Canadian authorship. This relational dynamic, though, could either have been for the good – as Gibson recalls – or for the bad. What effects might it have had on an author, for instance, to have been excluded from this tribe? What effect might the prestige of the tribe and its expectations have had on member authors themselves?

For the founding members of the Writers’ Union there was value in discovering and working with their peers, particularly in the knowledge that others shared their same position – often struggling financially, or to find time to work, or to make oneself heard. Of the founding meeting, Marian Engel once wrote: “I sat down in a room with people like Margaret Laurence, Farley Mowat, Fred Bodsworth, Margaret Atwood, W.O Mitchell, Harold Horwood, Graeme Gibson, Rudy Wiebe and Alice Munro, and I felt as

if I had come home. This was my family” (“Solutions: Public Lending Right [Second Draft]” 6).<sup>54</sup> Timothy Findley described the same moment: “it was like turning around and suddenly realizing, the room is full of people – I’m not in here alone” (qtd. in Wainwright 79). For Findley it was a “moment when clarification was happening” (79) about the industry and all of their roles within it. “All the crystals stopped being diffuse,” he said, “and started to gather and have a shape” (79). A March 1974 letter from Kent Thompson to newly joined member Alden Nowlan wasn’t quite as effusive about the feelings of the founding meeting. Thompson wrote, of the Union: “it’s already quite clear that its members are not going to see eye to eye on all sorts of things... but perhaps the harsh financial facts of life might outweigh other concerns. Public Lending Rights and standard contracts can’t help but be good for all of us,” he wrote. “The question is, of course: will the union and its benefits be worth its difficulties?” (1).<sup>55</sup>

Ultimately, I think, the Writers’ Union’s collectivity tried to provide a structure for nurturance – of careers and literary practice, of writers’ social and community wellbeing, of the economic and material subsistence of members. And, while we can celebrate the productive potential of collectivity, we must also be attentive to who and what that collectivity excluded. Who, thereby, did not have access to the reforms the collective was striving towards? How did the reforms themselves – and the structures they supported – potentially not reflect the needs of the authors who most needed advocacy? These were the ‘other concerns’ activated by the organization, which the ‘tribe’ brought together in a series of complex entanglements with commerce, friendship, collectivity, colonialism, and prestige. This nebulous conjunction held great potential for



both growth and challenges, which would be borne out in the Union's operations over the next four decades. How these entanglements interact with industry reforms, with gender, and with race, will be the focus of the remainder of these pages.

In Chapter One I will discuss the Writers' Union's programs, reforms, and interventions aimed at 'fostering' writing in Canada, as I explore the entwined financial and cultural efficacy of their work. I argue that the Union was instrumental in building what I call a 'fiscal-cultural futurity' for CanLit, as I highlight the legacies of the organization's work and recoup members' volunteer labour, which has indelibly shaped the structure of the industry and field. In Chapter Two, I delve deeper into the labour of the Union's formation and practices, as I consider the role that women played in this work. I will highlight the labour of female Union members and the all-female administrative staff who maintained and supported the organization's work through its first twenty years, as I consider not only the role that women played in the burgeoning organization, but the ways that their work reformed and reimagined opportunities for women writers in the Canadian literary industry. In Chapter Three I draw attention to the stories, perspectives, and experiences of BIPOC authors in relation to the Writers' Union. While the Writers' Union's involvement in race relations is often positioned as having 'begun' with *Writing Thru Race* in 1994, this chapter delves into the archives to reveal a much longer trajectory of racialized conflict within and around the organization, providing important context for the very controversial and public battles about appropriation and race that would explode in the late 1980s and early 1990s around the Union – and indeed, which continue to this day. Throughout this work, I look to see how

institutional narratives are deployed and upheld – and to what ends; how successful advocacy work is often effaced and forgotten; how institutional structures function and how their boundaries and intentions are challenged and developed over time; and, ultimately, how interrogation of structural power is embedded deep within the Canadian literary tradition.

\*\*\*\*\*

On the heels of The Writers' Union of Canada's founding meeting, newly elected Chairman Marian Engel sent out her first communiqué to the membership, writing: "It's done, we're formed, thank God, Margaret Laurence, Frank Scott, Alma Lee, the Ad Hoc Committee, and you" ("Chairman's Letter" 1).<sup>56</sup> She also included a small poem – a call to action aimed directly at 'you' – at the bottom of the page:

Get on with it, now.  
Write a letter. Be  
Interviewed. Volunteer.  
Or are we really going  
to go the way of all  
the other writers'  
organizations? (2)

As we will see, the Writers' Union's membership took up the mantle of this labour, and produced an organization that would have lasting effects upon the shape and structure of the Canadian literary industry, as it became a crucible for endemic debates about Canadian culture.

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> This project has now been published as *Tiff: A Life of Timothy Findley*, Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> AC Fonds, Box 4, File 1.

<sup>3</sup> ME Fonds, Box 32, File 6.

<sup>4</sup> TF Fonds, Box 98, File 20.

<sup>5</sup> This letter marks the earliest dated use of the word ‘union’ to describe the group’s endeavor, though the Cohen letter, which will follow on page 11, was likely written earlier, it is undated.

<sup>6</sup> All eleven novelists featured in Gibson’s book would go on to become members of the Writers’ Union.

<sup>7</sup> Dennis Lee had co-founded Anansi in 1967 and was the press’s editorial director, while Atwood worked as an editor for Anansi in its early days. Austin Clarke’s *When He Was Free And Young and He Used to Wear Silks* was published by Anansi in 1971, while Matt Cohen’s book of short stories, *Columbus and the Fat Lady*, appeared the following year from the press.

<sup>8</sup> Anansi Press’s archival papers will likely be helpful in teasing out the details of how the Writers’ Union’s founding intersected with the press. How long did Lee continue her work with Anansi – and in what capacity – before officially shifting to the Union, for example? While Anansi’s archival fonds have recently been acquired by Library and Archives Canada, they were, unfortunately, not yet processed and available to view for the purposes of this research. This will be an important foundational thread that remains to be explored in future versions of the project.

<sup>9</sup> GG Papers, Box 20, File 11. While this letter is undated, Cohen mentions upcoming launch commitments for his new book, to be published with McClelland & Stewart, which would likely be *Johnny Crackle Sings*, published in the fall of 1971.

<sup>10</sup> For detailed chronologies of industry developments see Dobson and Kamboureli, *Producing Canadian Literature* and Roy MacSkimming’s *The Perilous Trade: Book Publishing in Canada*.

<sup>11</sup> Andreas Schroeder, for example, remembers that it was on the plane back from the League of Canadian Poets’ “famous AGM at the Macdonald Hotel” (qtd. in Moore, *Founding the Writers’ Union...* 22) in the fall of 1972 that he was introduced to the idea. He describes sitting on the plane next to a “grumpy” Margaret Atwood, who told him: “I was just so disappointed in this organization. It’s got no political traction at all. It’s just farting around. We really need an organization that’s a whole lot more practical and a whole lot more political. One that’s got some real gumption and actually wants to improve writers’ lives in more serious ways” (22). This, before she asked him to get involved with their new idea for an organization – “we’re thinking about something like a writers’ union” (22) she said.

<sup>12</sup> I have been unable to locate any television footage or media coverage of this particular event.

<sup>13</sup> In his interview with Christopher Moore, Gibson states that he believes this was probably Dalton Camp. See *Founding the Writers’ Union of Canada: An Oral History*, 40.

<sup>14</sup> See “The Writers’ Union Meets the Royal Commission,” *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada*, 56/1-2, 2018, 141-178. Thank you to Ruth Bradley-St-Cyr, who brought this transcript to my attention and kindly provided me with a copy of the journal. This testimony could, certainly, comprise its own study, as there is much more to discuss than I have been able to here.

<sup>15</sup> I will return to this point in much more detail in Chapter Two.

<sup>16</sup> In his recollections to the Writers’ Trust in his 2010 Margaret Laurence Memorial Lecture, Gibson also included Marian Engel, Gwen MacEwan, and Dave Godfrey among the assembled group who were “present on stage at the hearings” (“2010...” 387), though I have not been able to confirm their presence. If Engel and MacEwan, in particular, were in attendance, this supports the idea that women were central to the founding of the Union, which I will discuss more in Chapter Two.

<sup>17</sup> It is worth noting that while Lee voices his dissent, when the chairman asks him, later, if he would like to address any specific comments to the commission, Lee states: “my sympathies are with the people who walked out. Perhaps I will remain silent” (177).

<sup>18</sup> Margaret Atwood and June Callwood speak towards the end of the very tense session and are thus forced to do so quickly – this hints at a gender imbalance in the Union’s processes which I will return to in Chapter Two.

<sup>19</sup> The Park Plaza Hotel story makes for a good example of a ‘retold tale’ as it surfaces in many Writers’ Union documents, most notably, an undated history written sometime in the early 1980s, and the history included on the Union’s website, “written on the occasion of the 35th anniversary” by Christopher Moore in 2007. Both stories cite the fact that it was Farley Mowat who organized “seven other writers” to attend the hearing – though they were a group of ten – and that, after walking out, “June Callwood, Graeme Gibson, Margaret Atwood, Ian Adams and Fred Bodsworth” “met in a pub and decided it would be a good idea to see each other more often. The nucleus of the Writers’ Union was born” (Writers’ Union of Canada, “History of...” 1). Moore’s account explains that the group “retired to a pub to discuss the events,” and as “some of them had never met before” they “decided they must meet more often, and the nucleus of the Writers’ Union was formed” (“The Writers’ Union of Canada 1973 – 2007”). Separated by 30 years, the narratives bear out the notion that institutions re-tell the same stories in order to legitimate themselves. Note that neither one of these histories – or any other intervening history written by the Union – mentions Max Braithwaite or Matt Cohen at all, though they were clearly central to the Union’s formative days. Indeed, the story of the King Cole Room meeting is so pervasive that it is even cited in a 2017 City of Toronto heritage building preservation report about the Park Plaza Hotel. Discussing the historical significance of the site, the report notes that “the public room, known as the King Cole Room, was a popular meeting place of university students for many years, where the inaugural gatherings of The Writers’ Union of Canada were held” (“Alterations to...” 24).

<sup>20</sup> ME Fonds, Box 32, File 6.

<sup>21</sup> A much longer version of Atwood’s scathing response appears in her archival files. See MA Papers, MS Coll 200, Box 92.

<sup>22</sup> JC Fonds, Box 8, File 8.

<sup>23</sup> John Weinzweig had been the Composer’s League’s first president in 1951 and the first meetings for that organization occurred at the Weinzweigs’ home. For more information about the formation of the organization see Benita Wolters’s 1999 MA Thesis, *The Early Years of the Canadian League of Composers*.

<sup>24</sup> JC Fonds, Box 8, File 8.

<sup>25</sup> RW Fonds, Box 34, File 1.

<sup>26</sup> A productive example of the tension between craft and industrial unionism can be found in the history of the Toronto Typographical Union. Founded in 1832 to protect the labour conditions of typesetters and printers, the organization took on several important labour battles with various arms of the Canadian writing sector. One of the organization’s most celebrated victories was their 1897 strike, which demanded workers be limited to a nine-hour work day. The Typographical Union’s other very public strike – the Toronto newspaper strike, which lasted from 1964 to 1971 – eventually resulted in the dismantling of the organization. The Typographical Union encapsulated the growing tension between skilled workers – meaning those who worked with their hands – and ‘professionals,’ as their members protested the increasing use of industrial technologies (and its workers) for replication and production, which threatened to make their ‘skilled’ jobs obsolete. The founders of The Writers’ Union of Canada would have been well aware of the Typographical Union’s existence and these tensions, inasmuch as several early

members – including June Callwood and Pierre Berton – worked in Canadian periodicals at the time of the Toronto newspaper strike. See Sally Zerker’s *The Rise and Fall of the Toronto Typographical Union 1832-1972* or Brian Dewalt’s *Technology and Canadian Printing: A History from Lead Type to Lasers* for more information about the organization.

<sup>27</sup> Many of the letters between the committee survive in John Metcalf’s fonds at the University of Calgary. See JWM Fonds, Box 13, File 32.

<sup>28</sup> JWM Fonds, Box 13, File 32.

<sup>29</sup> JWM Fonds, Box 13, File 32.

<sup>30</sup> JWM Fonds, Box 13, File 32.

<sup>31</sup> JWM Fonds, Box 13, File 32.

<sup>32</sup> See JWM Fonds, Box 13, File 32 for several copies of the letter. See also AC Fonds, Box 44, File 1 for an example of this letter addressed to a specific author.

<sup>33</sup> The work of defining membership criteria went on for some time behind the scenes, and even then, the tenets of membership inclusion were still hotly debated at each successive planning meeting. Even after the Union was officially founded and the constitution ratified in November of 1973, debate about membership continued. The criteria for admission to the Union – having at least one prose trade book published, either in the last seven years or that remains in print, and being a Canadian citizen or permanent resident – remained unchanged until 1983, when membership opened to poets, and, more recently, in 2013, when self-published authors were able to join the Union. As of 2020 membership in the Union relies on a points system to determine eligibility, so that “authors at all stages” of their careers “can benefit” from membership in the Union (“Writers’ Union Expands Its Membership Criteria”). Developed to try to bring more equity into the membership process, this structure now allows for more emergent writers who do not yet have a book published to accrue the necessary points to join via their “other qualifications” – i.e. “creative writing degrees, magazine and journal publication, co-authorship, and the winning of a juried literary prize can all count towards an applicant’s points total” for inclusion. This speaks to the ongoing-ness of the questions of equity, inclusion, and diversity that have plagued the Union’s membership structure from its beginning – questions which the Union’s more recently elected equity committees are now trying to address.

<sup>34</sup> AC Fonds, Box 44, File 1.

<sup>35</sup> In 2013, the Union published a podcast of Christopher Moore’s interview with Howard Engel, one of the series of interviews that would form Moore’s *Founding The Writers’ Union of Canada: An Oral History*. This story of the happenstance of the Engel typewriter was part of Howard Engel’s recollections about his then-wife, Marian Engel’s involvement in the organization, and his small contribution, via the typewriter. Unfortunately, the audio files of this interview have been removed from the Writers’ Union’s website and can no longer be accessed. In the published version of this interview in Moore’s *Founding The Writers’ Union of Canada* Engel notes that he was the only one who thought to bring a typewriter, as he explains that the Union’s founders were a bit disorganized and didn’t seem “to worry about things like that” (11). This final round of edits to the constitution are captured on an in-process version of the document in F. R. Scott’s Fonds at Library and Archives Canada (FRS Fonds, Box 71, File 17, Reel #H1264, Images #1407 to 1414). Interestingly, clause number 2 of the constitution, which states the Union’s purpose, which I’ve included as the epigraph to this chapter, was significantly different as the meetings in Ottawa began. The draft in Scott’s founding meeting package includes his handwritten amendments, which would have been discussed and debated by the membership, making it what it is today. Initially, the statement read: “The purpose of the Writers’ Union of Canada is to unite Canadian writers for the advancement of their common interests. These interests are writers’ relations with publishers; exchange of information among the members; improvement among the members; to

safeguard the freedom to write and publish; the advancement of the common good of the people of Canada” (1). Note the hints of craft-Unionism and the direct nationalism that this statement includes, which will be struck from the organization’s operational statement of intention by the end of the weekend. Scott’s copy is invaluable, as it includes hand-written addendums that reflect the membership’s debate about the developing document, overwritten and crossed out with the wording that will eventually become enshrined as the official constitution. Like so many of the archival documents about Union work that I’ve encountered, it becomes a palimpsest of organizational intention and labour.

<sup>36</sup> Budgets for the meeting can be found in RW Fonds, Box 34, File 28.

<sup>37</sup> AC Fonds, Box 44, File 1.

<sup>38</sup> RW Fonds, Box 34, File 2.

<sup>39</sup> See a letter, signed by Margaret Laurence and Rudy Wiebe, requesting support from the Alberta Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Recreation on October 26, 1973 in RW Fonds, 34, File 1. The letter notes that that Rudy Wiebe, W.O. Mitchell, and James Gray will be able to attend the founding meeting with this help.

<sup>40</sup> AC Fonds, Box 44, File 1.

<sup>41</sup> See “Canadian Writers’ Union Conference Agenda” in FRS Fonds, Box 71, File 17 Reel #H1264, Image #1508.

<sup>42</sup> RW Fonds, Box 34, File 2.

<sup>43</sup> TF Fonds, Box 210, File 25.

<sup>44</sup> This statistic comes from the June 1973 newsletter. I have not, however, been able to ascertain who the fifteen members of this committee might have been. The initial membership committee, chaired by John Metcalf, included Alice Munro, Farley Mowat, Timothy Findley, Clark Blaise, Larry Garber, Rudy Wiebe, and Margaret Laurence – all eight of whom were writers of fiction. As discussed, many of these authors had expressly argued that the Union ought to be open to anyone with a published book, so the details of this larger committee’s bent towards representing fiction writers has been difficult to verify.

<sup>45</sup> TWUC Fonds, Box 42, File 8.

<sup>46</sup> See also RW Fonds, Box 34, File 1, for copies of press clippings and letters about this conflict.

<sup>47</sup> I can locate no archive for CANUW, nor for Jim Brown. Two very detailed treatises against the Writers’ Union of Canada written by Brown, “Solidarity Forever” and “Recruit the 10,000,” exist in Seymour Mayne’s fonds at Library and Archives Canada. The documents are written in support of an organization called Canadian Authors Representation (CAR), which Brown and Mayne seem to have been members of at the time of the Writers’ Union’s founding. This was, perhaps, the precursor to CANUW, and both will be worth further inquiry in the future. See SM Fonds, Box 4, File 13.

<sup>48</sup> AN Fonds, Box 5, File 41.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, RW Fonds, Box 34, File 1. This copy of Laurence’s letter is directly followed, in Rudy Wiebe’s fonds, by the agenda and budget for the November 1973 conference, supporting the idea that perhaps this text was distributed to attendees at that event.

<sup>50</sup> The Writers’ Union’s website, at this time, featured a collection of quotations from members about the value of joining the organization. This quotation, attributed to Gibson, was one of many endorsements, several of which mentioned ‘the tribe.’ The website has undergone many updates since this time, and, it appears as though any mention of ‘tribe’ has now been scrubbed from the page – perhaps as a response to equity directives driven by 2017’s newly formed ‘Equity Task Force,’ which included author-members Farzana Doctor, Jane Eaton Hamilton, Ava Homa, Larissa Lai, Carrienne Leung, Judy Rebick, Heather Wood, and Waubgeshig Rice. See “Statement from the TWUC Equity Task Force...” (2017) for more information about ongoing

responses to racist systemic barriers in the Union and the writing industry in Canada. Notably, the statements and recommendations from the equity task force remain active on the Union’s website as of this writing (June 2021).

<sup>51</sup> JWM Fonds, Box 6, File 27.

<sup>52</sup> According to David Sneath, while “the word tribe itself derived from the Latin term *tribus*, the administrative and voting units of ancient Rome,” the “notion of the tribe took on a very particular role in the era of colonial expansion, [as] it became the social unit – and characteristic life-organising social form – of people considered more primitive than the Euroamerican colonists” (“Tribe”). He notes that such colonial “promotion of the term was so successful that among the non-academic public worldwide, the category ‘tribe’ remains the single most prominent and dominant popular anthropological notion for imagining and referring to human society” (“Tribe”).

<sup>53</sup> For a full transcript of this interview, see RMS Fonds, Box 1, File 6. “History of Modern Canadian Book Publishing, Interview #3, Margaret Atwood and Graeme Gibson.”

<sup>54</sup> ME Fonds, Box 26, File 31. Note that this quotation comes from the second version of the “Solutions: Public Lending Right” essay, both of which are included in this file in Engel’s collection.

<sup>55</sup> AN Fonds, Box 32, File 31.

<sup>56</sup> AC Fonds, Box 44, File 1. This early letter from Engel also includes one of the first official lists of possible members and their addresses, presumably all of whom received this communiqué – there are 127 of them. While not all of these authors ended up joining the Union officially, Engel was trying to rally a significant community of cultural makers with her words.

## Chapter 1 – Fiscal-Cultural Futurity: “The Fostering of Writing in Canada”

On April 30th, 1977, The Writers’ Union of Canada took out a half-page ad in the *Globe and Mail* promoting their upcoming fundraiser, The All-Star Eclectic Typewriter Revue.<sup>1</sup> In it, the Union proclaimed that the event – to be held at Toronto’s 831-seat St. Lawrence Centre theatre on May 9<sup>th</sup> 1977 – would be “an evening of unique entertainment for the public... PROOF THAT CAN-LIT CAN BE FUN!!!” (61). The ad promised “an evening of culture and corn,” of “literature and laughs,” and “of amateur theatricals and professional prose” (61), presented by Union members including Pierre Berton, Margaret Atwood, Earle Birney, Marian Engel, Margaret Laurence, W.O. Mitchell, Rudy Wiebe, and many more. The long list of names of these famous (and less well known) member authors – who arrived from all over the country for the event, timed to correlate with that year’s AGM – are included on the advertisement’s right-hand side under the heading “ALL STAR CAST” (61). The list of participants is followed by a simple note: “literary auction” to follow “immediately after the entertainment” (61).

While the All-Star Eclectic Typewriter Revue was ostensibly a fundraiser, it was also a way to leverage the celebrity of Union member authors into increased attention for the Writers’ Union, its membership, and their work, thus supporting the organization’s entwined intentions of both fiscal and cultural advocacy. Tickets for the revue sold for ten dollars, and the event brought in over \$5000 in funding for the organization, as they played to a packed auditorium.<sup>2</sup> According to Margaret Atwood, member authors were met with a raucous crowd as they “brought down the house” (*The Burgess Shale* 24):



Pierre Berton MC'd the event; W.O. Mitchell read two short stories, and Earle Birney read from *Turvey*; Atwood convinced some of the biggest literary critics of the day – Robert Fulford, William French, and Douglas Marshall – to perform a skit entitled 'The Literary Mafia,' wherein they danced the cha-cha; Margaret Atwood, Sylvia Fraser, and Marian Engel performed as the Farley Mowat Dancers, skittering across the stage in snowshoes; Rudy Wiebe and Andreas Schroeder sang Mennonite songs; and the whole group ended the program with an ensemble rendition of "The Union is Our Leader" performed by "one and all" (Writers' Union, "Program" 5).<sup>3</sup> The literary auction which followed included more than 60 items for sale, listed in the back of the evening's program, ranging from first editions, rare books, and original manuscripts from members – a publisher's proof of Laurence's *This Side Jordan*, for example – to a doll house hand built by John Dennison and offered for sale as a package along with jars of jam made by Joan Finnegan placed inside. There was "1 Royal Standard Typewriter, on which all Alice Munro's books were written, until the day it finally gave out" (7); Farley Mowat's kit bag from World War II, filled with a signed set of five of his books; and a "BEARaphenalia kit, personally prepared by Marian Engel, containing part of the original ms for *Bear*, and other related items which gave the author inspiration for this great Canadian epic" (8).<sup>4</sup> Of course, no one could have known, then, that Alice Munro would later become the first and only Canadian Nobel Prize winner for literature, or that some of these items would now be staggeringly valuable given the celebrity status the authors have since attained. And yet, the Writers' Union seems to have assumed that would be the case – marketing these items as important pieces of literary memorabilia, even in 1977.

The auction and stage-show, taken together, reveal a series of productive assumptions about CanLit and the Writers' Union's role in fostering that particular conjunction of identity, sales, and creativity that has come to define not only a national literature, but an ideological position, a community, and the structure of an industry. It would be too simple, then, to look at the All-Star Eclectic Typewriter Revue – and other Union events and initiatives like it – as incidental money-making activities. Rather, these economic-cultural endeavors help us to think more pointedly about how The Writers' Union of Canada was implicated in variously building, challenging, and upholding a particular version of the Canadian cultural canon via fiscal and cultural advocacy.

This chapter will discuss the fiscal-cultural network of CanLit that I see the Writers' Union as being implicated in, as I argue that the organization's work was not merely aimed at creating fair compensatory practices for its members, but in propping up, and sometimes authoring, the structures and processes that supported the reception and growth of the Canadian literary industry more broadly. I begin this chapter, which will draw on the Union's programs, reforms, and interventions aimed at 'fostering' writing in Canada, with the Revue, because it highlights not only the myriad and creative ways the Writers' Union and its members sought to engage the public and their funds, but the particular way that celebrity was imbricated in that labour, and how that labour was deployed: towards the futurity of the Writers' Union as an organization, and CanLit as a discipline. I very deliberately use the word 'futurity' in this chapter, to gesture to the myriad potentials this work sought to support. Recall that the first tenet of the Writers' Union's constitutional mandate is "the fostering of writing in Canada" ("Constitution

[1973 – Final]” 1), an active directive which, according to the *OED*’s definition of the verb to “foster,” includes to “nourish, feed, or support” (v.1) something – which I take to define the financial aspects of the Union’s work – and to “encourage or help to grow; to promote the growth of” (v.4) something. As this chapter will show, it was not that the Writers’ Union’s members foresaw a particular fixed future for their profession or for their industry, but that the group’s work was aimed at a series of potential or postulated futures, as they sought to encourage the growth of Canadian literature through programs aimed not just at its financial support, but at its promotion, its amelioration, its study, and its survival as a body of work.

By placing themselves and their writing upon the stage in an event like the All-Star Eclectic Typewriter Revue – and by offering their collectible memorabilia for sale – member authors were making promotional gestures that would advance and encourage their place in the Canadian literary canon, as they asserted, very publicly, their centrality to a community of Canadian cultural producers and the importance of that literary community’s production. While events like the Revue were designed to raise funds for the organization, they also had the entwined value of allowing member authors to raise their own cultural and fiscal capital, both individually and as a group. Like the Revue, most Union initiatives served a dual purpose: bringing in extra income – either for the Union as an organization or for individual member writers – and simultaneously increasing cultural presence. This interrelation worked in a circular manner, whereby if you increased the cultural capital of an author, their work might be more widely purchased, read, or published. Gaining some measure of symbolic capital bolstered fiscal

security, which, in turn, supported the continued production of more Canadian literature, and thus contributed to the continuance of the discipline's symbolic and material value. Or, in other words, writers, their work, and their community of makers was 'fostered.'

While I will argue, in this chapter, that the Writers' Union made important interventions in the infrastructure of the Canadian literary industry via advocacy, lobbying, and member-directed initiatives aimed at fostering the visibility and viability of Canadian literature, my corollary concern is in how those interventions shaped both an industry and a national ideology. Union-initiated fiscal programs like the Public Lending Right, the Writers' Development Trust, and CanCopy (now Access Copyright) have indelibly influenced the production of literature in Canada since their inception in the 1970s and 1980s, as they helped to establish productive compensatory practices for writers. These endeavors went hand-in-hand with other Union programs that were primarily cultural in their orientations, like the Books in Schools tour program, curriculum and education projects, and member-driven review counts and advocacy. These initiatives were always inevitably entwined as they simultaneously bolstered financial opportunity and cultural visibility; moreover, they were entwined with the broader politics of the Writers' Union, which was steeped in Canadian nationalism and its associated equity concerns. While the Writers' Union's impetus was ostensibly financial, then – underpinned by its union rhetoric of fair pay for productive labour – the 'craft' part of its particular brand of unionism, and its deeply nationalist investments, meant that the organization's work invariably had cultural effects and connotations. Those cultural reverberations were inevitably linked to building and supporting a particular image of,

and community of Canadian literature and its makers. As was true of much of the Writers' Union's business, the slippage between these parts of its organizational mandate and operative identity was both a site of great potential and a cause of conflict for a membership that continually debated the roles, intentions, and investments of their collective.

And this, in part, is why I begin with the All-Star Eclectic Typewriter Revue, as it encapsulates many of the tensions that will become endemic to the Union's fiscal-cultural work in the years ahead: grassroots advocacy versus celebrity; culture versus finance; craft unionism versus labour unionism; concerns with futurity versus the precarity of now. For the Revue, one of its most intriguing tensions is the fact the associated and much lauded literary auction may never have occurred. Letters from Margaret Laurence to the Union's executive suggest she struggled to get answers about what happened to her donated materials, even two full years after the event.<sup>5</sup> This incident caused considerable conflict between the membership and the Union office and executive, though I can locate no clear documentation that delineates what happened or why the auction might not have occurred as planned. The Revue, then, also exposes the mystery that remains around many Union events and interventions, which have not yet been studied, documented, or critically engaged. From reading tours to curriculum development, from review counts to guides for authors, these initiatives remain largely unexplored. As Margaret Atwood noted in her 2017 Kreisel Lecture, *The Burgess Shale*, "it's probable that neither" the All-Star Eclectic Typewriter Revue nor the Union's erotica project – which ended up yielding the embryonic idea for Engel's *Bear* – "is recorded in any official history of Canadian

literature or publishing” (20).<sup>6</sup> Rather, information about many of these events and initiatives exists only in the archives and behind the scenes – ironic, perhaps, given their public-facing nature – but they have not been critically parsed for the ways they inevitably affected the institution of, reception of, and the reach of CanLit. Yet they were imperative, in their own ways, for fostering and nurturing the industry and discipline, coaxing it along via Union organizing and collective action. This chapter’s project, then, is first to recuperate the productive member labour that led to some of the Union’s most important fiscal and cultural interventions, and then, building upon that history, to unpack the complexity and pitfalls of the idea of fostering a creative industry through professionalization – particularly one that was (and is) so entwined in a nationalist project.

This chapter, then, will trace a series of seven projects that the Union spearheaded in its first five years, sketching the broad reach of the Writers’ Union’s efficacy, beginning, first, with the fiscal interventions upon which the Union was founded, and then expanding into discussions of the entwined cultural and economic effects of the work of ancillary Union committees such as the Audience Committee, the Education Committee, the Archives Committee, and the Book Committee. It is important to note that there are many other fiscal-cultural Union initiatives that I will not cover here or that I will only briefly touch upon. With dozens of concurrent member-driven campaigns occurring within the Union it is impossible, in one chapter, to capture them all. I hope, in time, to be able to mount an even more in-depth story of the Union’s work. For now, I intend for this chapter to reveal the broader efficacy and function of the organization’s

labour, to establish the Writers' Union's indelible influence on the Canadian cultural landscape.

Before delving into the Union's fiscal-cultural endeavors, it would be productive to step back and comment briefly on the conceptual framework upon which my thinking about them rests. I rely, in this chapter, on the ideas of 'financial viability' and 'cultural visibility' to broadly define the work I see the Union engaging in. Financial viability I take to mean, as the Writers' Union once wrote in a brief arguing for the Public Lending Right, that their work was geared towards making "the government and the taxpayers of this country... acknowledge the fact that the Canadian writer is poorly remunerated for his work" ("Public Lending Right in Canada..." 2),<sup>7</sup> and changing that reality. As Marian Engel said in a speech to Trent University students in the fall of 1974, "financial viability is just as important to the writer" as having their work published and read, "and, although possibilities of earning a literary living in this country have increased, the writer still seeks improvement in his financial dealings" ("Short Speech for Trent" 1).<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, I see the pursuit of cultural visibility operating in two ways: initiatives aimed at immediate promotion, sales, and marketing of member work, and those aimed at the futurity of CanLit as a discipline. One cannot ever completely disentangle these categories, as they work in tandem with each other: cultural initiatives concurrently feed and support financial ones, and vice versa.

Their intimacy relies, in part, on the fact that the primary mechanisms upon which these efforts to 'foster' Canadian writing operated were celebrity and professionalization. As discussed in the Introduction, the interaction between labour, professionalization, and

celebrity was central to how the Writers' Union articulated itself, and thus, deeply involved in how the organization's bids for fiscal and cultural supports for writers played out. Moreover, the Writers' Union occupied – and strategically made use of – a complex entanglement between grassroots precarity and cultural capital. Looking to Bourdieu's definitions of cultural capital, we can recall that cultural capital is tied, inevitably, to economic capital. The Writers' Union used this conjunction to their betterment, leveraging cultural capital into economic reforms. But a crucial step needs to be articulated here, and one that, I believe, differentiates the Union's work from the organizations that came before it – like the CAA. Before the Writers' Union could argue for the reforms that fairly valued literary production, they had to position that production as a form of labour. To do so they positioned literary labour as fulfilling an integral social function. Using the language and context of Canadian cultural nationalism, they worked to establish writing's status as an essential service, if you will, which allowed them, in turn, to argue for the value of its production. This, simultaneously, allowed for the valuation of the makers of that production, and highlighted both the precarity of their labour and their status as artist-makers who could incur public acclaim.

In *Margaret Atwood and the Labour of Literary Celebrity*, Lorraine York articulates the complex working dynamics between celebrity and literary labour in her study of the mechanisms and modes of Margaret Atwood's public image and success. Taking inspiration from that book, I would like to consider how celebrity was operative in the foundational policies of the institution of The Writers' Union of Canada, as it articulated literary production as labour. York's study of Atwood reveals how literary



celebrity can be constructed and nurtured by the labour of dynamic groups of cultural actors (agents, publishers, editors, administrators, etc.), and highlights the importance of attending to the structural work that both informs and creates literary celebrity. My thinking in this chapter, then, is informed by that work, as I extrapolate York's argument beyond the individual professional practices of Margaret Atwood, Inc. (or O.W. Toad) and other literary celebrities like her, to consider the broader articulation of the institutional professionalization of Canadian writing that occurred through the Writers' Union. When we look in detail at any of the important fiscal-cultural interventions the Union supported, we see moments where cultural capital was the essential operative in achieving whatever the desired reform might be. As I will discuss, everything from press conferences to protests were used to publicly advocate for the Writers' Union's endeavors, as the membership sought to ensconce their labour and their work as necessary and valuable – indeed, as they sought to 'foster' Canadian literature.

As such, this chapter is also imbricated in the study of the canon that such positioning inevitably nurtured. As Carole Gerson reminds us “the contours of a canon are governed not by the inherent qualities of certain texts, but by the values attributed to them by those in power according to their current agendas and the particular configuration of national, aesthetic, and sexual politics that best serves their interests” (“The Canon Between the Wars...” 46) at the time. While the Writers' Union's members often positioned themselves as simple, unassuming writers, their cultural power needs always to be recognized, particularly as we discuss the interventions the organization made into the shape of our cultural, educational, and publishing institutions. As Linda

Hutcheon describes in *The Canadian Postmodern* a “canon, whether formed deliberately or inadvertently, will always reflect the discourses out of which it derives: social, cultural, ideological” (189). For the Writers’ Union’s part, their foundation rested on a Canadian nationalism that was rife with exclusions – exclusions that replicated themselves within the organization, and, by extension, in its efforts at cultural visibility. In his introduction to *Canadian Canons* Robert Lecker suggests that “the ideal examination of any canon would include analysis” of several aspects of the literary landscape: “of market forces; of the publishing and bookselling industry; of curriculum development in schools and universities; of government attempts to patronize a national literature and its supporters; of the dissemination of literary value in newspapers, magazines, scholarly journals and books” (4). As this chapter will show, The Writers’ Union of Canada was imbricated in *every single one* of the modes and instruments of canonical work that Lecker highlights here. As such, the reverberations of the organization’s endeavors require careful consideration and study for the ways they might have shaped, encouraged, and even limited possibilities for Canadian authorship. As I turn to those endeavors, then, we must remember, throughout, that they were inevitably linked to and upheld a particular image of, idea of, and representation of the Canadian nation-state. While the Writers’ Union worked, on one hand, to subvert an entrenched colonial canon – highlighting, instead, the work of contemporary Canadian authors – they inevitably influenced the establishment of another canon, similarly fraught with inequities and gaps. Moreover, we must remember, as Lecker describes, that “the values associated with canonical inheritance continue to

have power and influence over what is written, what is published, and how it is transmitted or taught” (4), even to this day.

\*\*\*\*\*

In the twenty years preceding the founding of The Writers' Union of Canada, the economics of production and dissemination of Canadian literature were at the forefront of cultural policy decisions. Recall, as discussed in the Introduction, that the Massey Commission's report (1951) had articulated a need for increased funding for publishers and producers alike, and that the Canada Council, established in 1957, was disseminating grants to authors, publishers, and other literary organizations. Yet the potential for a literary author to make a living from their writing in Canada remained tenuous. In 1955, Hugh MacLennan wrote to a friend: “nobody can live by writing novels in Canada at the present time” (qtd. in MacSkimming *The Perilous Trade* 57). Indeed, Frank Davey has noted that the “authors who were able to support themselves or their families through their writing” at this time “have been sufficiently rare in Canada to become the subject of gossip and legend” (103). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, literary nationalism, increased funding, and a new critical interest in CanLit fostered a climate of emergence and expansion, as a series of institutions, organizations, and businesses mobilized in support of Canadian cultural production. Several provincial arts councils and funding bodies were established around this time — most important for the Writers' Union being the Ontario Arts Council, founded in 1963.<sup>9</sup> Publishers were also contributing to the new mood of Canadian nationalism, with smaller presses providing a place for new and emergent writers to get their work to the public, while established

publishers like McClelland & Stewart and Ryerson Press were drawing on funds provided by the Massey Commission and the Royal Ontario Commission on Book Publishing, as they contributed to building a higher profile for Canadian literature — particularly through projects like M&S’s New Canadian Library. There was, in other words, a network of industry and institutions being built around Canadian literature at this time, which was both an extension of, and a response to, the work done by previous generations of Canadian writers and cultural advocates. And it was into this network, and in collaboration with this network, that the Writers’ Union and its members began to intervene.

As George Woodcock wrote in a 1979 article for *The Globe and Mail*, “Canadian writing has flourished in the 60s and 70s as never before” (“The Liberation of Canada’s Writers” 6). He continues: “I met nobody in 1949 who lived by writing. Most writers had to rely on university teaching or CBC work or some unlitrary occupation to make up a real income. Even those who were and still are great names in Canadian writing either taught or broadcast to keep alive [and...] real literary professionalism hardly existed” (6). While critics like Chris Doody have challenged this perception of Woodcock’s as they establish that the labour of previous writers and their organizations – like the Canadian Authors Association – were foundational for these successive generations of Canadian literary producers, Woodcock’s article is useful for how he positions The Writers’ Union of Canada and its members as having been implicated in the industry’s shift towards professionalism. Woodcock describes what he calls Canada’s “responsive infrastructure” as he notes that the “infrastructure of a real literary world has grown up at the same time

as these writers emerged” (6) – writers like Atwood, Engel, Laurence, and Cohen. “The Writers’ Union,” Woodcock writes, “is an organization of professionals, and it makes clear the shift from the old days of the Sunday writers to the new days of those who can afford to make writing a full time occupation” (6). As founding Union member Andreas Schroeder put it in an interview with Christopher Moore, “it was becoming just possible in the late ‘60s/early ‘70s to actually consider a writing career that... might actually pay your bills. I didn’t realize at the time that we were probably the first generation of Canadian writers for whom that wasn’t a completely ludicrous idea” (“Interview #3”). Schroeder goes on to comment that while there were certainly successful Canadian authors that preceded the Writers’ Union’s founders, you could “count the successful ones on the fingers of one hand. For them it was more of a romantic dream, whereas in my generation... we grew up with the idea that this was somehow a fairly practical possibility. Not easy, definitely, but doable. So we were... quite ready to engage with the concept of a Writers’ Union” (“Interview #3”) when it came around.

Early Writers’ Union of Canada documents suggest the founding group recognized and mobilized the conjunction of economic and cultural capital to bolster literary professionalization from the organization’s outset. A draft version of the Union’s first press release states that they are:

going to act at two levels. First we will fight to better conditions under which we now work. Included in our immediate objectives are the improvement of contract terms and the achievement of public lending rights. But real progress on these matters is necessarily dependent on

the complete transformation of the Canadian book publishing and distribution system... by this we mean that Canadian books must predominate at every aspect of the book medium. Only in this way will Canadian writers be able to reach their primary audience and only if this is done will there be a healthy climate for writing and will Canadian writers be able to live from their work (“Statement” 1).<sup>10</sup>

Note the entwining of several central Union concerns here: financial viability and cultural visibility, literary nationalism, and valuing the labour of literary practice. Moreover, note the active verbs: act and fight. Early Writers’ Union members positioned their work as confrontational and challenging, from its very beginning – not surprising, perhaps, given their experience with the Ontario Royal Commission, but the group’s indignation at their perceived lack of structural and institutional support compelled early Union members to get to work immediately, intervening into the developing network of cultural institutions around them. Indeed, the fledgling Union began their advocacy for fair contract terms and some form of public lending right even before the organization’s official founding. As Schroeder recalls in an address titled “Canada’s PLR Program: The Untold Story,” “one of the first discussions I attended on Marian [Engel]’s porch was about PLR. Canadian writers needed a new source of income: we were averaging less than \$5000 per annum in those days, not enough for even a single person to live on” (Schroeder). The Public Lending Right – a modest wage support for writers, which compensated them for the use of their books in libraries – became the Union’s rallying point, as the early press release attests. Similarly, a team headed by Graeme Gibson, Matt Cohen, and Margaret Laurence

got to work on researching and drafting the terms of a standardized contract, even before the Union's official launch. Both initiatives would take considerably longer to realize than the eager founding members of the Writers' Union could have ever anticipated – three years for the first standard contract and a full thirteen years for the Public Lending Right system which remains in place to this day.

The Union's contract committee, when officially established, was helmed by Margaret Laurence and Matt Cohen, who solicited sample contracts from established writers in the membership and began work on the language and clauses of a standard contract that could serve as a model for all members' negotiations. The contract committee's efforts eventually resulted in the 1976 publication of the Union's first 'Publishing Agreement' – a document that made recommendations about the shape and structure of literary publishing contracts. The 12-page agreement was accompanied by a 'Guidelines' document for members' information, which laid out the advice of the contracts committee as to how someone might go about negotiating ideal publishing terms. The guidelines document reveals the ambiguities that are central to the Union's 'publishing agreement' which they had hoped would be a 'standard contract' but ended up being nothing of the sort.

What the committee had discovered in their three years squabbling with publishers and Union members about what, exactly, the terms of a standard contract ought to be, was that there was absolutely nothing standard about how literary contracts worked. There were differing terms and conventions for the types of prose someone might write – contracts for literary fiction varied wildly from those for non-fiction

historical trade books, for example – and there were differing functions of a contract for emerging authors than there were for established ones. Moreover, any kind of set percentage terms, they discovered, were impossible to limit, as celebrity authors could negotiate terms that would be unheard of for fledgling writers. Thus, representing the needs of the entirety of their membership was challenging – something that will become an enduring reality for the Writers’ Union as its membership continued to grow and diversify.

According to an October 1974 *Toronto Star* article by Roy MacSkimming following the Union’s second AGM, the membership “contentiously” debated the committee’s first draft version of a standard contract, with James Gray “suggest[ing] that the draft must have been written by novelists because it failed to mention who shall pay for illustrations, maps, and indexes – matters of high importance for non-fiction writers like himself” (“Writers’ Union Meeting...” D6). Pierre Berton backed him up, objecting to a clause that had “restricted a publisher’s blue pencil to items of punctuation and spelling” saying “we can all use a good editor” to which, “two novelists sitting nearby winced noticeably but stayed silent” (D6). Resolving such fundamental conflicts – underpinned by everything from genre to status to working relations – became a major part of the labour of the contracts committee as they sought to make a document that was fair and representative of their membership’s desires and needs, and moreover, one that might actually be amenable to publishers.<sup>11</sup> It is productive to consider that, as one of the Writers’ Union’s very first active committees, their challenge of representing the diverse



and often discordant needs of the Union's membership was present from the organization's very inception.<sup>12</sup>

It was in 1976 that the Union's Agreements Committee – including Matt Cohen, Margaret Laurence, Judith Merrill, and Marian Engel – released their 'Publishing Agreement' to the membership. The "Guidelines to The Writers' Union of Canada Publishing Agreement" drafted by that group make clear that their newly recommended agreement is "is not a 'minimum agreement'" and that no member is "bound to make use of the agreement on pain of Union discipline" (1).<sup>13</sup> Its intention, rather, is to be a "minimum ideal agreement, providing for the very least we feel an author must ask for" (1) from a publisher. The committee clearly states, though, that, after their many years of work, this document remains imperfect, as it "falls short of stipulating everything we believe a writer should have" (1). The committee notes: "in the same way, the recommendations of terms, prices, and percentages" they've proposed "are set at the lowest level we feel to be reasonable and necessary for any professional writer whose principle activity is writing" (1). The language of professionalism which permeated the Union's early rhetoric is evident here, as is the tacit idea of the valuation of literary labour. I am struck, particularly, by the 'we' that is being deployed here. It denotes the contract committee themselves, and to some extent, includes the Union's then Executive, who would have signed off on the publishing agreement and its distribution to members. Remember, though, that this 'we' includes some of the biggest names in Canadian writing at the time – Margaret Laurence chief among them – and as such, it is a very direct gesture both to the mentorship of developing authors in the Union's membership

and to how the Union deployed celebrity power at a fundamental level of their membership services. For, indeed, in building this model agreement, they had petitioned the membership for their previous contracts upon which to guide and base their suggestions, and it was mainly the established authors among them who offered their expertise, guidance, and copies of contracts. There is, then, in the guiding ‘we,’ an element of Union comradery, that both acknowledges the differences between their many members (just shy of 200 in 1976) and their commonalities, as the Union strove to establish more equitable payment and contract terms. “We know,” wrote the committee, “that some of the best-known names in the Union can and do command better terms than are proposed here. We know that most first-or-second-book authors will not be able to secure everything proposed here. We know there are many authors of books (primarily scholarly or text books) who are accustomed to so much less that they may hesitate to even explore the possibilities of asking for what is recommended here” (1-2). “But,” they write, “we believe it is” the “lack of communication and organization among writers that has created a situation where (most) publishers and (many) authors believe it is ‘impossible’ for these terms to be met” (2), and, as such, “the TWUC agreement is based on one simple proposition: Publishers and authors both must understand that fair payment to the writer is at least as basic in book-costing as printing and distribution” (2). The Writers’ Union, in other words, was using their contracts committee to educate not only publishers on the appropriate valuation of literary labour, but to educate their own members as well, as they coaxed them towards professionalization.<sup>14</sup>

The guidelines document continues, pointing out that while the committee has tried to anticipate members' questions and needs, if, in one's own contract negotiations, someone is unsure about something, they "may apply to the Union office for information and advice" (3). The contract committee notes that they are "in the process of collecting a reference file of contracts and agreements" from both members and publishers "so that the information pool should grow rapidly" (3), reminding members that "every query presented to the office will bring us closer to the point where it is possible to compose a true 'minimum agreement'" (3). I have begun to call work like this, from the Writers' Union, 'informational advocacy' – this contract pool is an early example of how they leveraged the organization's collectivity into accessing, collecting, and utilizing information and data about labour conditions for cultural makers. This concept will appear throughout this chapter wherever finance and culture meet, as the Union often deployed informational advocacy to support and bolster whatever idea or endeavor they tried to take on – initiating surveys, questionnaires, and studies to both justify and direct their work. In the Writers' Union's now-nearly fifty years of existence, they have been involved in hundreds of surveys – of both their membership and of the wider communities associated with Canadian literature – and in doing so have created a vast 'information pool' about an industry that operated, prior to the Writers' Union's inception, largely in individuated ways. As the Writers' Union was apt to point out, Canada is a big country, and knowledge of what happens from coast to coast about writers and their work was scant prior to the organization's collective labour – and the contracts team's work is a productive early example. The final sentence of the

committee's guidelines is pointed in its valuation of that solidarity, and of the potential of their collective advocacy: "Don't be pressured when your publisher pleads precedent during negotiations: this Agreement breaks a great many precedents and is meant to do so. Publishers will have to adjust" (3). Note the invocation of the word 'when' – the Writers' Union fully expected that publishers would push back against this agreement and they are here asking for their membership to hold the line, collectively, to advocate for new, better, and more supportive remuneration for their literary labours.

The 'publishing agreement' continued to morph over the years, with several successive versions being presented to the membership. Eventually, the idea of a 'standard minimum' became the Union's guiding principle, as they asked members to accept no less than 10% royalties on their work, no matter the form or clauses of their contract. The agreement committee's work blended with that of the grievances committee over time, as the Union came to occupy a position of advocate and mediator for disagreements between their members and their publishers, when necessary. At the time, Marian Engel noted the efficacy of their collective contract work so far: "We've had two people come to us with the same problem: they'd been promised a contract and publication of their books, but then the publisher did nothing for months, didn't even answer the writers' letters. In both cases the union was instrumental in making the publisher live up to his commitment. When we did that, I knew the union had something. I knew it was real" (qtd. in MacSkimming, "Writers' Union Meeting..." D6).

The standard contract and public lending right, the Writers' Union's two central founding ideas, both seemed so simple to the fledgling membership – things that could

easily be achieved – but in their execution they reveal the complex entwining of cultural, political, and fiscal power at work in the field of Canadian literary production. These two first initiatives expose the dynamic interplay between fiscal and cultural capital as it was, primarily, cultural capital which pushed both the standard contract and the PLR through into existence, so that they might materially benefit a greater range of literary producers both within and beyond the Writers' Union.

The Public Lending Right, adopted by the Canadian government in 1986 and administered, then, by Union member Andreas Schroeder – who had stewarded the project into existence for over a decade – had faced many failures and setbacks prior to its inception. Yearly financial remuneration for the use of Canadian-authored books in libraries had first been proposed by Marian Engel, in the early days of the Writers' Union meetings at her home. According to Schroeder, it became “the main idea around which the Union coalesced because it was the only idea (of the many ideas that were being proposed) that looked like it could be turned into cash” (“Interview #3”). This fiscal drive is important for our purposes, for it becomes central to the Writers' Union's operations. A 1974 “Public Lending Right in Canada: Brief From the Writers' Union” – likely written by Marian Engel and Andreas Schroeder – notes that it was at the first founding meeting that the Writers' Union “declared” its intentions to obtain “public lending right fees for Canadian writers, based on the number of books in Canadian public, school, University, and Special libraries” (1).<sup>15</sup> The document is quite clear about how the Union perceives this remuneration as a “right and a necessity” of practicing authors, as they note that “this right has been established in Australia, Denmark, Finland, New Zealand, Norway, and

Sweden” (1) already. The brief put forward an “Administrative Scheme for PLR” (3) which, while written in 1974, is largely how the PLR ended up operating, with recommendations for how to count books (via holdings numbers or circulation numbers), how authors should register their books for consideration, what, exactly, constitutes a book, how multiple authors or translations would be managed, and how the body that administered the scheme ought to be articulated. The Union strongly recommended the holdings model – which ended up being adopted – for its facility, in as much as one book census per year could yield the data necessary for administering the program. The fact that the PLR remains in place with this same basic structure today reveals that it was not the structure or the concept of the program that held back its adoption, but that cultural, political, and theoretical wranglings – which I will discuss – are what delayed its progress for so many years.

The Public Lending Right proved to be a thorny and difficult concept to adopt, in part because people didn’t understand it and, in part, because it held very little cultural cachet. In a speech titled “Canada’s PLR: The Untold Story,” Schroeder outlines the countless hours of labour that he, Marian Engel, and others spent in meetings with government officials, politicians, librarians, writers, and anyone else they could try to interest in the PLR.<sup>16</sup> He reveals that “most people we contacted really couldn’t have cared less about the issue. They may have had an opinion about it, but their own lives really wouldn’t have been affected by it” (n.p) at all. The Writers’ Union, then, spent many years advocating, lobbying, speaking, and rallying on behalf of the project – drumming up not only support for the authors, but, advocating for a more intrinsic

understanding of author's finances, book distribution and royalty systems, and, ultimately, their nationalist belief in the importance of supporting Canadian authorship.

The 1974 "Public Lending Right in Canada..." brief shows that even early on, the Writers' Union had done its research, initiating the very first Canadian PLR study, helmed by volunteer Union members working "in co-operation with library systems" (5). This is another form of early information gathering on the Union's part, as volunteers counted books by 14 randomly selected Union member authors in the Waterloo and Scarborough library systems, just to see if – and how – their PLR idea might actually function. The 1974 brief relays the data they collected, to bolster the idea that a Public Lending Right would provide moderate wage support to working authors. The document estimates that, given Canada's demographics, 3000 writers might eventually receive compensation via a PLR program, which would thus require a \$900,000 annual investment from the Canadian government (this proved to be quite accurate, as the first iteration of the PLR in 1986 had 6000 registered authors and dispensed \$2.7 million). What is most interesting about this PLR brief, beyond its prescience, is that the Union's PLR committee lays out the actual working details of how the PLR might support a developing author, noting that while "a writer whose work is popular... would be able to receive \$3 or \$4,000 per annum... novices would receive in the neighbourhood of \$2 or \$300, a sum that is not paltry to a writer who would have to turn out 4 to 6 book reviews to replace it" (8). This gesture to the concurrent labour that creative writers in Canada must perform to pay their bills is particularly productive, inasmuch as it highlights another form of informational advocacy that the Union engaged in while fighting for the

PLR: informing people – the public, government officials, the Canada Council – about the inner workings of authors’ finances and labour. The PLR Brief, then, recalls some of the same ideas that I quoted from George Woodcock and Hugh McLennan, above – that book writers cannot always live by book writing alone, and that other ancillary money-making activities are often part of their practice, including review writing, journalism, or teaching. In our current moment this might be called living in the gig economy – taking on whatever small jobs allow you to continue to live and survive. For the Writers’ Union, though, they were trying to find ways to amp up the ability of their membership to continue their creative writing pursuits, including being paid on an ongoing basis for the use of their work in libraries. The brief notes that while the PLR would “clearly favour, among the writers, those with long and prolific careers...there is justice here, considering that some elderly writers are of retirement age, but without pensions” (7). The trade unionism that was so central to the Writers’ Union’s mission reveals itself here, as the document reminds us about the ongoing precarity that even very successful writers might find themselves in, and the labour protections that are at the core of the Writers’ Union’s operations. Part of the Writers’ Union’s vociferous support of a PLR program came from what they often termed the ‘dismal’ financial situation of Canadian writers – but what exactly that looked like, financially, demographically, statistically, was unknown to most people who were not writers themselves. Thus, appeals to librarians, or politicians, or the public, for the money to fund a PLR, weren’t likely to land without information and context.



It was Marian Engel who first set about establishing these contexts, in her many speeches and addresses in support of the PLR. In one address at Trent University she challenges the assumption that a writer “makes most of his money from hardcover sales” (“Short Speech for Trent” 2)<sup>17</sup> as she describes just what that process looks like and what its yields might be for the author. “A 10% royalty on an \$8 novel gives the writer 80¢ for every copy of his book sold” (2), she says, as she asks her audience to consider how much labour that writer has expended (often years of work) in order to receive a paltry 80¢ per copy. She notes, further challenging the notion of plentiful remuneration from paperback sales, that “even a generous 8% on a paperback at \$1.50 yields only 12¢, 6¢ of which goes to the writers’ original publisher, [and] 1.2¢ to his agent if he has one” (2). “A yield” then, “of 4.8¢ on each copy sold” demonstrates that “the paperback revolution really works more in favour of the public than of the writers” (2). Engel closes out this section of her speech parenthetically noting that “numbers are crass, but before getting metaphysical about literature, think about them” (2). Here, Engel is urging her audience to delve beyond the philosophical value of literature and to think of the labour behind the work, the industry that (she believes) devalues that work, and the infrastructure that upholds that status quo. In another address, this time to the Canadian Libraries Association in 1976, Engel explains that “the point of” her “remarks is to advise you of some of the facts, financial and otherwise, of the book business, because the book business is not going to survive without your help. On the surface it looks very prosperous, but particularly in the fiction line, it’s in a precarious position” (“Canadian Writing Today” 11).<sup>18</sup> Engel lays out financial data that no one but a practicing author

would have been tallying at that point, as she argues that the purchasing power of librarians is integral to the success and survival of the discipline of Canadian fiction. Discussing the wages of writers, she notes that “10% of the \$16,000 brought in by the sale of 2 thousand copies of an \$8 hardback is only \$1,600, often for two years of work, and then the publisher deducts money for the copies you’ve sent to your friends and for your advance; [and] there’s no real gravy left at the end” (13). While Engel’s address demonstrates her care and concern for libraries and their funding and continuance, she urges the librarians “to buy your country’s own writers, for their sake and for the public...they cannot survive without your help” (15-16). Engel closes pointedly, stating: “when, therefore, you hear writers demanding Public Lending Right fees from the Federal Government, I hope you will keep in mind the fact that it’s the devil’s own bob for a non-best-selling writer to make \$3000 a year. Enough said” (19).

In another draft version of an address, titled “Solutions: Public Lending Right,” Engel notes that “the truth is that the rewards from Canadian sales are so mediocre, even for successful writers, that it’s time the public knew the truth” (1).<sup>19</sup> She continues:

Very few Canadian writers support themselves by their literary, as opposed to their journalistic work. Those few who do tend to live in the country, and not high on the hog. The rest of us struggle along on advances of from \$300 to \$1000 for books accepted by publishers, 5 – 10% royalties, from which advances are deductible, small provincial arts grants, large Canada Council grants once in a blue moon, writing book reviews, magazine articles and CBC scripts, teaching creative

writing, and hoeing turnips. Good books aren't made in spare time...  
nobody dashes off good prose; it comes from the most intense  
concentration and regular exercise at the typewriter (1-2).

I quote these sections of Engel's addresses in detail because they reveal the necessity of informing her audiences of these very technical and financial aspects of the publisher-author relationship. The writing world, for many, is a romantic idea, but the Union, through Engel's early advocacy, was trying to establish the role of the writer as labourer, not merely as cultural actor. As an undated "Compensation for Authors" Press Release from the Union, written around this same time, explained: "no one in the book trade is paid as little as the producers of books, just as ordinary farmers are paid less than anyone in the food business" (2). Accounting for the labour of their writerly production is another form of the early informational advocacy that I see this group enacting – tracing the experiences of their community and its needs, as an integral step in bettering their conditions.

It is worth noting that in its first five years, the Writers' Union had carried out several internal surveys of members' financial status and associated needs to support this work. They continued, however, to press for structural governmental recognition of the labour conditions of working writers.<sup>20</sup> In response to that pressure, in 1978, Statistics Canada mounted an official "Survey of Writers" which sought for the very first time to account for the income and work habits (i.e., part-time or full-time) of writers across the country. The "survey methodology involved creating a list of possible respondents in cooperation with various writers' associations" ("Preliminary Data" 1) including the

Writers' Union, L'UNEQ – L'Union des écrivains québécois – and the League of Canadian Poets to “deriv[e] a representative sample” (1) of 300 Canadian writers.<sup>21</sup> Statistics Canada is clear to point out that the survey “does not include all writers in Canada, but does represent a cross-section of those who were actively pursuing writing careers either on a free-lance or full-time basis in 1978” (2). The 1978 survey of writers has since become pivotal as one of the few metrics with which we can measure the changes and developments in the financial viability of Canadian authorship.

Over the thirteen years that Union members poured thousands of hours of volunteer labour into advocating for the Public Lending Right with governments, libraries, and other authors' organizations, one of their additional stumbling blocks was helping people to understand what a 'library book royalty' actually meant. Many librarians were concerned that it would be readers who shouldered the burden of the cost, or that their own library budgets would suffer, which was never the initiative's intention. In 1976, the Canadian Library Association – after Engel's address to their membership – agreed to support the project in principle, which led to a wider Canada Council driven study to consider the scheme's efficacy. Yet, after over a decade of advocacy, the Union and the Canada Council could not secure federal funding for the initiative. Union members' frustration boiled over in 1983, when they decided to organize a series of demonstrations in support of the initiative to rally public interest and public knowledge. They hoped to parlay that attention into increased pressure on then Minister of Communications, Francis Fox.

Union members and supporters gathered together at rallies held across Canada, the

biggest of them at Toronto's Metropolitan Reference Library on September 15<sup>th</sup> of 1983.<sup>22</sup> This demonstration was advertised with a full-page flyer, reminding the public of the Union's position: that Payment for Public Use (as the PLR was then being called), "is not a government grant. It is an earned payment for the use of a writers' property" (Writers' Union, "Demonstration" 1).<sup>23</sup> The flyer asks that people "show up for this important event" (1) and that they "bring placards" (1) along with them, as it highlights that the "annual earnings of a full time book writer [were] only \$1050" (1) the previous year. The flyer also includes the all-star line-up of speakers for the day: Eugene Benson, Marian Engel, June Callwood, Bob Rae – then leader of the Ontario NDP – Linda McKnight of McClelland & Stewart, Joe Rosenblatt from the League of Canadian Poets, playwright Erika Ritter, and Timothy Findley. Not only does this list of names recall the celebrity power at work in these attempts to garner public support and attention, but it shows the wider support that the Union had already amassed for the PLR – both governmentally and across literary genres. Marian Engel addressed the crowd with the words: "We've worked our butts off writing books you obviously like... but very little is coming in" ("Authors Want Slice of Library Action" E9), drawing direct attention to the precarious labour of being a writer in Canada at the time – even if you were a Governor General's Award winning writer like Engel. Another prominent member of the Writers' Union, Robertson Davies, supported the rallies with a written statement, which read: "The author is robbed by a library system which serves everybody admirably except the people who make it possible, who provide the raw materials, who do the real work. Brothers and sisters of the pen, arise! Make your voices heard!" (qtd. in French, "Paying Pennies...")

A1). There are clear calls, here, to fellowship, to the labour of literary production, and to the monetary compensation that the Writers' Union and its members were seeking through these demonstrations and initiatives.

Timothy Findley closed out the day's events, and the words of his address survive on a beaten-up little note pad in his archival files.<sup>24</sup> He draws attention, not to the financial aspects of the scheme, but to the cultural value of books and libraries, and the continued social necessity of supporting authors in their production. Findley calls libraries "a safe route along which... books pass into the future" ("Payment for Public Use" 3) whereby a book "whose time, perhaps, has not yet come" (3) can later be discovered and learned from. "When all else fails for that book," he writes, "and their reviews have been killer and their sales have died, they can be kept alive, here" (3) – I imagine Findley waving his arm dramatically, towards the Metropolitan library behind him. He continues: "a book and its author cannot only be kept alive – but they can be kept working – and they can be kept alive and working with dignity – if, but only if, we achieve Payment for Public Use" (4-5). So much of the Writers' Union's drive and rhetoric about the value of literary labour are wrapped up in these statements from Findley, not least of which is the ability of the creative to craft books that can be socially reflexive and relevant – that can be kept working – with dignity and safety, if they are well compensated for and structurally supported in that labour. Keep in mind, too, that Findley was one of the most celebrated Canadian authors at this time and was a seasoned actor, performer, and speaker – the fact that the rally's organizers had chosen Findley to close out the day's events is no coincidence. This leveraging of celebrity to garner support was strategic and, often, quite

effective for the Writers' Union. An internal memo reveals that this particular rally ended with the famous authors mingling with the crowd, as the Union requested that they all make themselves available afterwards – to sign autographs, to connect with the public, and, of course, to talk to those fans and supporters about the PLR.<sup>25</sup>

While it took three more years of rallies, lobbying, and leveraging of Canadian literary celebrity, in the spring of 1986, a new government finally funded the initiative and officially established Canada's Public Lending Right. The initial fund of three million dollars per year, for a trial period of five years, was estimated to support 6,000 authors annually at its inception. While the actual financial gains for any one author were modest – averaging about \$500 per year, as the Union's first study had estimated – for smaller producers, reforms like the PLR could make a very real and tangible difference to their material security, and moreover, to their capacity to produce more literature while less encumbered by financial concern. Any little bit of funding helped an author keep writing – this was the Union's main founding drive – but the further symbolic valuation of the work of Canadian authors implied by the PLR was incalculable. The PLR program remains in effect to this day and has grown steadily since its inception. Last year (2019/20), with an injection of new funds from the Canada Council, the PLR distributed \$14.8 million among 17,976 authors, with an average payment of \$822 each. There are now almost 21,000 authors registered with the PLR program, with over 85,000 eligible titles on file (“Annual Report 2019-20”).<sup>26</sup> Consider that the membership of the Writers' Union sat at almost 400 people at the time the PLR was adopted in 1986, and was just 13 or so when they decided, on Marian Engel's porch, that the fight for this particular

initiative would be one of their central concerns. The material, and far reaching, effects of the PLR program for Canadian authorship – far beyond the Union’s own membership – cannot be overstated.

Nor can the time, energy, and effort that Union members volunteered for early initiatives like the standard contract and Public Lending Right – their collective efforts were fundamental in establishing economic reforms in the book industry that keenly affected the material experiences of Canadian authors. It is important to remember, though, that these were not new ideas or endeavours in the Canadian context. The Canadian Society of Authors, established in 1899, had cited copyright and contract inequities as the driving factor in their founding. While that society floundered within a decade and was subsumed by a new organization, the Canadian Authors Association (CAA), founded in 1921, concerns about copyright and equitable contractual practices remained central to the organization’s charter. The CAA had also launched a PLR proposal in 1949 which was never realized.<sup>27</sup> These organizations laid the groundwork for the potential utility of endeavors like contracts and library payment schemes, as well as tours programs – to which I will turn next – but had never been able to parlay their advocacy into accepted or standardized industry norms. What made The Writers’ Union of Canada’s efforts different, at least according to Frank Davey in his piece “Economics and the Writer,” was its level of funding and the high-profile calibre (read: celebrity) of its member authors (113). I would also posit that the collective energy and work of the Union’s membership – their labour – were pivotal factors in the realization of these programs and others which followed.



We must remember though, as Davey highlights, that the Writers' Union's fiscal interventions were also always inevitably entwined with questions of their own funding. The Canada Council provided the Union's initial seed money – money that paid for the first Executive Director, and for members to travel from across the country to attend their inaugural meeting in Ottawa. The economic and political capital that was wrapped up in the Union's relationship with the Canada Council must always be acknowledged, for both its contribution and its challenges to the Union's work. The Writers' Union attempted to become self-sufficient several times over its history, often precipitated by rifts in the membership due to their continued reliance on government support. It was Margaret Laurence who so astutely noted “you can't lobby against the government that's paying your way” (Downey A11) when she briefly resigned from the Union in 1978 amid concerns and debates over the organization's sources of funding. In this regard, the Union often found itself in a double bind – wanting to distance itself from government funding, while simultaneously keeping membership fees affordable and realistic for the many authors among them who struggled financially. In 1978 the organization initiated a sliding scale for membership dues, based on income, which caused months of discord among the membership and threatened to topple the organization. 1979 saw them quietly return to a \$150/year membership fee, and a renewed reliance on Canada Council funding – much to the chagrin of certain members. The Writers' Union continues to derive its primary funding from the Canada Council and Ontario Arts Council, and, indeed, the Union's endeavors have long been intimately entwined with the Canada Council's programs – particularly the push for more structured and professional author tours.

From the Union's first meetings in 1973, book tours emerged as a major tool in the Union's toolbox for increasing authors' financial and cultural presence. Many founding members had been involved in Canada Days, a high-school reading program organized by Ontario educator Jim Foley from 1971 onwards. They had likely seen the sales and marketing potential of such author-reader engagement and recognized that cross-Canada reading tours could be integral for both fostering public support and creating economic opportunities. The Canada Council had provided funds for reading and speaking engagements to authors for many years, but the Union wished to formalize and ameliorate this process. Early on, Union members Gerald and Arlene Lampert volunteered to take on the task of tour organizing, as they arranged speaking engagements for members, including travel and accommodations, in collaboration with the member-authors themselves for the first two years of the Union's existence.<sup>28</sup> The Union memo soliciting interest in the project was signed by the Lamperts and went out to the membership in the summer of 1974, confirming that they had secured two grants to support an internally operated tours program – one from the Canada Council and another from the Ontario Arts Council.<sup>29</sup>

In 1975, the Writers' Union's Audience Committee – charged with bolstering opportunities for marketing and public engagement, made up of Jim Bacque, Pierre Berton, Margaret Laurence, Matt Cohen, Alice Munro, and Rudy Wiebe – compiled a brief to the Canada Council titled "Improvement and Expansion of Existing Council Support for Authors Tours." In it, they note that "the Canadian writer and publisher have two great advantages over the foreign writer or branch plant publisher," namely, that

“they are on the scene, and they are part of it” (1).<sup>30</sup> The committee notes that, in their opinion, this is “an enormous advantage not usually exploited to the full” (1). They recommend that the Council make the “promotion of books by Canadian authors” (1) central to their program – echoes, here, of the Union’s founding nationalist documents – by requiring certain things from publishers and authors involved in that program. The committee includes four pages of recommendations and advice for the Council, including a list of five requirements, all of which ask for publishers to put more effort and money into promotion and advertising. The committee’s reasoning that this work should fall to the publisher and not to the author, is that “two things prevent the writer from publicizing and promoting his books as well as he could: money and skill” (1). The fact that the Union specifically positions their membership as unable, due to knowledge and finances, is both productive and deceptive. The authors writing this document had incredible cultural power, even in 1975, and they are using that power to advocate for changes. Yet, on the whole, they position the Writers’ Union as representing the ‘little guy’ – authors who do not yet have access to this kind of knowledge and prestige. This is among the many complex – and sometimes contradictory – positions that the Writers’ Union exploited in the service of their members.

One small section of the document does reveal what the authors themselves should be contributing to this relationship as they “must recognize that the state of the art today in Canada requires that he or she promote the book energetically” (3) and that the author should make “the connection between his art and the interest of the community at large” (3). It is productive to consider that these were the tenets – as the Union saw them

– of the author’s place in the literary landscape: enthusiastic community engagement. I find this particular document fascinating, as it was created by an early and fleeting Union committee, aimed specifically at promotion, and thus – though they would never have used this language – at fostering literary celebrity. Enthusiastic, community-engaged, literary celebrity. The Audience committee only existed between 1974 and 1976, when their work seems to have moved out into all of the committees of the Union, writ large – perhaps, as the organization realized that promotion, marketing, and audience engagement were implicated in almost every single fiscal-cultural initiative the Union would take on.

This tour brief, though, also helps establish the structural informational role that the Writers’ Union often played, as their committees provided detailed, industry-specific recommendations directly from Canadian authors to governmental programs. I should note that the cover letter which accompanied this brief, written April 8<sup>th</sup>, 1975, to Naim Kattan, then director of the Canada Council, is signed by Pierre Berton, Margaret Laurence, Matt Cohen, and on down the line of the committee members, with James Bacque, the committee chairman who likely penned the letter, being named last.<sup>31</sup> Having the letter signed, first and foremost, by two of Canada’s most famous authors – of non-fiction and fiction, respectively, who had both recently won Governor Generals Awards<sup>32</sup> – certainly could not have hurt their cause. While the response from Kattan, cited in an internal memo, was positive – Bacque reports to the membership that Kattan said “this is just the sort of program the Council wants to implement” (“News Story” 1)<sup>33</sup> – there is no

way to track what alterations, if any, the Council made to their programs based on the committee's brief.

What we do know, however, is that under Graeme Gibson's chairmanship in 1975, the Union recognized a need to formalize the tours process, having seen its potential over the previous two seasons, and likely knowing that if they wanted their desired reforms to promotion to move forward, they would need to do it themselves. So, the Union hired an extra office assistant, Kate Hamilton, to officially take on the task, and, beginning in September of 1975, Hamilton set about establishing a process and plan for a Union-organized, Union-promoted, tours program.

Tours managed by the Union's office could be arranged in one of three ways. First, there were Canada Council-funded talks to colleges, libraries, universities, or other community-oriented institutions nationally. These readings were arranged as a tour of three to five grouped appearances, allowing an author to travel somewhere and speak to several groups successively. The Canada Council paid \$125 to the author for each reading and reimbursed travel expenses, while the hosts were responsible for providing accommodations. Second, a tour oriented to Ontario high schools and elementary schools could be funded by the Ontario Arts Council. These opportunities were limited to presentations within Ontario and paid \$100 per reading plus all expenses and accommodations. Finally, independent organizations – ones that didn't fall into the Canada Council's definition of 'community oriented' or who charged a fee for event entrance – could arrange readings directly through the Union. The fees for these events varied depending on the author, with a minimum Union-prescribed amount of \$125 per

reading. The Union felt that the standard set by the Canada Council ought not to be undercut, and thus adopted this minimum for their own program.

No matter which type of tour was arranged, the idea was that the Writers' Union would become the central repository for information about member authors, their work, and their schedules, so that if an organization were interested in booking, say, a children's author, the Union would not only be able to recommend someone, but to arrange the details of booking and travel. Centralizing the administrative necessities of tour booking in such a manner would, they hoped, increase the opportunities for reading and speaking engagements and provide a valuable service to member authors who may not otherwise have had time (or money, or inclination) for such administrative work. While funds for these programs came from Canada Council and Ontario Arts Council grants, the Union formalized an important administrative system to facilitate tour booking, confirmation, and payment – directly through their office – making it much simpler for authors to be involved in readings than it had been before. The Union's staff expedited practical matters like hotel bookings or reimbursement for receipts, and booking inquiries were funneled through Kate Hamilton, who, according to her tour reports, prioritized recommendations of local member authors who might be less well known.

What may, on the surface, seem like a simple administrative strategy had intrinsic value as an organizing principle, whereby authors – potentially disorganized, isolated, or new to the process – were offered assistance in making connections with readers, and by extension, with the market. For my purposes, it is important to consider the reach that these speaking and reading engagements allowed. They put member authors directly in

contact with the public – in primary and secondary schools, in post-secondary institutions, and in private settings – exposing new potential readers to their work. Moreover, successful tours had the potential to parlay that increased attention into tangible effects upon school curricula, university classes, and, by extension, publications and book sales. As one 1976 memo to the membership expressed it, “the vision, the dream, is that when a group is planning a meeting or an event, they will immediately think of inviting a Canadian writer to grace the occasion... and don’t forget, it’s exposure and money, both!” (“Update” 3).<sup>34</sup>

The first set of Union office-organized tours took place between September and December of 1975 – a test case for a broader tour plan. Fifteen authors took part in this preliminary set of tours, including Graeme Gibson, Max Braithwaite, Joyce Marshall, Peter Such, Gerry Lampert, Andreas Schroeder, Sylvia Fraser and Miriam Waddington. They engaged in a total of 27 events over four months, netting almost \$2000 plus expenses among them. The year-end 1975 report to the Union notes that Hamilton already has another 67 appearances lined up for the following six months, from January to June of 1976, in high schools and elementary schools alone.<sup>35</sup> This successful test case helped the Union to run the numbers about the efficacy and reach of such a program and confirmed their suspicions that it would be a valuable addition to their programming. In order to promote this service and their members, the Union invested a thousand dollars at the end of 1975 to produce a tour brochure, which was distributed to all high schools and elementary schools across Ontario.<sup>36</sup>

One of the Union's basic administrative intentions for tours was to organize concurrent or correlated events, maximizing the opportunity for a given author. According to Hamilton's year-end report, if an organization called asking to arrange an appearance, she "contacted every school in the neighbourhood of [that] appearance, asking whether they would like to be included on the tour" (Writers' Union of Canada, "Report on High School-Elementary School Reading Tours" 3). "The answer was often yes" (3) she notes, lowering the overhead costs of a given appearance and creating more opportunity and exposure for the member author. Of course, exposure alone cannot sustain a practicing writer. The beauty of this particular program was that it allowed for both exposure and financial remuneration. Hamilton's report also highlights that the relationship between the office staff and the membership was crucial to the program's success, as she describes correlating tour stops with members' personal schedules, allowing them to defray travel costs by "stopping off [to do a reading] on the[ir] way to a meeting, or to visit an aunt" (3), for example. This allowed the Union to stretch their block grants from the CC and OAC even further, giving more members access to the funds. Hamilton's report notes that the schools were "interested, eager, and most cooperative" (4), and that elementary schools, in particular, were "climbing all over themselves in their hunger to have 'a real writer' visit them" (4, emphasis in original). The report quotes letters from several school administrators and member authors commenting on the events, all of which were positive. Joyce Marshall noted that this experience had been her "first venture into the reading field" and that she "enjoyed it very much" (4). She notes that while she learned a lot as a speaker, "quite an assortment of



young people learned at least a little about Canlit (mine and others), [and that] even the teachers learned something” (4). “Perhaps,” she writes, “we’ll have a new generation of writers in Sudbury” (4). Author Andrew Malcolm noted that his tour to Picton, Ontario was “extraordinarily interesting and I am convinced that your tour program is really a good idea. You must keep doing this sort of thing” (4). Miriam Waddington notes that all the classes at A.N Myers Secondary School in Niagara were cancelled so that students could be at her reading, and that the 200 or so grade 10 to 12 students she spoke to “had prepared for [her] visit and knew [her] work” (4). From a school curriculum that, 20 years earlier, had included almost no Canadian content, these forms of engagement with current, contemporary authors and their work were previously unheard of. Consider that if the Writers’ Union organized 200 member readings per year, and that each of those engagements was performed for an audience of at least 20 – a conservative estimate of elementary or high school class size at the time – at least 4000 people were exposed to Canadian literary content in any given year through the reading tours alone. And, if the books were purchased and taught in the schools, universities, or other community venues, then all the better. For the Union, this seemed like a valuable service, both financially and culturally.

As the tours program expanded, it became clear that the office staff needed more information about members in order to adequately promote their work. The office could not keep up with information requests, and, they believed, opportunities for tours were being lost because of this lack. “WE NEED INFORMATION!” one memo to the membership implored in February of 1976; “we are constantly embarrassed by the lack of

information in our files” (“Update” 3).<sup>37</sup> Note the continued entwining, here, of informational advocacy, as well as of financial and cultural capital. These tours were ostensibly set up to make money, but to do so authors needed to be promoted, which was, in turn, achieved by information being on hand at the Union office. Later that year, the Union applied for and received Canada Council funding to create a membership directory, which could serve as a promotional tool both for the tours program and more broadly for member authors. “We envisage a reference work,” says the memo introducing the idea to the membership, one that will be “for use in universities, libraries, bookstores, high schools, and by individuals both within Canada and abroad” (“For Your Urgent Attention” 1).<sup>38</sup>

The publication became *Canada Writes!: The Writers’ Union of Canada Members Book*, published in 1977. It compiled biographical and bibliographical information for the 205 members represented within it and included a photo of each author. Each member received a two-page spread to do with what they liked: some list all their published books, others cite positive reviews; some provide biographies, others write pithy one-liners about being a Canadian writer. Farley Mowat’s entry, for example, includes this personal note: “I’m a *Canadian* writer; a chauvinist and a rampant nationalist” (249). Hubert Evans includes the “quote pinned on the wall above [his] writing desk” (107) – from Albert Camus, incidentally. This form, according to the book’s preface, provided “a more exciting glimpse of writers in Canada than would have been obtained had a single person composed the material” (x). As a record of Canadian authors, this document deserves a study unto itself, as it demonstrates how this group of writers conceived of themselves

and of their work. For the Union, it was intended as a promotional tool, one that could be distributed widely as a resource and reference guide that would lead to more tour bookings, more appearances, and, in turn, more prestige, more exposure, and more money – for members and for their Union.

It was also, though, a fundraising device, that specifically leveraged members' celebrity to get the project paid for. At the 1977 AGM 60 copies of *Canada Writes!* were set aside for autographing and subsequent sale for \$50 a piece. According to a letter sent to several Union members by author and lawyer Steven Franklin, all of the members who had been present at that year's AGM had signed these 60 copies, as did a further dozen members during National Book Week just afterwards.<sup>39</sup> Franklin writes to invite a group of thirty very prominent Union members to his house for an 'Autograph Session' from noon to 7pm, where they can enjoy "a glass of wine, a cup of coffee, and sundry comestibles" (1) while they work. Franklin asks: "Will you come and add lustre to this limited edition by signing them?" – gesturing directly to the celebrity power of this particular group of invitees, which included Earle Birney, Max Braithwaite, Robertson Davies, Timothy Findley, Northrop Frye, Judith Merrill, Robert Fulford, J.L. Granatstein, Margaret Laurence, Farley Mowat, Gordon Pinsent, and Alice Munro, among others. Franklin makes a further connection between Union members' cultural power and the material work of the Union as he notes that "we have already sold 15 copies at \$50 and I see no reason why we should not sell sixty easily, thus realizing [the] \$2500 badly need[ed] to pay our printers...and the binders" (1) of the book. Franklin's letter demonstrates that it was, very literally, the valuing of literary celebrity that helped pay for

the guide's production, as the Union strategically employed their members' cultural power to effect this project and others like it. His letter also speaks to the ongoing collaborative friendships and labour that underpinned much of the Union's work.

*Canada Writes!* now rests in library and archival repositories Canada-wide, as one might expect – from Universities to public libraries to Library and Archives Canada. More surprising, perhaps, is that the members' book has made its way into a total of 78 libraries worldwide, spread across 12 countries, including South Africa and Australia, Slovenia and Sweden. Even if the directory now languishes on a hidden shelf somewhere in those libraries, one can imagine that some curious researcher might stumble across the original book and be exposed to the words and lives of this early group of Canadian literary makers. The Union continued to produce member-books as reference documents, which were distributed to libraries nationally and internationally – with updated publications in 1981, 1988 and 1993, respectively<sup>40</sup> – with the hopes that these books would continue to promote and foster Canadian writing as they exposed more readers to the work of their membership.

By 1978 the Union was consistently hitting its goals of organizing 100 Canada Council funded reading engagements per year and another 100 Ontario Arts Council funded events for high schools and elementary schools annually. However, questions of equity began to plague the program, as Union members raised concerns about who was being allocated tours and how much of the administrative staff's time was being dedicated to the process. Citing the Ontario-centrism of the tour program's work, they argued that the same group of members were getting tours over and over again, while

other less well-known authors – or those who lived farther afield – did not benefit equitably from the tour manager’s work, though their membership fees paid, in part, for this service. Indeed, an internal tours report for the 1978/79 year reveals that of the 100 Canada Council funded readings that year, a full 68% of them had occurred in Ontario. This Ontario-centrism was seen as particularly problematic, given that the Ontario Arts Council also funded the concurrent K-13 tours program, whose 102 readings that year all occurred in Ontario, and, for the most part, were allocated to Ontario authors (though this wasn’t a requirement of the program – only that the event occur in an Ontario school).

For some, this felt like a waste of Union resources, as attention was concentrated upon a core group of Southern-Ontario writers. Alden Nowlan, for example, on the East Coast, called *Canada Writes!* “a parody of a high-school year book” (1)<sup>41</sup> in a letter to then-Chairman Leo Simpson as he decried the utility of such Union projects for members like him. And this, perhaps, is where the more pernicious potential of the Writers’ Union’s reliance on celebrity begins to show itself. The tour manager argued that she could not control who the schools, community groups, and universities asked to have speak – of course, if an author’s name were previously known to the organizers, they were more likely to request that person. Yet the 1978/9 Tours Report demonstrates some attempts by the Union to level the playing field, as it notes that “there are several better known authors who have given many readings in the past touring years, and they have stepped down to allow other members the opportunity to give readings” (“Canada Council Reading Tours Report” 1) from now on.<sup>42</sup> The Union also altered their process slightly, and, while they continued to produce membership books, they also produced

specific touring brochures for the Canada Council’s National Public Reading Program, and the Ontario Arts Council’s Authors in Schools Program, annually, specifically polling the Union membership to see who would like to be involved and included in the marketing material for a particular year. The Canada Council had, by this time, also instituted a quota system, such that any given author could only take on a maximum of six engagements per fiscal year, to try to stretch the funding to more authors.

A 1984 report for the Union on the status of the ongoing Canada Council tour programs reveals that as more events were organized each year, their regional distribution also grew. While Ontario routinely hosted 60+ author events per year, by 1982/83 BC and Saskatchewan also had 12 readings a piece, with Manitoba hosting 13 events, and New Brunswick a further 11 (“Statistics Regarding Canada Council Readings”).<sup>43</sup> This broader distribution of funding from the tours program, and the raising of tour rates, in the early 1980s to \$200 per event, provided significant opportunities, financially and culturally, to the Union’s membership nationally. In the early 1980s, as they tried to diversify the program’s inclusions, the Writers’ Union began accounting for the regional distribution of their members who took part. The tours report notes that of the 55 members who were involved in 1982/83, 27% were from BC, 11% from the Prairies, 54% from Ontario, and 4% respectively, from Quebec and Atlantic Canada. These numbers more equitably reflected the Union’s membership, as well as the broader demographics of the Canadian nation.<sup>44</sup> It was also during this time the Writers’ Union had pushed for the Canada Council to include non-fiction writers in their readings program – which were previously only open to authors of fiction – and, by 1982/83 14 adult non-fiction authors in the

membership had also drawn on the program, which felt like a significant win for the Union.

If we consider the early Union forays into tours in 1975 in conjunction with the official tour reports up until the mid-1980s, we see that over \$100,000 in income was put directly into Union member pockets in the tours program's first decade, and that over 200 Union members participated in at least one reading engagement over that time. The fact that the tours programs, funded by both the Canada Council and the OAC, respectively, and administered by the Union, remain in place with largely this same structure, to this day – now almost 40 years later – speaks to the very material effects of the Union's advocacy with arts councils on behalf of its members – to the tune, in all likelihood, of over half a million dollars, keyed to this one program alone. What the Writers' Union did was to formalize an important process, one that leveraged their collective knowledge about touring and funding structures into better conditions and available opportunities for their membership. And the more intangible effects – of potential fans, associated increased attention, and book sales – cannot be measured. For my purposes, it is important to note that the tours program became an early site for exchanges about equity within the membership and that – in this instance – the Union and its members were responsive, changing their structures and processes to increase fair access to such lucrative events.<sup>45</sup> Ultimately, what the tours program did for the Union was to open up yet another avenue of advocacy for the organization, as it revealed – very early on – that there was a lack of knowledge, among Canadian teachers and their readers, about Canadian literary content.

In Graeme Gibson's "Report From [the] New Chairman," published after his election at the Union's second AGM in 1974, he reveals what was to become the central operational concern during his tenure as Chairman: the Union's involvement in influencing school curricula. Highlighting "the horror of what and who is being taught (or not being taught) in our schools," Gibson asserts that "the Union must initiate public discussion and, hopefully, generate concern for the woefully inadequate state of so-called 'Canadian Studies' in our school system" (1).<sup>46</sup> This initiative operated in tandem with the push for book tours, and no doubt, seeing the early success of those high school and elementary school tours, the Union forged ahead with plans for what eventually became a set of *Resource Guides for the Teaching of Canadian Literature*. From the outset of the project, the guides were positioned as addressing persistent questions raised by teachers during Union member reading tours: what pieces of Canadian literature would be appropriate for school audiences? And how can we begin to teach them?

The Writers' Union partnered with educators in 1975 selecting thirty-seven secondary school teachers from across the country who were assembled into five regional work groups.<sup>47</sup> Writers' Union members were assigned as coordinators of each regional workgroup, working with a small group of teacher-advisors to craft the content of each guide. A group of 31 other Union members and cultural workers from outside the organization – like Naim Kattan of the Canada Council, Professors Clara Thomas and Malcolm Ross (who also founded & continued to direct the New Canadian Library imprint at McClelland & Stewart), and established writers and cultural icons like Northrop Frye and F. R. Scott – served as a broader advisory panel, reviewing the guides



as they were produced and providing feedback.<sup>48</sup> The ten topics that the Union, in conjunction with their educator partners, decided upon for the guides were: “The North/Native Peoples,” and “Coming of Age in Canada,” both compiled by the British Columbia working group, headed by Andreas Schroeder; “The Immigrant Experience,” and “New Land/New Language,” prepared by the Prairie workgroup, organized by Terrence Heath; “Family Relationships,” and “Action/Adventure,” prepared by the Ontario workgroup headed by Barry Dickson; “Quebec Literature in Translation,” and “Images of Biculturalism,” prepared by the Quebec workgroup and Sheila Fischman; and “Social Realism” and “Women in Canadian Literature,” prepared by the Atlantic workgroup, coordinated by Geraldine Gaskin. The whole project was overseen and coordinated by Union member Eve Zampera from the Writers’ Union offices, and took over two years to execute, eventually being published by the Writers’ Development Trust in 1977 under the stewardship of David Young and Steve McCaffery.

But this simple description belies a very complex, challenging, and discordant two years for the Union, as the education project became a point of dissension amongst the membership and challenged the operational structure of the organization. While Gibson was deeply invested in implementing curricular Canadian Studies approaches, other Union members saw this as taking their mandate to ‘foster’ Canadian literature too far. Some argued that the guides should (or shouldn’t) prioritize Union-member written books, while others were concerned with the idea of a partisan advocacy-organization influencing education. Still other members were concerned that the labour involved in producing the guides was taking time and energy away from other, more directly

beneficial – i.e. financial – Union endeavors. To quell some of these concerns, the Education project eventually became the first major initiative of the Writers' Development Trust, which was founded for the purpose of off-loading the labour of projects like this one (and their fundraising, and their politics) from the Union and its members. As Gibson notes in a letter to John Metcalf in April 1976, "the establishment of the foundation will allow us to push all kinds of generalized things, from the education project through the random helpful work done daily from the office, from the Union to the foundation. This will permit the Union to concentrate on 'union' business" (2).<sup>49</sup>

For John Metcalf's part, he ended up being one of the most vocal opponents to the education project, resigning from the Writers' Union in 1976 over concerns that the Union was tying itself up in canonical issues they had no business being involved in. In a letter to Timothy Findley, Metcalf decries the fact that the project "puts the Union, as a sponsor, into the position of selecting and endorsing a national literature" (1).<sup>50</sup> To Metcalf, "a union has no business farting around with cultural concerns... all we can do is business. The only thing that unites us is money. Which is as it should be. That is what a union is" (1). Of course, things weren't that simple, for a quasi-craft Union founded on a principle of nurturance (or, to echo the language used by the Union office for their tours program, above, for a writing community interested in money and culture, both!). While Metcalf's dissent stemmed, in part, from the industrial unionism part of the Writers' Union's mandate, his corollary concern was the fact that he did not think anyone had the right to decree what a 'Canadian Literature' was. As he writes to Findley: "I'm bloody arrogant, but I'm not arrogant enough to say what constitutes our literature" (1), which is

precisely what he saw the Union doing with the *Resource Guides*. Gibson, however, was adamant – it was not the Writers’ Union and its members picking the books, it was the teachers, and therefore, the Union was not, to his mind, implicated in crafting a singular Canadian literary image or identity. As he explained to Metcalf in his April 1976 letter: “we have tried to structure, to encourage, to insist where possible, everything in such a way to avoid a situation where a specific short list of books became compulsory. The outlines are very extensive with an extraordinarily wide range of titles... At the end, with ten outlines, we hope and expect there will be a terrifically various list and any number of ways of entering into the material” (2).<sup>51</sup> Note, though, the words “structure,” “encourage,” and “insist” – Gibson’s language betrays the tacit ways in which the Union did, inevitably, shape the material the guides present and the modes of its dissemination.

In a July 1976 letter, also to Metcalf, Alma Lee confirms that the Union Executive has agreed that the Writers’ Development Trust “should take over the project as soon as all the relevant paperwork comes through” (1)<sup>52</sup> for the Trust’s founding. Until that time, however, the Union’s education committee and regional coordinators would continue their work to develop and complete the guides. “Once started,” she writes, “with teachers giving their energies and souls (!) we couldn’t do anything but at least carry on to the end of the first stage (i.e. the actual development of the resource guides)” (1). Lee’s letter confirms that the Union and its members were instrumental in the actual construction of the guides themselves, though they were published under the Writer’s Development Trust’s name. While the Union maintained that the teachers were the ones crafting the pedagogical components of the books, the organization was instrumental in the

dissemination of the information, and, indeed, the Union’s operational structure, members, and administrators were paramount to the initiative being completed at all. Eight more Union members sat on the broader advisory panel, and many – like Edith Fowke and Judith Merrill – wrote lengthy letters in response to the draft guides, editing content, raising concerns or questions, and making recommendations for other potential sources.<sup>53</sup> The Writers’ Union, in other words, was deeply entwined in the messaging these *Resource Guides* produced, and, by extension, may have had lasting effects on school curricula nationally, though these reverberations would be difficult to trace. The Ontario Ministry of Education, for one, commissioned a staggering number of copies of the guides, to be distributed “free of charge to 30,000 high school teachers in Ontario” (Lind).<sup>54</sup> The Union’s governing nationalist ideologies indelibly mark the production of these resource guides, whether the organization wanted to claim involvement in their making or not.

The *Introductory Handbook* to the guides, which explains the rationale for their creation, asserts: “we anticipate that this material will prove useful to educational administrators on all levels, to school, university, and public librarians, and to all kinds of students, both formal and casual, who are interested in the literature of this country” (1). Note the reach that the makers of the guides intended – this project, ambitious enough in its initial intention of being for high school audiences, was, in its final version, positioned as being relevant to anyone and everyone interested in learning more about CanLit. The guides were available to the public, via The Writers’ Development Trust, and sold for \$2 each, or \$15 for a full set of ten. As the authors note, they believe these guides provide “a

valuable entrée to the astonishing array of literature that contains and reflects so much of our cultural heritage” (1). And indeed, the guides certainly do open up the field of Canadian literature and present a wide, complex range of titles and interpretations of those works.

That does not, however, mean that their existence did not, at the same time, replicate a particular idea of CanLit – one crafted in the Writers’ Union’s image. Each guide is organized along the same general lines: an introduction to the topic, a series of possible themes or approaches to draw attention to, and then lists of literary works related to the topic: novels, short stories, poetry, non-fiction books, and drama. Some guides have lengthy sections that include films related to the topic, and thus, expand beyond just the strictly literary. Each book, short story collection, poetry anthology, film, or play is glossed in a small paragraph describing its content, its publication details, and its cost, with the intention of providing all the information a teacher might need to order and use a particular book for their classrooms. It is important to note that not all the works included in the education guides were written by Union members. Rather, the guides reach back into historical sources, and outwards into other forms of media, with the clear intention of bringing Canadian cultural production into school curricula. While the Union’s involvement in schools began squarely in Ontario, the *Introductory Handbook* to the guides makes clear that “the five work groups” were intended “to provide nation-wide talent, and representation and topics were similarly chosen” – by the educators, not the Union – “to reflect national interests” (4). The handbook clearly invests the guides in a broader Canadianization project, citing The Commission on Canadian Studies’ report *To*

*Know Ourselves* as a rationale for their work. Thus the guides both challenged a prevailing canon – by widening the scope of what educators might know about CanLit – while simultaneously reifying broader structures of inequity already present in the publishing culture of their time, which the selected pieces of literary production reflected.

The *North / Native Peoples* guide, for example, was authored by a group of white people, headed up by Union member-coordinator Andreas Schroeder. By today's standards it feels deeply problematic, celebrating and highlighting, as it does, a group of books written primarily by white people which appropriate Indigenous stories. Indeed, while the *Introductory Handbook* celebrates "The North/Native Peoples" guide's inclusion of "the native people's own descriptions of themselves, their legends and histories" (7-8) it notes that these, "often, admittedly, are 'retold' or 'transcribed' by whites" (8) in the editions they've selected for inclusion. *The North/Native Peoples* guide is rife with the word 'Indian' and refers to work by only three Indigenous authors, George Clutesi (Tseshaht), Harold Cardinal (Cree), and Sarain Stump (Cree-Shoshone), a poet and artist then living in Alberta. One wonders where Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* is in this list, for instance, as it is notably absent. *Halfbreed* had been published in 1973 to wide acclaim, Campbell was a Union member at the time of the guide's production, and the book has since been taught in high schools nationally. But this is just one example of the assumptions, omissions, and gaps that documents like the *Resource Guides* have the potential to reveal, if studied in more detail.

While the *Introductory Handbook* to the resource guides positioned their work as merely "a first step which will hopefully be superseded by the work of ourselves and

others” (5), as the guides were added to and updated, none of that work ever actually occurred – likely due to the conflict that had surrounded the project’s work. Today, mentions of the *Resource Guides* seem to be few and far between – relegated to a few lists of surveys of Canadian literature.<sup>55</sup> I can find no critical engagements with their content or their intentions. Yet they are fascinating objects that reveal the canonical assumptions of their time, and betray the role that the Writers’ Union played in influencing the dissemination of Canadian cultural production.

In 1985 the Union took on a related but separate project, distancing themselves from any direct canonical influence on school curricula and focusing on the promotion of member works. Providing an outlet for authors to articulate how they might see their own books being used in educational settings, the Union produced *Our Books In the Curriculum*, a three-volume set printed and bound by the Writers’ Union themselves in 1985. These are three massive 350 to 400 page volumes, which were compiled from members’ self-assessments of their own work, and presented in volumes geared to K to 8, grades 9 through 13, and undergraduate and adult education, respectively. This “compendium of members’ work” (v. 1, *Pre-school. Kindergarten, Grades 1-8* 1) dedicates an entire page to each book, and includes the author’s assessment of the “vital statistics” (1) about their work: title, publisher, cost, recommended grade range, type of book (fiction or non, mystery or fantasy or historical, etc.). Each page includes a paragraph-length comment from the author discussing how their book could be used in the classroom. Taken together, these guides amount to over 1100 pages of promotion and exposition of literary works written by Writers’ Union members. And perhaps the most

fascinating thing about these massive volumes is that they contain very few works by superstar Canadian authors. Atwood is there, as is Robert Munsch – with the greatest number of entries in the K to 8 edition – and Joy Kogawa is there with *Obasan*.

Otherwise, though, the indexes reveal a who's who of practicing, published authors, reflecting those people who made up the majority of the Union's membership at the time – sitting just shy of 500 members in 1985. The organizers of the volumes asked authors to provide all the “information that might possibly be pertinent to educational courses from kindergarten to post graduate work, from teachers' workshops to adult education courses” (1) – a lofty, if unrealizable, goal. “The results,” of this process, the organizers hope, “are three volumes of carefully annotated entries which we hope will...help in the planning of curricula, for the studying of all subjects, as well as in the enjoyment of Canadian literature” (1). While the Writers' Union had distanced itself from being implicated in creating a broader canon, with *Our Books in the Curriculum*, they were certainly still asserting their position within that structure. Moreover, they continued to enact the organization's intention to do everything possible to foster cultural presence and visibility through education, which might, in turn, influence sales. Considered together with the work of the tours committee, these educational endeavors were intimately tied up in the processes of canon building, curriculum development, marketing and sales. The Union was not merely involved, then, in making money, but in propping up, and sometimes authoring, the structures and processes that supported the reception and growth of their industry.



Concurrent with these educational endeavours, Pierre Berton was heading up another Union committee dedicated to fostering support for writers via an integral part of the sales chain – book reviews. Early on in the Writers’ Union’s planning, Berton had voiced his concerns about Canadian “book pages” – by which he meant the pages of Canadian dailies dedicated to books. Berton was dismayed by the scale of the coverage of American publications in these periodicals and saw a simple and efficient way of securing more promotion for Canadian literary producers: to be given equal billing. The Union’s founding meeting had set up the audience committee, headed by James Bacque, which, along with tours, saw an opportunity to expand the promotion of Canadian content – be it reviews, articles, or interviews – in national periodicals. In other words, they hoped to foster an audience for Canadian writing. Much of the audience committee’s work was informal, as they advocated for changes with the editors of individual publications on more personal levels. Though this labour is difficult to trace, leveraging, as it did, their friendships, relationships, and their already established cultural power – especially Bacque and Berton, who had worked in Canadian periodicals and publishing for many years – it had at least one particularly marked effect on publication content: in 1975 Bacque convinced the editors of *Maclean’s* to include a Canadian national bestseller list instead of the syndicated American one for the very first time.<sup>56</sup> The data for this scheme came from an alliance with the Canadian Booksellers Association, and *Maclean’s* further agreed to print enlarged versions of the bi-monthly bestseller list on coloured cardstock for distribution and display at any book store nationally that requested it. This was a significant win for the committee, as they believed that this practice – previously enacted

only by the *New York Times* – could highlight, instead, the work of Canadian authors, some of whom might be Union members. Incidentally, in the very first edition of *Maclean's* bestseller list – on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1975 – Writers' Union members topped both the fiction and non-fiction lists: Robertson Davies's novel *World of Wonders* and Peter C. Newman's *The Canadian Establishment*. While it may seem unfathomable today that a national bestseller list did not exist in every major national periodical, prior to 1975 – and the Writers' Union's intervention – only the *Toronto Star* had featured such a list, and they had refused the Union's invitation to partner with the Booksellers for increased promotion of Canadian titles via printed bi-weekly cards. The win with *Maclean's* was a significant milestone for the Audience Committee and for the Writers' Union, and it propelled Berton and his later Book Pages Committee on to continued labours for the promotion of Canadian book reviews in periodicals.

While Berton had pitched the idea early on in the Union's development for book review tracking, it took over ten years to devise and implement a formal plan. Some initial forays into tracking remain in the Union's archival files, mostly as correspondence between committee members who were observing their local newspapers and reporting back to Berton.<sup>57</sup> In one letter, committee member Len Taylor lays out his concerns about the “continued use of U.S. canned stuff” (1) in *The Vancouver Sun*, particularly reviews written by “*The Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times* who provide some 52% of the review[s]... enumerated” (1) in that paper. Taylor includes a two-page accounting of *The Vancouver Sun's* review section for December 1986 to May 1987 wherein he tracked syndicated versus locally written reviews, but didn't track Canadian writers or Union

members. These fragments help demonstrate that the committee went through a long and challenging process of figuring out just what to track and how to do so effectively before they could implement a full nation-wide survey. The informal tracking went on for many years, providing anecdotal evidence for Berton's concerns, and support for a comprehensive plan for review tracking nationally. This was, however, an ambitious and complex project, one that required data analysis assistance and the involvement of members from all across the country, as Union members were recruited to become the review trackers in their home communities. The decade of trial and error and planning came together when a student was hired to help formalize the process, which, eventually, culminated in the publication of the Union's *Book Pages Survey* in 1988.

The survey tracked the weekend book pages of thirty Canadian newspapers, over the six-month period between September 1, 1987 and February 29, 1988. It ranked the thirty newspapers on a series of metrics, including total column inches dedicated to book reviews and book news. For the survey's purposes, book news was defined as articles on authors, activities of the literary community, and any bestseller lists which may have been included in the book pages. The organizers did not attempt to trace other writing about books that appeared outside of a publication's books section, as this simply made the project too large. Consequently, a front-page article about an author was not captured, while the arts section's writing about another author was. They counted the number of review articles, how many came from syndicated sources, and how many were dedicated to individual books. Then, most important to the committee, they tracked the number of Canadian authored titles (CATs) within them. The number of reviews of books authored

by women, and the number of reviews written by women, were also counted, as requested by the Writers' Union's Status of Women committee. As I will discuss further in the next chapter, by the late 1980s, concerns about inequity for women authors were coming to the fore within the Union's membership and the Status of Women committee worked in collaboration with Berton's, to add gender as a point of inquiry to this version of their survey, yielding important and otherwise unaccounted-for data about the state of reviews of Canadian women's writing. Berton's introductory material to the *Book Pages Survey* notes that, overall, "in preparing this survey we have been impressed by the quality of many of the books pages in Canadian newspapers. Several have been improved remarkably in the past few years; it is our hope and expectation that this improvement will continue" (v). The data show, however, that the Status of Women committee's concerns about inequity are "made devastatingly clear" (v), as Berton registers the Union's hope that "this unacceptable gender imbalance will be recognized and corrected by book editors and publishers" (v) in the years ahead. He explains that the goal of the survey, overall, is "to see more space given to book coverage in the book sections... to see more books reviewed, especially Canadian books" (v).

Reflecting the increasing celebrity of the Union's members, Berton draws attention to the fact that, in recent years, "there has been an explosion of Canadian books. Authors, publishers, editors are all making news. Many of our members have achieved international recognition. It is our belief that book reviews and book news now deserve the kind of attention that entertainment, sports, fashion, and travel receive" (v) in Canadian newspapers. Convictions like this one helped not only to solidify and uphold

the renown of Union members, but to replicate it, as Berton and his committee called for the same amount of attention to be dedicated to the makers of CanLit as had traditionally been devoted to entertainment celebrities. Like most smaller Union-published documents, the *Book Pages Survey* survives in libraries across the country, though knowledge of its existence is scant. It provides, however, important data with which to assess the development of a reviewing culture in Canada, and reveals that underlying mechanisms – like celebrity, acclaim, and marketing – are deeply entrenched in the Canadian literary machine. What's more, it helps demonstrate how the Writers' Union and its members actively nurtured cultural power for the improvement of both professionalization and sales, concurrently. Like many other Union initiatives, the *Book Pages Survey* was invested in a complex fiscal-cultural futurity for Writers' Union members, and more broadly, for Canadian authorship.

One more initiative helmed by the Union, initiated in 1977, expressed the organization's investment in this futurity quite clearly, as they established an Archives Committee to look into how authors might benefit from, and be memorialized within, Canadian archival institutions. Helmed by Robin Skelton, the committee was charged with exploring the state of Canadian literary archives and making recommendations to members about their potential as both fiscal and critical opportunities. To do so, the committee initiated a substantial study of the state of literary archives, sending out questionnaires to three branches of the Canadian literary archival industry: writers, publishers, and the archival institutions themselves. Seeking information on how archives were managed from these three separate but related locations, the committee sought to

understand how their concerns intertwined or diverged. According to the committee's files, writers were asked, for example, if they had sold their archives and for how much, or if they would ever consider doing so.<sup>58</sup> If they had donated their papers, did they receive tax relief? Had they placed restrictions on their papers, or were they fully accessible to researchers? Publishers were asked how they managed documents: did they return manuscripts to authors or keep them in their own files? If they kept them, did they plan to donate them to an archival institution, sell them, or destroy them? The archival institutions were asked about content: What kinds of archives did they currently collect? And did they have any Canadian literary holdings already?

The information from hundreds of questionnaires was distilled into an internal report which notes that, of the nearly two hundred member authors to whom surveys were sent out, fifty-six replied regarding their experiences with archival institutions. Fifteen respondents had sold their archival collections already, and another eleven had donated material, making for a total of twenty-six member authors with archival holdings in 1977. The experiences of survey respondents varied so wildly—from what they felt was exploitation to great financial success—that, the report concludes, “it seems necessary to work out a guide to handling the personal archives of writers, or at the very least to draw up a list of do's and don'ts” (Writers' Union of Canada, “The Experience of Authors...” 2)<sup>59</sup> for members. This impetus drove Skelton and the rest of the archives committee – Marian Engel, Philip Shackleton, and Helen Robinson – to draft their archival call to action, “Authors and Archives: A Short Guide.” The guide offered members advice about everything from appraisal information, sales strategies, and tax relief regulations, to

copyright rules, executions of wills and bequests, and potential restrictions on materials. “Authors and Archives: A Short Guide” was distributed at The Writers’ Union’s AGM in May of 1979, mailed to other members thereafter, and made available to non-members from the Union’s office for a small fee; a significant community of cultural makers was educated, then, through this document, about navigating the Canadian literary archival landscape. Moreover, they were encouraged to invest the time and energy to nurture, organize, and value their own material documents and ephemera, a concept that was relatively unheard of in a fledgling industry of emerging writers.

The “Authors and Archives” guide thus defines what constitutes “archival material” (1): what that material actually includes, how to collect and organize it, and how to have it appraised. Challenging the traditional privileging of manuscript collections, committee chair Robin Skelton tried to instruct members to broaden their point of view about what archival material could include. He wrote that “a full archival collection will include photographs, tape recordings, press cuttings, diaries, signed copies of books, records of house purchases, mortgages, insurance policies, and all the written, printed, photographed and recorded material relating to the person or persons concerned” (1). In short, Skelton argues, the records of one’s everyday life are important and ought to be prized and preserved.<sup>60</sup> Although one might not consider one’s own materials valuable, Skelton notes that “whatever can shed light, however obliquely, upon the subject of the archive may be useful to those who, in the future, intend to write a biography or survey of the life work of a person” (1). He repeatedly appeals to his readers to consider their poor beleaguered researchers who will be obliged to navigate these archives, observing that

“material of no apparent significance may turn out to be helpful... a picture postcard [for example] saying merely, ‘Wish you were here’ may save the worker a great deal of research” (1). Note the implication of utility, labour, and assistance in Skelton’s words—indeed, the idea that archival preservation will be “helpful” and “useful” to an imagined future researcher is repeated throughout the document. The invocation of the term “worker” is also striking as it reveals the Union’s rhetorical bent towards valuing the professional labour of writers. Moreover, note the text’s expectation that CanLit’s archives will one day become an important site of biographical and critical study. By preserving their own archives, Union members could make a contribution to future critical scholarship, and, what’s more, they could assist future researchers—the next generation of Canadian scholarly writers—with their own production. Encouraging members to create archival collections was yet another way that the Writers’ Union was implicated in a developing critical consciousness of the field of Canadian literature, and, by extension, in fostering a collective cultural memory of and about the discipline.

There seems to be an element of appeal, in “Authors and Archives,” to the always already present futurity of the construction and preservation of archival materials. In *Archive Fever*, Jacques Derrida asserted that “the question of the archive is not... a question of the past,” but rather “a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow” (36). Moreover, Derrida’s famous assertion that “there is no political power without control of the archive” (4) feels relevant to an organization that saw itself as making an important political investment in the future of Canadian authorship. In an article titled “Archives,



Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory,” Joan Schwartz and Terry Cook similarly assert that archives “wield power over the shape and direction of historical scholarship, collective memory, and national identity, over how we know ourselves as individuals, groups, and societies” (2). “Authors and Archives” acknowledges that part of the value of crafting and establishing archival collections is their potential to influence, guide, and assist future knowledge and understanding. We must also remember, however, as Helen M. Buss writes, that archives are not neutral sites, but rather “collections developed from specific social assumptions that dictate what documents are valuable” (2). The specific social assumptions that drove the valuation of Canadian archival materials were based on a project of cultural nationalism, which has its own agenda and structure of power and privilege, tied primarily to the whiteness of the Canadian nation. Those who did not conform to that structure were almost invariably omitted from the archival record. While we ought to always be critical of archival practices, then, inasmuch as they have a very material potential to reify structures of power, the details of a document like “Authors and Archives” help to reveal the complexities at work in such archivization processes. In this particular case, those processes – paradoxically, perhaps, in view of the nationalist underpinnings of the Writers’ Union’s mandate – included several groups often on the margins of archival representation, as the document, and by extension, the Union, worked to bolster the inclusions of new, emerging, rural, or otherwise undervalued Canadian literary artists.

The latter sections of “Authors and Archives,” dedicated to the “valuation of archives” (2) and to “the market for archival material” (3), provide us with some clues

regarding these intentions. The focus, here, turns back to the Union’s overarching aim to support the fiscal and material security of their membership, offering “practical suggestions” for “making *some* financial profit” (3) from one’s papers (my emphasis). Skelton advises members to break up their archival donations into several accessions in order to accrue “maximum tax relief” (2) from their donations. In trying to sell one’s papers, he advises, do not offer “large collections: offer small ones with a valuation of below \$1000.00” (3)—opting, for example, to try to sell the papers related to one novel rather than one’s whole collection. In this way, an author might secure some small bit of material benefit—and moreover, might be able to do so over a series of years to the same archival institution—while ensuring that one’s work be preserved. Recall that many authors were, at this point, struggling to make ends meet – the 1978 Statistics Canada financial survey had concluded that the majority of Union members made less than \$3000 per year.<sup>61</sup> A \$1000 purchase of their archival papers, then, might make all the difference in their ability to keep writing. If a collection were donated rather than sold, the tax relief offered by that donation might help offset the author’s income for the year and similarly create considerable material benefit for a practicing writer.<sup>62</sup> I draw attention to these financial sections of “Authors and Archives,” because they demonstrate that the point of this document was not necessarily to help celebrity authors profit wildly from the sale of their archives, but rather to assist practicing writers in the Union’s membership to glean some additional bit of immediate material and future symbolic benefit from their production – and to learn a bit about this practice from the more experienced members of their collective.

As of this writing, sixty-three percent of early Union members now have personal archives—as in, dedicated institutional archival holdings under their own names. Of the 191 authors listed in the 1977 membership book, *Canada Writes!*, 120 of them now have archival collections. In the Union’s initial survey of those same people, cited above, only twenty-six members reported having placed their papers with an archive at the time. This four-fold increase in the number of member archival holdings post-1977 feels like a significant shift. It is particularly worthwhile to consider that the Union had a significant membership of women—thirty-six percent in 1977—and, under the guidance of their first chairman, Marian Engel, the Union sought to improve the position of women’s authorship in Canada (to which I will turn in more detail in the next chapter). As Linda Morra observes in *Unarrested Archives*, historically, institutional archives have often refused women’s records and the records of people of colour, and there is a long history in Canada of the devaluation of their inclusions (3). As Helen M. Buss notes, the inequities of archival representation are revealed when we consider the records of “marginalized people, those not of the traditional white male elite” (1). Clearly, the Union was striving to work against this bias, if not entirely successfully. While far from creating gender equity in archival holdings, thirty-five of the Union’s 1977 female members went on to establish archival collections of their work. Making up twenty-nine percent of all 1977 Union members with archives, these women inscribed themselves and their stories into the nation’s critical consciousness by way of archival presence. And by extension, they made important symbolic and material interventions in the cultural consciousness of the developing field of Canadian literature. The archives that “Authors and Archives”

encourages might thus be approached as a form of counter-archive,<sup>63</sup> of particularly privileged types, of course, given the fact that you had to already be a published author to become a Union member—but a series of alternative archives no less, that were worth time and energy to try to preserve. By providing members with a “how-to” guide for placing their papers in archival institutions, the Union was expanding opportunities for less-experienced, lesser-known, or more regional authors in their membership to create a space for themselves in cultural memory and future research, a space that had hitherto been reserved for those powerful elites. Moreover, they were helping those authors derive a small bit of material benefit from their literary labour.<sup>64</sup>

It is important to remember that The Writers’ Union’s process was not to create one cohesive archive of its own,<sup>65</sup> nor did they encourage members to homogenize their collections in particular curatorial ways; rather, “Authors and Archives” empowered members to value their own production and to find the correct avenue, process, and institution for the dispersal of their own archives. We must also remember, however, that the principles of cultural capital, celebrity, and mentorship were certainly at work in this document’s production, as the more established authors in the membership offered their knowledge, expertise, and experiences for the committee to work from. While I cannot claim that “Authors and Archives” was directly responsible for a material shift in Canadian archival holdings, it is productive to consider how it interacted with a series of other Union cultural and fiscal interventions in the late 1970s to foster a future for Canadian writing. These developments bolstered the otherwise often undervalued labour

of Canadian authorship, as they invested in the archival, educational, promotional, and fiscal futurity of the Union's membership and their work.

\*\*\*\*\*

As we consider the broader reach and efficacy of the Writers' Union and its programs, we must remember – that the fiscal-cultural programs to which I've drawn attention here nest within and grow out of each other, with finance influencing culture, with celebrity influencing the grassroots, with labour unionism influencing craft unionism, and vice versa. Lest this chapter's organization should imply that all of these initiatives were logically planned and neatly organized ahead of time, we must recall that the Writers' Union's approach was a decidedly more serendipitous one. The success of a given project depended, in part, on who was tasked with it and if they had enough time, ability, and interest to make something of it. Success depended, too, on which way the market forces and governmental policy that surrounded the particular issue or initiative swayed at that given point in time, and on whether the Union could find other people, organizations, and businesses interested in partnering for the particular endeavor they sought to explore. As a result, the Union's approach was ephemeral, often transitory, and sometimes quite arbitrary. For example, the organization managed, somehow, to pull in over \$100,000 in funding for the *Resource Guides* within a year, but could not get traction on the Public Lending Right for over a decade. Their approach involved brainstorming all the ideas they could think of – often over long, heated debates at the yearly AGMs – hoping to address the broader problem with the Canadian literary industry as they saw it: a dearth of opportunity and money for Canadian authors. The answers to

that problem, as the Union's story illuminates, were complex, varied, and culturally and financially intertwined. So too, the initiatives that stuck were rewarding, and sometimes, literary-life-changing for many member authors within – and beyond – the organization's structure.

The financial efficacy of the Writers' Union's endeavors is undeniable, as the three main funding arteries that originated from the Union's labour – the PLR, the Writers Development Trust, and Access Copyright – have now yielded almost a billion dollars in payouts to Canadian cultural producers since their inceptions.<sup>66</sup> What is equally interesting to me, though, are the intangible ways that the Writers' Union's push to foster Canadian writing might have affected the opportunities available to authors and to readers alike. If the cultural programs were not as celebrated or as well-known as the monetary interventions, it is only because their effects are more difficult to trace. But involvement in these cultural programs would likely have increased potential opportunities for a given author, be it with audiences, book-buyers, awards juries, writer-in-residence adjudicators, publishers, or even their peers – all of which are integral facets of the political economy of Canadian writing. Recalling Robert Lecker's observation with which I began this chapter, all of these branches of the literary field continue to influence the work, opportunities, assumptions, and criticism of and about CanLit to this day – particularly in the case of the curriculum and archives programs, whose critical reverberations continue to influence our field. The far-reaching effects of The Writers' Union of Canada's programs and advocacy, then, continue – spatially, temporally, and ideologically – far

beyond the immediate fiscal benefits that the early Union members had so clearly focused their attention on.

Studying the Writers' Union's fiscal-cultural initiatives becomes all the more compelling when we consider that almost all of them prefigured similar projects that remain ongoing to this day. The journal *Canadian Literature*, for example, now produces the *CanLit Guides*, an online resource for university students whose aims are not dissimilar from the Union's educational guides efforts in 1977. They are accessible to anyone interested in Canadian Literature, and parse major themes and topics in the discipline.<sup>67</sup> Until 2019, CWILA – Canadian Women in the Literary Arts – continued to track reviews, similarly analyzing 30 journals and newspapers across the country and producing an annual review count aimed at “building an equitable review culture in Canada.”<sup>68</sup> The National Public Reading Program and Books In Schools Programs continue to be administered by the Writers' Union, to bring their members and their readers closer together. And of course, the PLR, Access Copyright, and The Writers' Trust remain in place to this day, continuing to support Canadian authorship financially. One could look at the continuance of endeavors like these either pessimistically or optimistically – either the Union was far ahead of its time, or the problems intrinsic to teaching and supporting Canadian literary production remain largely unchanged.

Ultimately, the Writers' Union did everything it could to foster the opportunities for Canadian authorship – in as many varied and sometimes unexpected ways as they could. It was, ultimately, the collective labour of the Writers' Union's members – their ideas, their inspirations, their passions – that effected pivotal cultural programs in

Canada, all of which occurred largely on a volunteer basis. Remember that it was a group of author-advocates who came together to do this work, not only establishing their cultural work as labour, but leveraging the mechanisms of celebrity and professionalization to nurture their vocation – with their sector, with the government, and with the public. I will turn to the labour of this work in the next chapter, as I consider how it was primarily the labour of the Writers' Union's female members that established, directed, and maintained the organization and its efforts.

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> See *The Globe and Mail* April 30, 1977, 61. The advertisement actually promotes the All Star Eclectic Typewriter *Review*, rather than *Revue*. The posters and tickets for the event, however, all use the latter name, so I have used it to describe the event throughout.

<sup>2</sup> See Writers Union of Canada, "History of the Writers' Union of Canada" (4). ME Fonds Box 32, File 6.

<sup>3</sup> See CH Fonds, Box 9, File 61 for a copy of the program. For more information about the *Revue's* reception, see Lawrence O'Toole's "Writers' *Revue* Offers Amateur Fun..." or Philip Moller's letter to the editor, both in *The Globe and Mail*.

<sup>4</sup> *Bear* had just won the Governor General's Award for 1976, and the auction directly capitalized on that attention and prestige.

<sup>5</sup> In April of 1979 Laurence penned a seven page "Open Letter" sent to the executive, which outlined her concerns with ongoing issues within the Union and its directions for the future. As an example of one of many things left undone, she highlights the "auction stuff," noting: "I would like to know when and where the auction materials are going to be sold. I opted for having my contributions remain with the union, because I had donated them for the purpose of raising money for the union. But I did contribute quite a few items, and I'd like the whole matter to be seen to, soon" (5). See JC Fonds, Box 8, File 10. Other pieces of internal Union correspondence indicate that the auction items may have been placed with a collectibles dealer in late 1979, but I cannot find any definitive documentation about where these important pieces of literary memorabilia ended up, or if they did, indeed, raise necessary funds for the organization.

<sup>6</sup> Atwood does provide some detailed accounts of both of these initiatives in *The Burgess Shale*. See, particularly, pages 23 – 30, where she details her contributions to these two Union projects. She describes her direction of the Farley Mowat Dancers, for example, as "six short women who, when outfitted in fur coats, tuques, beards, and snowshoes for our first number, 'Lost in the Barrens,' looked remarkably like six... Farley Mowats. The snowshoes were quite dangerous on the hardwood stage; I almost killed us" (22-23), she remembers. Recall that she's writing, here, about herself, Silvia Fraser, and Marian Engel, along with three other female Union members whom I have not been able to identify.

<sup>7</sup> ME Fonds, Box 26, File 32.



<sup>8</sup> ME Fonds, Box 26, File 38.

<sup>9</sup> Only Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba had provincial arts councils at the time of the Writers' Union's inception. Saskatchewan had mobilized even before the Massey Commission, founding their provincial arts council in 1948, while Manitoba followed in 1965. Many provincial councils, like BC, Alberta, Quebec, and New Brunswick weren't founded until the 1990s. This is likely part of why the Writers' Union based its work in Ontario – not only did many of the founding members live in or near Toronto, but the Ontario Arts Council's offices were there, and, as discussed in the Introduction, it was OAC funding that supported the very first meeting of what would eventually become the Writers' Union.

<sup>10</sup> TWUC Fonds, Box 42, File 10.

<sup>11</sup> Publishers' responses to this work have been difficult to ascertain. As I will discuss in Chapter Two, Jack McClelland of McClelland & Stewart was vocal about his critique of both the Writers' Union and its attempts at a standard contract. But this information was only recently revealed, by Laura K. Davis and Linda Morra in their extensive archival work on McClelland's correspondence with Margaret Laurence (see *Margaret Laurence and Jack McClelland, Letters* 2018). Similar engagements with the histories of other publishers and publishing houses would help reveal how industry responded to the Union's contract work, and if, indeed, it had any material effect on contract reform.

<sup>12</sup> You'll note, perhaps, that my language for the work of this committee has been ambiguous – I sometimes interchange contract, contracts, standard contract, and agreement as I try to describe their efforts. This, of course, comes from the Union's own shifting parameters of the committee's work. Between 1973 and 1975 they positioned their work as devising a 'standard contract' but as time went on and it became clear that the varying needs of their membership were not reconcilable under one simple standardized document, they became the 'contracts committee,' and later still, as the language of a 'standard' contract was abandoned, the committee morphed into the 'agreements committee,' a group of members dedicated not only to establishing an equitable base contract, but – with the help of newly retained Union lawyer, Marian Hebb (in 1976) – to reviewing current publishing agreements, helping members negotiate fair terms, and, when they deemed necessary, publicizing contractual disputes.

<sup>13</sup> ME Fonds, Box 32, File 6. See also JJM Fonds, Box 20, File 1, for a lovely draft version of the document which is overwritten in several different colours of ink, demonstrating the collective labour that went in to crafting it. Also accompanying the draft is a letter from Marian Engel to Alma Lee, dated July 22<sup>nd</sup> 1976, noting that she's "made a few more corrections and suggestions on the enclosed copy than you wanted" and that she "hope[s] this of some help and that you and Judy don't collectively have my head!" (1).

<sup>14</sup> A dedicated study of the efficacy of the Writers' Union's contracts committee would be very valuable, as one could compare authors' contracts that survive in archival files to see if there is any material change in their clauses or tenets after the adoption of the 1976 agreement. Studying the contract language, in particular, to see if parts of the committee's agreement were implemented directly by members in their negotiations, would be particularly productive.

<sup>15</sup> ME Fonds, Box 26, File 32.

<sup>16</sup> Schroeder presented this Keynote in celebration of the 25th Anniversary of the adoption of the PLR to The Writers' Union of Canada's membership, assembled for the organization's AGM in Toronto, on May 25, 2011. Noting that "it took the participation and dedication of a significant number of Union members to achieve PLR" (n.p), he opens his talk with a list of names of those many people who were involved: "Marian Engel, Margaret Laurence, Graeme Gibson, Charlotte Fielden, Charles Taylor, June Callwood, Lynn Harrington, Sylvia Fraser, Janet Lunn, Robin Skelton, Rudy Wiebe, Eugene Benson, Audrey Thomas, Margaret Atwood, Pierre Berton, Matt

Cohen, Susan Crean, Betty Jane Wylie, Greg Cook, Terry Heath, Michael Gilbert, Keith Maillard, Cathy Wismer, David Homel, Fred Kerner, Nancy-Gay Rotstein, Ann Szumigalski, Bonnie Burnard, Karleen Bradford, Joan Clark, Ken McGoogan, Andreas Schroeder” (n.p). The collective, member-driven labour of bringing the PLR into existence is certainly highlighted by this long list of names.

<sup>17</sup> ME Fonds, Box 26, File 38.

<sup>18</sup> ME Fonds, Box 26, File 4.

<sup>19</sup> ME Fonds, Box 26, File 31.

<sup>20</sup> The first of these studies that I can locate is an August 1974 “Questionnaire” that asked the membership to break down their yearly total income into income from “professional writing” (1) and other, and then, further, to detail how much of that writing money came from grants, royalties, or sales – of hardcover books, paperback books, television scripts, film scripts, and theatre scripts, respectively. The questionnaire then went one step further, asking authors to note the geographical location of their income source – whether Canadian (and from which province), American, or otherwise. The cover letter notes that the data will be “incorporated into a report to be submitted to the Canada Council” (1), directly linking this demographic income data to advocacy for increased funding. While I have found copies of this form letter in several authors’ archival files I have never been able to locate the completed questionnaires or an accounting of their data in the Union’s fonds. This would be a valuable data set to locate, as it could help us understand the financial position of early Union members to help track if the organization’s advocacy had direct financial effects for members. See AN Fonds, Box 32, File 31, for the form letter and a blank version of the two-page questionnaire.

<sup>21</sup> ME Fonds, Box 32, File 3 – the survey was based on 1978 income data and was published in 1980.

<sup>22</sup> Rallies were also held at libraries in Halifax, Montreal, Ottawa, and Vancouver the same day.

<sup>23</sup> TF Fonds, Box 108, File 10. The flyer is attached to a letter from Eugene Benson, then Writers’ Union Chairman, dated September 6, 1983.

<sup>24</sup> TF Fonds, Box 108, File 10.

<sup>25</sup> TF Fonds, Box 108, File 10.

<sup>26</sup> It is worth noting that the Writers’ Union is currently engaged in continued activism for PLR funding, as the average payments to authors have not changed by much in the 25-odd years of the program’s existence. The Union calls, now, for increased funding so that payments can keep pace with inflation.

<sup>27</sup> “Writers’ Networks and Associations” by Peggy Lynn Kelly and Josée Vincent includes a helpful chronology of all writers’ organizations established in Canada between 1921 and 1980 (126). See also Chris Doody’s PhD dissertation *A Union of the Inkpot: The Canadian Authors Association, 1921-1960*, or Lyn Harrington’s *Syllables of Recorded Time: The Story of the Canadian Authors Association, 1921-1981* for more details of the CAA’s programs.

<sup>28</sup> The Lamperts were also members of the League of Canadian Poets and it appears that they had been organizing tours for the League members prior to the Union.

<sup>29</sup> AN Fonds, Box 32, File 31.

<sup>30</sup> TWUC Fonds, Box 18, File 3.

<sup>31</sup> TWUC Fonds, Box 18, File 3.

<sup>32</sup> Berton had won three Governor General’s Awards by this point – the most recent in 1971 – and Laurence had just won her second, for *The Diviners*, when this letter was written in 1974.

<sup>33</sup> TWUC Fonds, Box 18, File 3.

<sup>34</sup> AN Fonds, Box 32, File 31.

<sup>35</sup> See “Report on High School-Elementary School Reading Tours, Sept-Dec 1975,” TWUC Fonds, Box 27, File 1.

<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, I have not been able to locate a copy of this brochure – it would be fascinating to know how the Union positioned their member authors. Did the brochure invoke and centre authors with celebrity status? Or did it highlight local and regional authors? Given later arguments that would erupt about Toronto-centrism and favoritism for the tours program, this would be a particularly useful archival relic.

<sup>37</sup> AN Fonds, Box 32, File 31.

<sup>38</sup> AN Fonds, Box 32, File 31.

<sup>39</sup> TF Fonds, Box 108, File 11.

<sup>40</sup> The Union continues to promote their authors through detailed member biographies, now hosted on their website.

<sup>41</sup> AN Fonds, Box 32, File 31.

<sup>42</sup> JC Fonds Box 9, File 5.

<sup>43</sup> TF Fonds, Box 108, File 11.

<sup>44</sup> While Quebec makes up a significantly higher proportion of the Canadian population, Writers’ Union organized tours in Quebec were often held in English, in support of the Union’s mainly English-speaking and -writing membership. L’UNEQ – L’Union des Écrivains Québécois – represented primarily French-language writers, and, since 1979, has organized their own tours in the province with Canada Council funding. Thus, I believe that the 4% of tours occurring in Quebec most likely reflected the Anglophone proportion of the population which the Writers’ Union’s members engaged, and which, in the 1980s, sat at approximately 10% of the provincial population.

<sup>45</sup> A questionnaire sent out to the membership regarding the 1978/79 tour program would be productive to study in detail, as its data would reveal how Union members positioned their needs and desires around tours and promotion. Many of these completed questionnaires survive in TWUC Fonds, Box 37, File 7, and others appear in the individual files of tour committee members, like Judith Merrill, whose archives include several copies of tour recommendations and questionnaires. See JJM Fonds, Box 20, Files 8 and 9.

<sup>46</sup> AN Fonds, Box 32, File 34.

<sup>47</sup> I have been unable to locate any suggestion of how this selection process occurred, unfortunately. But the Union was adamant, throughout, that the “outlines [were] being written by and for teachers” (“Education Project” 1).

<sup>48</sup> A full list of the advisory panel is attached to the Writers’ Union’s proposal for the project, see “Education Project” in JJM fonds, Box 20, File 2.

<sup>49</sup> JWM Fonds, Box 13, File 32.

<sup>50</sup> JWM Fonds, Box 13, File 33.

<sup>51</sup> JWM Fonds, Box 13, File 32.

<sup>52</sup> TWUC Fonds, Box 27, File 1.

<sup>53</sup> Judith Merrill’s archives, in particular, provide a productive example of the labour that Union members invested in this project. Her files include draft versions of almost all of the educational guides, and copies of her letters in response to these guides are prime examples of the way Union members influenced their content. Edith Fowke’s files, too, contain copies of her comments on the “Action/Adventure” and “Immigrant Experience” guides. See JJM Fonds, Box 20, Files 2 to 5 and EF Fonds, Box 75, File 6. It is important to note that I came across these letters only because I was able to see Merrill and Fowke’s collections, in Ottawa and Calgary respectively, as I looked for traces of the Writers’ Union’s women and their labour. The working groups involved many more union members and tracking the progress of the guides through their correspondence would

be productive. The Union members on the advisory panel were: Margaret Atwood, Edith Fowke, Margaret Laurence, Dennis Lee, Judith Merrill, John Moss, Rudy Wiebe, and George Woodcock.

<sup>54</sup> The Union's "Education Project" memo from January of 1976 notes that "\$50,000 has been received or pledged from teachers' federations, government agencies, and private foundations" (1) for the production of the guides so far. The memo notes that a further \$100,000 of funding will be necessary to bring the project to completion.

<sup>55</sup> George Elliott Clarke mentions "The Immigrant Experience" guide in a list of field surveys in the bibliography to his book *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature*, while Tim Struthers mentions three of the volumes in a bibliography of critical work on Alice Munro published in *Studies in Canadian Literature* in 1981. There is little other mention of them, though, in our critical and historical studies of CanLit, which is, in itself, fascinating.

<sup>56</sup> See "Ten Years of Union Accomplishments," RW Fonds, Box 34, File 1.

<sup>57</sup> See TWUC Fonds, Box 104, File 12, for "Book Reviews in the Times Colonist, Victoria" compiled by Robin Skelton in 1985 and Box 104, File 13, for a letter from Len Taylor to Pierre Berton.

<sup>58</sup> See TWUC Fonds, Box 64, Files 1 to 3, and Box 104, Files 5 to 8.

<sup>59</sup> TWUC Fonds, Box 104, File 5.

<sup>60</sup> Not everyone was pleased with Skelton's call to "build" one's archive. At the 1983 Annual Conference of the Association of Canadian Archivists, Jean Tener, then archivist at the University of Calgary's Special Collections, critiqued Skelton's instructions as having the potential to create "artificial collections" ("Problems of Literary Archives" 229), i.e. ones that have been too mediated. She does concede, however, that "by setting up an Archives Committee and producing a Guide, The Writers' Union of Canada acknowledged that its membership needs advice about an issue of very real concern to authors" (231).

<sup>61</sup> Statistics Canada, "Preliminary Data on the Survey of Writers, 1980."

<sup>62</sup> The member portion of the committee's questionnaire reveals a range of valuations for member collections. Less well-known writers typically noted sales in the range of \$500 to \$1000, while more noteworthy figures sat on the high end of the spectrum. Margaret Atwood revealed an initial \$11,000 (1970) payment from the University of Toronto, while Pierre Berton noted a \$50,000 (1974) payment from McMaster. Most respondents were located somewhere between the \$3000 and \$5000 range. See TWUC Fonds, Box 64, File 2 "Archives Questionnaire to Writers, 1979."

<sup>63</sup> Ann Cvetkovich develops the concept of affective counter-archives in "In the Archive of Lesbian Feelings," which draws on the important work done by the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York City among many others. While Cvetkovich's focus is on the archiving of ephemera of LGBTQ histories and memories, and on the radical archiving of emotion and trauma to document intimacy and sexuality, her work has informed my thinking here, particularly due to its gestures to the archiving of grassroots political activism. For Cvetkovich, such archives "assert the role of memory and affect in compensating for institutional neglect" (241), as they insist "on the value of apparently marginal or ephemeral materials... [to] propose that affects – associated with nostalgia, personal memory, fantasy, and trauma – make a document significant" (243-4).

<sup>64</sup> One other node of this archival discussion that will be productive in future iterations of this project is to consider the Union's advocacy for tax benefits for archival donations. While I know that several Union members called for tax reforms of this sort, I have not been able to ascertain if their advocacy specifically affected the Income Tax Act, which was enshrined in 1985. I envision a future chapter that specifically engages the efficacy of the Writers' Union's monetary reforms, including tax advocacy.

<sup>65</sup> The Writers' Union's own administrative archives, which I have drawn on extensively for this work, are housed at McMaster's William Ready Division of Research and Special Collections.

The Union did, incidentally, sell their archives to McMaster for a sum of \$30,000 in 1983, which allowed the organization to fund ongoing grants to assist members.

<sup>66</sup> This number comes from tallying the yearly PLR and Access Copyright payouts, and tracking all of the awards administered by The Writers' Trust, since each of their respective inceptions. It is, of course, an estimate.

<sup>67</sup> See [canlitguides.ca](http://canlitguides.ca).

<sup>68</sup> See the entry for [cwila.com](http://cwila.com) on the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine.

## Chapter 2 – “Status of Women”: Women’s Labour in The Writers’ Union

“Being in the two great unpaid occupations, writing and housewifery, radicalized me”

– Marian Engel<sup>1</sup>

This chapter considers how a particular group of Canadian women authors advocated for structural reforms in support of literary producers through the Writers’ Union between 1972 and 1992. Marian Engel’s statement of writer-housewife radicalism – drawn from her profile in the Union’s 1977 members’ book, *Canada Writes!* – has become a guiding statement for me, as I consider the intersecting roles these women navigated between their professions, their homes, and their volunteer activism within the Writers’ Union. Their stories articulate a nexus of feminist, activist, and writerly politics that elucidates not only the contours of these concerns, but the incredible amount of labour that was necessary to support their development. My intention is to articulate how integral women’s work and advocacy has been to the establishment, growth, and preservation of The Writers’ Union of Canada, as I consider the role that women played in the burgeoning organization, and, what’s more, the labour those women enacted in an effort to reform and reimagine opportunities for women writers in the Canadian literary industry.

I begin by outlining the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of my methodology for this chapter, as I look to non-profit, archival, and union theories to articulate the particular nexus of historical silence that I see engulfing the work of the

Writers' Union's women. I will then turn to the stories of the women themselves, as I try to recoup the narratives of their labour and argue for the efficacy of their interventions. With my starting point well before the Union's official founding, I will explore how women were central to the organization's development and how their care and community became essential to the Union's functioning. I will consider how an initial trifecta of women – Alma Lee, Margaret Laurence, and Marian Engel – established the roots of the organization and its key initiatives in the early 1970s, and then discuss the roles that other women, both member-authors and Union staff, played in developing and maintaining the organization. I will then turn to how feminist advocacy, which had hitherto only occurred in the background of other Union initiatives, took centre stage in the 1980s and beyond, with the founding of the Union's 'Status of Women Writers' committee in 1985. Here, women like Sandy Duncan, Anne Innis Dagg, Myrna Kostash, Daphne Marlatt, Heather Menzies, and Audrey Thomas will be highlighted, as I demonstrate the efficacy of the labour of the Writers' Union's women, and argue for the particularly female-driven nature of much of the organization's work. Ultimately, I will argue that while the Writers' Union's founding narratives often privileged the concerns and interventions of their mainly male demographic, feminist praxis and affective labour were pivotal to both the organization's founding and some of its most celebrated successes.

The Writers' Union of Canada provides us with a particularly salient structure within which to consider issues of gender inequity. It is, at its most basic form, a non-profit arts administration organization. Women are disproportionately represented as

workers in the cultural industries, and particularly in the non-profit sector. According to Michael O’Neill, “of the 7.8 million employees of the [American] non-profit sector in 1990, two thirds were women” and further, that “more than half of the sector’s 90 million volunteers were women” (1). While corollary historical data does not exist for the Canadian landscape, O’Neill’s work helps us consider that the overrepresentation of women in these sectors is due, in part, to gendered norms. O’Neill contends that men are expected to focus on capital rewards while women are compelled to sacrifice economic parity for immaterial value – the satisfaction of supporting arts workers by advocating for systemic change, for example. While non-profit workers, then, are poorly compensated for this vital work, volunteers within the sector are even more structurally vulnerable. Women make up the bulk of this volunteer workforce within the non-profit arts sector, and often work tirelessly for their particular cause with little to no recognition for that labour. Given The Writers’ Union of Canada’s founding structure – with a volunteer Chairman and National Council, and one paid Executive Director managing administration – and the consistent demographic profile of arts industry workers, it is not surprising, perhaps, that the Union would become an organization managed largely by women. Even today, women continue to occupy 52% of all cultural management and administration positions in Canada.<sup>2</sup> Yet the Writers’ Union, at the time of its founding, was overwhelmingly male. There were sixty-three founding members of the Writers’ Union – 18 women and 46 men – all of whom worked together, between 1971 and 1973, to discuss the parameters of the potential organization and to hash out its intentions. These people, collectively, did a lot of work to bring the organization into being. But the



brunt of the operational labour of establishing and maintaining The Writers' Union of Canada fell – as it so often does – primarily, to a group of dedicated and determined women.

The first piece of written evidence I have that dates the Union's inception is the letter written by Graeme Gibson to Timothy Findley in October of 1971. Gibson ends his description of the potential, as-yet-unformed, Union – an organization that they feel must be “political” – with the note: “Anyway, none of us (so far as I know) want to run it, define it, but we'd like to see it begin” (1).<sup>3</sup> Here Gibson reveals his own – and his (largely male) colleagues' – unwillingness to engage in the actual management of the organization that they believed was so important for their sector. Instead, the group recruited Margaret Laurence to take on the role of interim Chairwoman before the organization was officially founded, as she worked with the first executive to craft the Union's founding documents. Marian Engel then became the Union's first elected Chair, taking on a year of intense advocacy work to establish the organization and its concerns, lobbying, letter writing, and, in her words, ‘politicking,’<sup>4</sup> for the betterment of Canadian authorship. Alma Lee, technically, was working on the ‘union’ even before these two initial leaders, volunteering to set up the first informal meetings and, eventually, becoming the first Executive Director of the organization. When it came time to define the central management roles for the organization, consider that none of the 46 founding men were willing to take on the work. Instead, this central group of women became the first public faces of the burgeoning Union, deploying their names, their expertise, and their material and immaterial labour to nurture the developing organization into existence.

In so doing they worked together to become the de facto representatives for this particular group of Canadian authors. Yet they receive very little credit for the amount of time, energy, and commitment this foundational work must have cost them, and as yet, remain largely excluded from the narratives of The Writers' Union of Canada's success. Even in the organization's own documents, this important female labour is often obscured. An early "History of The Writers' Union of Canada," for instance – likely produced in the early 1980s – makes no mention of Margaret Laurence's involvement in the founding, and incorrectly dates Engel's adoption of the chairmanship.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, "The Origin of the Union," a description of the organization's founding that prefaced the 1977's members book, *Canada Writes!*, completely omits Alma Lee's name, and by extension, her integral work.

According to Paula Bourne, "Canadian women's collective work is important and needs to be better known. To date, this work, both volunteer and paid, has received little attention" (10). Written in a 1985 text titled *Women's Paid and Unpaid Work*, Bourne's statement still rings true today. Bourne argues that "despite the fact that Canadian women have organized for collective action in countless places and in countless ways, their associational activity remains largely hidden from history" (10), as she notes that, ultimately, "the historical invisibility of women's cooperative life deprives us of the knowledge of the many and varied contributions to Canadian social, political, economic, and cultural development made by organized women" (10). My work in this chapter is, in part, a response to the invisibility of the organizational and collective labour enacted by women within the Writers' Union. Bourne reminds us that while "female volunteer

groups have provided and continue to provide millions of hours of unpaid work to society” (12) that work is little known. She suggests that, “perhaps, when their history is better known, their ‘economic’ worth will be acknowledged” as she argues that “a crucial first step towards achieving this objective will be through the writing of individual organizational histories” (12). I take some inspiration from Bourne, as I flesh out the contours of the material and immaterial labour that a central group of women enacted on behalf of the Writers’ Union and its membership. I remain cognizant, however, of the ways in which my own writing and research have the potential to similarly elide particular stories. As Bourne reminds us, “what literature we have on women’s organizations in the past tends to...[focus] on founders and leaders rather than the rank and file and promot[es] a somewhat narrow view of Canadian organizations’ origins and achievements” (10). While I believe, in this case, that it is important to recoup the narratives of founding women like Laurence and Engel – as these have not yet been told – I seek, also, not to reproduce those trends. I have thus expanded the conceptual and temporal boundaries of this particular chapter to encompass the work of other women within the organization’s structure, including administrators – like Alma Lee – and members of particular committees within the membership. I have also opened up the archival boundaries of the discussion, employing a multi-archival approach in order to resist the convention of representing the work of only highly visible celebrity authors.

The Writers’ Union’s institutional archives at McMaster are the central repository of the organization’s administrative correspondence from which I draw, as they capture the extraordinary amount of material labour enacted by the Executive Directors of the

Union in managing its daily operations. Over my study period (1972 - 1992), all of those Executive Directors, incidentally, have been women.<sup>6</sup> While this rich archive of women Directors allows for the often-under-represented voices of female administrators to emerge quite clearly – a rarity in organizational collections – the institutional archives do not fully capture the complexities and ruptures within individual committees, or the extent of the operational labour enacted by individual members of the Union. In order to trace the stories of some of the Writers' Union women, then, I have had to turn to their own personal archives, held in various institutions across Canada. Drawing, in such a manner, on multiple archival sources allows me to capture voices and stories that have otherwise gone unremarked or unremembered in the dominant narrative about the Writers' Union and its development. Part of my project is, as Helen M. Buss expresses it, to “re/discover” (5), through the archives, the work of the Writers' Union's women. As Buss notes, working in women's archives requires “detective work that uncovers the often hidden, poorly documented, and incomplete record of female persons” (1). As such, this work becomes an act of “re/discovering a part of the culture that has not been appreciated, a culture in which women have inscribed themselves” (5). Carole Gerson similarly asserts that “the researcher in quest of the personal papers of women writers must often approach her subject obliquely” (“Locating Female Subjects in the Archives” 15), for the traces of women and their work often show up in marginal places within the collections of other, more noteworthy, figures. Thus, I have searched through not only the individual fonds of 23 female members of the Union, but those of dozens of their male

colleagues – for this, if nowhere else, is often where the correspondence of women ends up being preserved.

Yet we must also recall that to have one's papers housed in an archival institution at all requires a particular level of privilege, and, for writers, celebrity. As a result, several of the women whose names appear in the committee files within The Writers' Union of Canada's archive have been difficult to trace elsewhere. This does not, however, lessen the necessity of engaging in such archival sleuthing. Indeed, as Marlene Kadar notes, "this work is mandatory if we are to embolden feminist scholarship...[as] the consequence of this 'working' is the improved representation of women, and the continuing interrogation of 'women' as a fixed category of study" (117). Buss reminds us that this work will necessarily remain ongoing, and that forays into women's research – like mine here – remain necessarily incomplete, due to the other voices and stories not yet captured. Rather than producing definitive histories, for Buss, "this [archival] work produces 'results' that are tentative markings along the way of longer searches, guideposts that are not meant to be conclusive but which will help others to choose to work in women's archives" (5) in the future. Invoking very similar language as Paula Bourne did about the importance of studying women's collective and associational work, Marlene Kadar calls for an archival "rescuing [of] women's lives and cultures from the 'anonymity of history'" (116) in order to yield "new insights into the study of women's lives in significant political, historical, and cultural ways" (115).

Before turning to the stories of the women themselves, I must also recognize one other complicating factor that is salient to an analysis of the gender disparity within the

Writers' Union – their use of the language and structure of union organizing. Women had, traditionally, been excluded from the structures of many unionized organizations – particularly trade unions. According to Linda Briskin, the rate of unionization of women in Canada in 1965 was just 16.6%. By the 1980s, however, women were advocating for positions within trade unions and for more equity within those organizations, across sectors. Broadly, they sought to leverage the collective spirit of these reform organizations for the betterment of their (gendered) community. The 1980s thus saw many productive critiques of the structures of Union organizing, as women sought out a place within these collective associations, and the percentage of women in unionized positions in Canada grew from 26 percent in 1975 to 30 percent by 1980 (Briskin 33). The Writers' Union of Canada's rates of growth – strikingly – echo this pattern, as the number of women within the organization grew from 28 percent in 1973 to 36 percent by 1977.<sup>7</sup> I highlight these demographics to underscore how gender became a central challenge to previously exclusionary trade union structures, as women became more prominent within their memberships. In the latter half of this chapter, this growing prominence becomes particularly clear when we consider the work of the Writers' Union's women's caucus in the early 1980s, and of the Status of Women Writers Committee after 1985. Even when we consider the Union's founding women, the organization's focus on economic equity and the ethics of trade unionization cannot be forgotten, as it is part of the complex relationship the Union had with women's work – one that, paradoxically, both relied on and marginalized that labour in its structure. While, on one hand, we might say that the Writers' Union was progressive in allocating space for

female members in positions of power within the Union's executive and management in the 1970s, on the other hand, we might argue that they relied on a group of volunteer women to advocate for structural economic reforms for a membership that was 72% male, and that already made at least 50% more for their literary work than the women who advocated on their behalves.

This complex web of intersecting concerns – non-profit, union, and archival – serves, collectively, to silence and marginalize the narratives of women from the organization's histories. Women, though, have always been central to The Writers' Union of Canada. Recall that June Callwood and Margaret Atwood were part of that embryonic meeting over beers in 1971 where the idea of the Union was first formed. June Callwood and Marian Engel were members of the first interim executive, prior to the organization's founding. Those same women, along with Cassie Brown, Sylvia Fraser, Margaret Laurence, Alice Munro, Heather Robertson, and Audrey Thomas, worked on early Union committees and executives. Moreover, a woman has *always* been at the operational centre of the organization – every single Executive Director or administrator employed by the Union over my study period was female.

In an interview with Christopher Moore about the Union's founding, Alma Lee, the Union's first Executive Director, notes that she was “involved from the beginning” (*Founding the Writers' Union...* 6): “I was working at House of Anansi Press at the time, and Graeme Gibson asked me to organize a meeting of writers about this organization” (6), she says. That organization remained undefined, at the time, and Alma Lee took on the volunteer operational labour of coordinating its inception – while still doing her own

job at Anansi.<sup>8</sup> In the interview with Moore, Lee seems clear about the efficacy and importance of her role: “I was the person who organized the meeting at Ryerson” (6), she notes – which was the first quasi-official gathering of what was then called the ‘Canadian Writers’ Union.’ She went on to coordinate every other initial meeting of the group – producing all the administrative documents necessary for the meetings, arranging travel and accommodations for out-of-towners, and herding a large group of otherwise uncoordinated authors into collaboration. As Lee recalls: “Graeme would come up with ideas and off I would go to make them come true” (8). Note the efficacy she gestures to here, and her integral, on-the-ground, role as the organizer of the Union. “For a long time it was just me,” she says, “it was a lot of work. But it was fun” (7). Here, Lee highlights the sheer scale of the labour necessary in managing an organization of over 60 members with an office of one, but she also gestures to the affective dimensions of that work – the productivity and the joy of it. Consider that the Union operated, in its early days, out of Alma Lee’s home – the first newsletter for the organization, sent out in June of 1973, lists her home address at the time, “14 Albemarle Avenue, Toronto,” as the place to send “any correspondence” (“Newsletter [#1 June 1973]” 4)<sup>9</sup> related to the Union. Indeed, they relied on Lee for every aspect of their administrative efficacy and progress – everything from newsletters to finances to committee reports. Particularly striking is that in every early list of committee members or attendees at a particular meeting, Alma Lee’s name is there. Her work was central and foundational – literally and figuratively – for, without it, the Union could never have existed.



In another interview in Moore's volume, Andreas Schroeder remembers that it was Alma Lee who literally kept the organization running in times of financial turmoil. As he notes, Alma "was formidable in ways that were not standard issue. The Union was actually technically broke a lot of the time, so that every couple of months we were actually going under" (*Founding the Writers' Union...* 25). Invariably, according to Schroeder, Lee would "go and see the bank manager" (25) and work out something to keep the organization going until the next influx of money could be found. In retrospect, Schroeder marvels at the "degree and quality of [Alma's] charm that the Union had no idea it was basing its entire financial salvation on" (25). "What that woman was able to get in the way of cooperation... was astounding" (25), Schroeder reflects, highlighting the affective dimensions of Lee's labour as the first Executive Director, and the wish-and-a-shoestring upon which she was able to coax the organization into prominence. Beyond that, though, he also highlights the debt that the organization owes to Lee for keeping it, materially, alive. It is not often, in reflections about the Union, or histories of the organization, that anyone draws such distinct boundaries around the material efficacy of the administrative work that Lee – or other later Executive Directors like Ellen Powers, Mary Jacquest, or Penny Dickens – enacted. Indeed, while their letters, files, and traces dominate the Union's archival files, their names are rarely, if ever, mentioned in the institutionally and member-sanctioned accounts of the organization's development.<sup>10</sup>

Conversely, other women held foundational positions within the Union, but rarely, if ever, show up in the archival files about the Union's early days. Cassie Brown, June Callwood, Sylvia Fraser, Hélène Holden, Heather Robertson, and Audrey Thomas, for

instance, were all members of the Union’s early operational executives, but traces of their labour in service of the Union’s work has been difficult to track. Timothy Findley, wonderfully, remembers Sylvia Fraser arriving to the first meetings at Marian Engel’s house on her motorcycle in a ball gown – but her archives at McMaster include no hints about her Union involvement. Heather Robertson was part of the first elected National Council, which hashed out the tenets of how the Union, as an organization, would be constituted, but her archives hold no papers from those early days. We know that June Callwood was involved in drafting the organization’s constitution, reaching out to Helen Weinzwieg for knowledge and help – but even Callwood’s extensive and meticulous files include very little information about her early involvement with the organization. Instead, they are concentrated around the time she becomes vice-chairman, and then chairman, between 1977 and 1980. H el ene Holden sat on the Union’s national council for four years, from 1974 to 1978 – pivotal developmental and operative years for the organization – and while her investiture to the Order of Canada in 1995 notes that “she has worked tirelessly to bring together writers from Canada’s two linguistic cultures through the Writers’ Union” (“H el ene Papachristidis Holden”), no archive of her papers exists and very few references to her appear outside of the Union’s lists of historical executives. While these female members were present for – and central to – the first years of the Union’s existence, archival traces of their work are scant, even though several of them would eventually go on to take on the chair-ship of the organization.

We are fortunate, however, in that we have extensive archival files for both Margaret Laurence and Marian Engel, the first two chairs of The Writers’ Union of

Canada. Both women wrote – and kept – extensive correspondence, with both the Union’s office and with other Union members, which helps us trace their involvement with the nascent organization. Margaret Laurence was asked to be the first interim chair of the Writers’ Union in June of 1973. She had attended some of the informal gatherings around Toronto, and, upon her return from England in 1973, was interested in getting involved. In an interview with Christopher Moore, Graeme Gibson reflects that “we knew we could never get her to be the real chair for the full season” (*Founding the Writers’ Union...* 49). They proposed, however, that she take on the role of interim chair until one could be elected at the founding meeting. The early members believed that Laurence would be the best person to carry the mantle of their cause as she was one of the most established and recognizable Canadian authors at the time, both nationally and internationally. One detail recurs in many of the founding members’ statements about that initial chair-ship, though: that it was simply a titular honour. According to Graeme Gibson, Laurence “was sort of the granny figure and was sentimental and well known” (49). Margaret Atwood echoes these ideas when she asserts, in the same interview, that Laurence “lent her name” (50) to the organization, but had such anxiety as a public speaker that she could never be more involved in the actual operations of the Union. Regarding the founding meeting in Ottawa in November of 1973, Gibson reflects: “I’m not sure how much she did other than be there” (49). While Laurence’s fear of public speaking is well documented, these characterizations of her time as chair betray a lack of valuation of the immaterial labour she invested in the burgeoning Union, as well as a

seemingly willful forgetting of the material role she played in the organization's development.

For the archival files – the Union's, and Laurence's, housed at McMaster and York Universities – reveal another story. They reveal a woman who was deeply involved in and invested in the material safety of her community of cultural producers, one who was thinking through the political economy of her industry and the possible structures of reform. Moreover, they reveal that Laurence was among those who drafted the founding documents of the organization, including some of the Union's first public statements to its membership, and the organization's constitution, which remains in use to this day. Early newsletters, for example, penned by Laurence, were circulated throughout the Canadian literary community. These articulated the core concerns of the developing organization and functioned as early recruitment documents, encouraging members to actively participate in the fledgling Union. In her first official statement to the organization, Laurence insisted on being referred to as the "Chairwoman" of the organization, stealthily injecting the concerns of women writers into the Union's agenda and rhetoric from the very outset. In that "Message from the Chairwoman," circulated in August of 1973, four months before the official founding of the Union, she notes the "practical difficulties of having chosen a trade in which there is no guaranteed income, no pension, no side benefits, [and] no group health plan" (Writers' Union of Canada, "Newsletter #2" 2).<sup>11</sup> Note, here, the material concerns that were central to why a "union" of Canadian authors might be necessary. Laurence calls on other Canadian writers to attend the founding conference "armed with your serious personal ideas about the nature and function of a

writers' union in this country" (2). She notes that her own "personal hopes" for the organization include more French language representation and the collaboration of writers from all across the country, and she poses a lingering question that materially addresses the nature of female writing in Canada. "How do we" Laurence writes, "persuade the Canada Council that a woman writer with a husband and a couple of kids needs a grant to get a cleaning person for a year?" (3). She calls this a "practical thing" that needs to be addressed by what she hopes will be "a practical organization" (3). As the woman at the helm of that organization, Laurence advocated for the material betterment of all Canadian authors, but she also fought for the rights and freedoms of women writers within that broader system. She believed, according to this newsletter, that Canadian authors "need to get together, like the people in any trade, to ensure that the work to which we have set our hands will at [least enable]<sup>12</sup> us to keep a roof over the head whilst doing it" (3). With statements like this one, Laurence was shaping and promoting the rhetoric of the developing organization, all the while urging other Canadian writers to come take up their place within their 'tribe.'

Even Laurence, however, devalued her own contribution to the Union's work. In her memoir *Dance on the Earth* she reflects: "at the founding conference all I did was to welcome the members of our tribe who were there, many of them friends" (206). Her affective labour of welcome, in actuality, was important in setting the tone for a community-oriented organization and the operational tone of that first official meeting. We should recall, too, that it was, in part, the leveraging of Laurence's name, her celebrity, and her contacts (i.e. her "friends") which had brought several authors to that

Ottawa meeting in the first place. Yet, just a sentence later in her memoir, Laurence does hint at her broader involvement: she notes that she, and a group of others, had sat up working late into the night before the founding meeting, reviewing the draft constitution with the writer and lawyer, F.R. Scott. Gesturing to the coalitional labour that had been involved in this process, Laurence notes: “the half-dozen of us who had worked on it for weeks felt very proud of ourselves” (206). As David Lewis Stein remembers, Laurence continued to play an integral role in the development of the constitution during that first meeting, for he and Margaret became “floor managers” (qtd. in Moore, *Founding the Writers’ Union...* 18) of the conference room at the Lord Elgin Hotel. “We were introducing the constitution clause by clause” (18), he notes, to be voted on by the membership. To Stein’s recollection, while Laurence didn’t chair that particular meeting, she was busy “on the floor making proposals” (18) about the developing constitution.

A letter from Margaret Laurence to Alma Lee just one month before the founding meeting reveals that she had, at one point, intended to take on the role of the official head of the organization, but that she had “underestimated the strain” (1)<sup>13</sup> – drawing attention to the incredible amount of public labour she anticipated the position would require. Laurence asks Lee to explain to the interim executive her decision not to stand for an elected position, offering her “real regrets” and noting: “I had thought this would be a good year for me to do this kind of job with the union, but as I am so definitely not a public person, I’d underestimated the strain” (1). Laurence notes, however, that she would be happy to sit on a committee, and goes on to ask several pertinent questions about the organization of the – then upcoming – founding meeting. “The conference of the Writers’

Union of Canada went really well over the weekend” (qtd. in Davis and Morra 300), she told Jack McClelland in a letter afterwards. “I was there nearly four days as I went in advance to help get things in order. We had two extremely intensive days, getting the constitution, electing officers, setting up areas of action. I thought it was really great” (300). She notes, too, that she has taken on a position on the membership committee, and that she “feel[s] optimistic about the union – I think it can really do some things” (300).

In addition to the membership committee – where she played an important role helping to draft the official entrance requirements for the organization – Laurence also headed up the Union’s Emergency Committee, which helped members in times of crisis. The Emergency Committee, in particular, is emblematic of the nurturance that Laurence enacted on behalf of this community, as she imagined the committee being accessible to members for any and all kinds of support and accommodation, should they need it. An early draft statement that Laurence wrote and sent to Timothy Findley about the role of the committee informs members: “IF YOU –

- Need stopover or stop gap accommodation
- Need letters of reference or advice re: a grant
- Need help in a hassle with a publisher
- Need to break the isolation and just talk or write to another writer
- Or if you have any real emergency with which you think we might help

CONTACT YOUR NEAREST EMERGENCY COMMITTEE

MEMBER...WE DON'T GUARANTEE ANYTHING BUT WE'RE

WILLING TO TRY (2).<sup>14</sup>

Note the wide-reaching and material interventions this committee sought to make. They reveal, in part, Laurence's long and established experience as author – wherein she could anticipate the types of help that might be required – and the material ways that she perceived community collaboration as being beneficial to the Writers' Union's membership. In the official version of this statement, sent out in a later newsletter, each member of the Emergency Committee offered their home addresses and phone numbers, so that they could be reached easily and directly in times of need, including Margaret Laurence.<sup>15</sup> Laurence's willingness to be accessible to this developing community of writers – and the labour that must have demanded of her, even outside of an 'official' elected role – is striking. With interventions like the Emergency Committee, then, Laurence continued to be involved not only in shaping and directing the developing Writers' Union, its structures, and its community, but at the same time, she was very materially invested in supporting its membership's needs.

Laurence's belief in the practical and material support of Canadian authorship led her, later, to the Union's contract committee, a group of authors charged with preparing the Union's standard contract, which was intended to be used by members to achieve fair compensation in their dealings with publishers. Initially drafted in 1973 by Ian Adams and Matt Cohen ahead of the founding meeting, the Union's standard contract went through many revisions until it was eventually adopted at the Union's AGM in 1976. Laurence discusses her role in this process in a letter to Gabrielle Roy, dated June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1976, noting that she recently “worked for a solid week, together with several others, on the final draft of the Writers' Union standard contract” (qtd. in Socken 16-17).



Laurence's faith in the necessity and potential efficacy of that contract got her into trouble, however, with her own long-time publisher and friend, Jack McClelland of McClelland & Stewart. As revealed in their letters, edited by Laura K. Davis and Linda Morra, Laurence and McClelland argued at length about the efficacy of such an agreement, never accepting each other's position. McClelland believed the Union's standard contract was a "dangerous document" (*Margaret Laurence and Jack McClelland, Letters* 419), one that would inspire "an adversary relationship between author and publisher" (420). Laurence vehemently defended her – and, by extension, the Union's – position in her response to McClelland, arguing that "it is in fact our labour which gives you your product, and no amount of public recognition or handsome publicity can obscure the fact that professional writers are entitled to a living wage for their work" (426). She echoes the founding documents she helped pen for the Union when she asserts to McClelland that "writers want better conditions in this country and we have a perfect right to work towards that end, which we shall continue to do" (426). The Union's membership accepted and passed the standard contract in 1976, which asked for a minimum ten percent royalty on all trade-books and copyright ownership of their own work. While not all publishers agreed with the contract, and some refused to sign it, it became an important guiding document, particularly for emerging authors, as they negotiated contracts for their work. Due to the efforts of the contracts committee, the Union eventually wrote standard minimums into its constitution, declaring that "members shall not sign contracts or enter into other agreements" that "fall below the standards...established by the Union" ("Constitution [1983]" 4). In this way they hoped

that their members would act as a coalition, pressing publishers into fairer dealing and more equitable remuneration packages. According to Davis and Morra, Laurence's involvement in the Union's founding, and her work towards material support for Canadian authors "may be seen as part of her early efforts, even as part of her legacy in relation to advocacy," for she argued that the Union's "constitution was essential...to support writers, to provide them with advice about the publication process, and to create a writing community that extended across the country" (LII). Laurence's involvement in shaping, guiding, and directing that community are clear, challenging the notion that she was merely a figurehead around which the Writers' Union coalesced.

Marian Engel took up the mantle of this work upon her election as Chairman in November of 1973. Engel was no stranger to the Union's processes, as she had been central to the fledgling organization from its inception: it was her home on Brunswick Avenue in Toronto that often served as the meeting point for the first groups of interested authors. She had also been on the first interim executive of the organization, and, along with Margaret Laurence, had been integral in drafting the Union's constitution. In a letter to Timothy Findley just two weeks before the founding meeting, Engel notes: "we meet again on Thurs re the constitution, which is still a mess" (1).<sup>16</sup> The letter demonstrates Engel's material interventions, like Laurence's, in the founding documents of the organization, and her labour in bringing the founding meeting to fruition. She notes Alma Lee's work, too, as she jokes "Alma's going fairly hairy" (1) – presumably with the amount of work in front of her to organize the over 130 delegates they had invited to attend that meeting in Ottawa.

In contrast to Laurence, who turned the gendered name for the chair-ship on its head, once Engel was elected, she chose to claim it. As George Payerle recalls, she stood in front of the membership at the founding meeting, “and she reared up, all sort of five feet whatever of her, and yelled ‘I am the chairman of this organization and don’t you forget it!’” (qtd. in Moore, *Founding the Writers’ Union...* 71). Engel’s assertion of her role and her power in this position was echoed in her first written statement to the membership, where she notes: “I realized that what the job needed was a large presence” – she assures them: “You’ve got one” (“Chairman’s Letter” 1).<sup>17</sup> Engel went on to establish her presence – and, by extension, the presence of the Union and its concerns – in everything from TV and radio interviews, meetings of the Canadian Library Association and Toronto Library Board, to an array of letters written to an extensive network of Canadian authors promoting, defending, and explaining the work of the fledgling organization. Letters with authors like Ernest Buckler, Lovat Dickson, and Hugh MacLennan reveal the extent of her advocacy for the organization, and the efficacy of her persuasion.<sup>18</sup> MacLennan, in particular, notes the distinctly female-driven labour that went into having him, eventually, sign on as a member – after a series of letters between himself, Engel, and Laurence. In a letter dated May 9, 1974, after almost six months of correspondence about the organization, MacLennan thanks Engel for sending him the nascent organization’s newsletter, praising her for it. “In fact,” he says, “it decided me to apply for membership in the Union if you’ll take me” (qtd. in Verduyn and Garay 129). In earlier letters, MacLennan had made clear that he was wary of the developing Writers’ Union, as “he has been through much of it before” (110) with the Canadian Authors

Association and was concerned that the Union's initial goals "did not seem too realistic" (110). MacLennan describes his and his first wife, Dorothy Duncan's, efforts on behalf of the CAA, noting that much of their work fell apart after "persistent haggling and heckling" (110) from people within the organization. In his May 1974 letter, MacLennan notes that he was thus "off put in the beginning by a somewhat frenetic tone in the handouts from the union promoters" (129). But he ascribes a change in the Union's direction, and, by extension, his attitude about it, to the work of Laurence and Engel. "It probably needed two women like you and Margaret," MacLennan writes, "to make some sense in it" (129), such that he has now decided to join. MacLennan's gesture to the efficacy and coalitional labour of these women's efforts is striking, particularly as he recognizes that Engel has had to coax him, repeatedly, into compliance. While this may, partly, be a reinscription of the traditional role of women as the cordial administrative coaxers, MacLennan also reveals the very tangible effects of that affective labour – Engel and Laurence had, indeed, convinced one of the more established Canadian writers of the time to join their ranks, one who had specifically avowed his dissatisfaction with previous generations of Canadian writers' organizations. For The Writers' Union of Canada MacLennan's name and association with their work was a significant win – one owed, specifically, to Marian Engel.

Given that the membership of the Union had increased by over thirty percent during Engel's year as Chairman, there is strong evidence to support the efficacy of her labours. Consider, though, that Marian Engel's position as the first elected chair of the organization would have been a risky one. Should the organization have failed, the blame

would have been squarely on her shoulders, as was the pressure of its potential. The Chair-ship was also a very busy role, one that allowed little time for one's own work and writing. As Engel noted in a July 1974 letter to Robert Weaver: "I wish I could get back to writing-as-writing...my thinking time has got absorbed by public life and my rhetoric is used up mostly writing long letters to people like the Bureau of Intellectual Property, so it will be a long time before I get down to serious work again" (qtd. in Verduyn and Garay 135). Engel's language here betrays her own lack of valuation of the unpaid volunteer labour she was devoting to the developing Writers' Union. It also, however, gestures to her own economic precarity and her need for real, paying, work. Yet, Engel's work for and within the Writers' Union was, indeed, "serious work." Maybe not of the literary or paying kind, but with her volunteer labours Engel enacted essential public advocacy work, as she tried to better the opportunities for a whole community of Canadian cultural producers.

Establishing the Public Lending Right program (PLR) became the chief focus of Engel's attentions – before, during, and after her Chair-ship. Her year as Chairman of the Union was largely spent lobbying both provincial and federal governments in service of the PLR, speaking to library associations and at conferences about its intended structure, and writing to scores of Canadian authors and librarians to explain the concept and its potential effectiveness. In the draft of one address, titled "Solutions: Public Lending Right," Engel explains that "what the Union is determined to do is [to] obtain for its writers due compensation for the use of their work" (5).<sup>19</sup> Reflecting on the desperate financial state of many of her peers, she notes: "it is clear from the situation of Canadian

writers that many public institutions expect him to live off that vaporous substance known as ‘prestige’” (5). Explaining how a small lending right stipend for each book included in a public library could function to provide steady and ongoing income to writers for the repeated use of their books, Engel notes that “lending right money will not make anyone rich, but it will help equalise an unfair situation” (6). Note the consistent calls to equity and material subsistence which so clearly align with Laurence’s approach. Both women were operating as spokespeople for the community of literary producers which they represented, raising their voices, calling attention to inequity, and advocating, ultimately, for the financial viability of Canadian authorship. Engel, however, was considerably more visible in the public media than Laurence had ever been. She even took her advocacy to the pages of *The New York Times*, when she penned their “Guest Word” column in March of 1974 titled “Writers of Canada Unite.” She proudly proclaimed the existence and intentions of the newly formed Writers’ Union of Canada on the international stage, drawing a direct correlation between feminist activism and her work for the Union, as she called their movement “writers’ lib” (46). Engel notes that “after a frantic three months” since the founding meeting, they have “raised [their] voices, at public hearings, on broadcasting [and] done a bit of everything in fact” (46),<sup>20</sup> underlining the highly visible nature of her work for the Union, which she had high hopes would prove effective.

While the PLR remained Engel’s primary focus, as discussed in Chapter One it encountered a raft of opposition that kept it from coming into being. In a letter to Secretary of State Francis Fox in 1982, after a full decade of work on the initiative, Engel specifically tied her advocacy on behalf of the PLR to the economic instability of female

authors. She notes that the original proposal for the PLR was her “baby” (qtd. in Verduyn and Garay 228), and that, since that time, “writers’ incomes, never great, are sliding down” (228) even further. “I worry,” she writes, “now that we have so many good writers, about how they are going to survive in these difficult times. I worry particularly about the single women, particularly about those who are getting older” (229). The thrust of the PLR’s efficacy – or at least how Engel hoped it would be efficacious – is evident in statements like this, as she arcs her concerns towards those women writers (like herself and Margaret Laurence) who remained economically precarious throughout much of their careers. While the PLR was only achieved after Engel’s death – after thirteen years of concerted effort – much of the drive of the concept’s development can be traced back to Engel herself, who clearly made it a core campaign of her early Union leadership. Indeed, even before the Union’s founding, she was advocating publicly for the idea, as demonstrated in a scathing October 1973 letter she penned to the editor of *The Globe and Mail* in which she declared, “I’m not against free libraries. I’m against ripoffs” (“Libraries Forget...” 7). Andreas Schroeder, similarly, recalls a meeting on Engel’s front porch in 1972 where she introduced the idea to the informal assembly of authors interested in forming a union. “PLR was a major topic that day,” Schroeder says, “[and] Marian knew all about it. She had heard about it from Denmark” (“Interview #3”). Schroeder goes on to note that, in those informal meetings, “there were a whole bunch of ideas being bandied about, but [the PLR] was the one she insisted we pay attention to.” Schroeder’s recollection of Engel’s insistence upon this particular scheme, even before the Union’s official founding, is significant for several reasons. First, as he notes, the

“PLR became the main issue around which the Union coalesced,” which he directly attributes to Engel’s dedication and advocacy. Second, in our literary histories, it is often Schroeder himself who is credited with this particular Union achievement. It was Schroeder who took over the work of the PLR initiative after Marian Engel, and it was Schroeder who finally pushed the agreement through with the federal government. He became the first chair of the committee that finally, in the spring of 1986, brought the PLR into being.<sup>21</sup> So Schroeder certainly enacted pivotal advocacy work on behalf of Canadian authorship by materially bringing this initiative into existence. Consider, though, a 2011 publication, *Public Lending Right in Canada: Policy Foundations*, written by Roy MacSkimming and published by the Canada Council. This document, which provides the official organizational history of the PLR program, only mentions Marian Engel’s name twice: once, in a timeline that notes the founding of the Writers’ Union, and Engel’s launch of the PLR campaign in 1973 (7), and then again, in a narrative that positions her as having been a detriment to the movement, as her comments about ‘ripoffs,’ cited above, angered a group of Ontario librarians (13-14). The omission of the rest of Engel’s very public advocacy from the official, Canada-Council-sanctioned record of the PLR’s history speaks volumes about the ways in which women’s work and contributions are so often excluded from narratives about public life and institutions in this country. Incidentally, Alma Lee also sat on that foundational PLR committee with Andreas Schroeder in 1986 – though her work is similarly elided from many discussions of this history.<sup>22</sup> The tacit devaluation of these women’s contributions to the efficacy of such an initiative speaks to broader inequities in our literary, publishing, and public



structures that so often elide the labour of women. Yet Canada's much lauded Public Lending Right would simply not exist without Engel's persistent work. The program remains one of the most effective and far reaching fiscal interventions that the Union ever effected, having provided at least \$280 Million in funding to Canadian authors since the program's inception.<sup>23</sup>

Christl Verduyn and Kathy Garay argue that this period is indicative of Engel's "literary activism" wherein she "helped to define and defend the important question of royalties for authors" (xvii) in Canada. They remind us, though, that Engel became a single mother in 1977 after her divorce from Howard Engel, and that her capacity to enact activism in service of the literary community was invariably linked to her role as a mother. "Engel donated what time she could rescue from her writing and raising the twins to causes for which she felt her voice might make a difference and help achieve change" (xvii), they note, drawing attention to the demanding split roles women writers like Engel had to navigate. In her essay "Cavewomen Div(in)ing for Pearls: Margaret Laurence and Marian Engel," Christl Verduyn similarly notes the "both/and condition that women writers of Laurence's and Engel's generation experienced, as both mothers and writers, women and artists" (34). In a letter to Robert Weaver, Engel draws attention to this conjunction, and to the ways in which the Union has highlighted the financial instability of her vocation: "The Union stuff has convinced me there isn't a goddam reason anyone would write books anymore," she writes. "Publishers expect you to do everything but turn the crank on the press, readers expect masterpieces, and NOTHING will get you out of scrubbing pots and pans" (qtd. in Verduyn and Garay 128). Engel ties together the

laborious grind of being a writer with the duties of a housewife, intimating – backhandedly, perhaps – that the structures of power involved in both roles is similar. She prefigures, here, her later statements about the radical writer-housewife she would become. Laurence, too, drew attention to the duality of their roles in a February 1974 letter to Engel, noting that “Marion [sic] Engel and M. Laurence have scrubbed many a floor and washed many a diaper and made many a meal, whilst also doing book-reviewing, articles, etc. etc., and have gone on writing” (qtd. in Verduyn and Garay 125). These reflections gesture to the new configurations of the public and private that marked Laurence and Engel’s work with the Union. For their lives and affective connections seeped through into the Union work and, in turn, those two forms of labour supported each other. While Engel had two small children at home at the time of her election as Chairman, she continued to use that home as her Union office, until the organization could afford a real, dedicated, office space. The blending of Engel’s spheres even extended to hosting prospective members of the fledgling Union. In a letter from December of 1973, Robert Harlow asks Marian to thank her daughter for moving out of her room and giving up her bed, so that he could have a place to stay for a Union meeting (Verduyn and Garay 101). This very material entwining of the women’s activist labour on behalf of Canadian authorship with their domestic spheres further underscores the pivotal nurturance roles these women played in the development of the Writers’ Union as an organization.

Not only did their domestic spheres blend into their Union work but their friendships became central to the functioning of the Writers’ Union as well. The summer

of 1976, for example, included national PLR campaigning for Engel, particularly at a meeting of the Canadian Library Association in Halifax, as the Union lobbied for official support from the librarians. June Callwood was central to this meeting as she and Engel worked together to try to get the votes they needed. They lost the initial vote 136-142, but later won a vote that confirmed that the CLA would support the PLR, at least in principle. In a letter to Alma Lee explaining the proceedings, Engel highlights Callwood's involvement, calling her "a miracle" (1),<sup>24</sup> as she overcame both of their frayed nerves to advocate for PLR reforms in the face of constant opposition and challenge. Indeed, the letters housed in The Writers' Union of Canada's fonds reveal the extent of the collaborative emotional encouragement these women engaged in in support of the Union's initiatives. In a June 1976 letter back to Engel about the Halifax vote, Alma Lee expresses her admiration for Engel's work and assures her that PLR advocacy has a good champion in her successor, Andreas Schroeder. Lee comments: "You have done a marvellous job in the past and it was getting time for you to have a break and concentrate on your own space and things to do" (1).<sup>25</sup> Lee assures Engel that "whenever you want to get involved, either in PLR again for with any other visionary project that will improve the lot of our writing community, you just need to say the word" (1). Lee's gesture to Engel's involvement in 'visionary' work is particularly striking, as it flies in the face of the concept of the Union's men as the visionaries and its women as the administrative drudges who simply got things done. Moreover, it demonstrates not only the way these women saw their labour functioning in the service of Canadian authorship, but the close, collegial, and collaborative manner with which they approached their interactions.

For example, many of the early letters between the Union’s founding women – Engel, Laurence, and Lee, in particular – include the word “love” as their complimentary closing. After a long letter about Union business prior to the founding meeting, for example, written on October 9<sup>th</sup> of 1973, Margaret Laurence signs off her letter to Alma Lee “Love, Margaret” (2).<sup>26</sup> This had not been a personal letter – it included almost two pages of detailed questions and instructions about everything from copyright law to communications with the executive, and accompanied Laurence’s message to the membership about the draft constitution. The fact that Laurence – and Lee and Engel, in other letters – should communicate with love and kindness about these administrative tasks and details speaks to the complexity of their affective entanglements with the fledgling Union and its work. These women were not only colleagues, but friends who worked together, pouring hours of material labour into their work for the organization, and layering an enormous amount of immaterial and affective labour into that work as well. Moreover, from what I can ascertain, these women did not know each other before their involvement with the Union – making their mutual care and affinity all that much more striking.

In another letter written just after the founding meeting, Laurence writes to Engel praising her work and efficacy. “You and Alma got the bulletin out in really quick time... congrats” (1),<sup>27</sup> she writes, referencing Engel’s first message from the Chairman in November of 1973. Laurence expresses her concern for Engel’s wellbeing and champions her labours so far: “Don’t run yourself down, dear one! You are a competent, capable, talented lady, and don’t you forget it” (1). Laurence’s specifically gendered language

betrays the fact that this role – of public spokesperson, advocate, and chair of the organization – would likely have been even more challenging for a woman. She offers constructive care and support, affectively propping up Engel’s work. Moreover, she offers her material support in the form of future assistance, should Engel need it. It seems that Engel did take her friend up on that offer, for, in a letter dated a few months later, on January 25<sup>th</sup> 1974, Laurence reflects on a challenge that Engel has navigated saying: “nonsense... of course you’d have got through it without me, but thanks all the same – I really am glad if I was any help at all” (qtd. In Verduyn and Garay 106). Laurence reminds Engel that “it’s a two way street, kid – we help one another” (106). These letters, and others like them, demonstrate an ethic of care that moves over from the personal to the collective in the work of the Writers’ Union. This is instructive, not only for the ways in which affective labour is deployed as a necessary tactic of community building in feminist and creative organizing, but for its allusion to the project of the Writers’ Union more broadly. The forms of care that we see women like Engel, Laurence, and Lee engaging in together for the benefit of the authors within the Union’s membership, are indicative of the forms of care they hope that the Canadian people, the Canadian government, and the Canadian publishing industry might extend to writers as a whole. They are modeling an ethic and structure of care that is similar to the one they are advocating for from the structures of power that undergird the literary industry and community more broadly.

Margaret Atwood has said that there was no particular feminist agenda implicit in the choices of two women as the Writers’ Union’s first chairs. She notes that, at the time

of the Union's founding, they were in a place where "gender ferment and nationalism ferment and writer ferment" (qtd. in Moore, *Founding the Writers' Union...* 50) all bubbled up simultaneously. And, that at the time, "writer trumped gender" (50) as particular facets of identification. According to Atwood, "people were willing to overcome the gender thing in order to work on the Canadian thing and the writer thing, because those were the problems we had as writers" (50-51) at the time. She notes, instead, that the broader concern for their livelihoods as writers united the membership in common purpose and that that affinity trumped any gender concerns.<sup>28</sup> While advocacy based on gender may not have been at the forefront of the early work of the Union, Atwood's inattentiveness to the implicit politics in the gender of the organization's first chairs reveals the extent to which this female organizational labour has gone unremarked, even by members of the group itself. Perhaps Atwood's intention was to highlight the coalitional labour of the Union as a whole, in order to celebrate that important work? Perhaps, then, we could call this a move of solidarity for the broader collective, or, even, an act of diffidence, as no one person wanted to claim authority for the work of the organization as a whole. While that interpretation could be part of the dynamic that plays out in recollections of the Union's history, another salient point to consider is that the work of women in administrative and non-profit sectors is, all too often, seen as background labour – the housework, so to speak, that simply gets done. These modes of labour – the ones that keep the lights on, that get the bills paid, and that allow newsletters to be written and printed – are often buried in the rubble of organizational history, with the flashier, more exciting tasks claimed and celebrated by those higher up the operational

mountain. If, as Atwood and Gibson articulate, the choice of two female chairs wasn't a "clever gender decision" (qtd. in Moore, *Founding the Writers' Union...* 52), then we must consider that it may not have even been recognized as out of the ordinary. Such a lack of concern could, in turn, be interpreted, in a hopeful manner, as a sign that the Union's membership was blind to gender. Much more likely, however, is that these early positions of power for women reflect a reliance on traditional ways of doing things – ways in which women enact care and structural labour without much recognition or regard. Moreover, it may also suggest that these women writers were even more frustrated with their current labour conditions than the men were, making, as they did, even less than their male peers. Writers like Laurence and Engel, and administrators like Alma Lee, became the mother figures of the Writers' Union, nurturing it into existence when no one else would take on the massive amount of labour that it required. They devoted time and energy and passion to the Union's efforts, and with that work, they managed to keep a vulnerable ship afloat. Consider that these women, as creative professionals, were accustomed to advocating loudly for themselves and for their work – it was the only way that they had become successful creative professionals in the first place. So, by the time a series of male chairs took over in 1974 – Graeme Gibson, David Lewis Stein, Andreas Schroeder, Timothy Findley, and then Charles Taylor – the heavy lifting of establishing the organization had already been done. Ultimately, the union relied on this group of women for its survival and for its success – which they achieved through affective connection, collaboration, and care.

A 1978 report from the Union's second Executive Director, Ellen Powers, makes clear that the labour of managing the Writers' Union only continued to grow. Between 1977 and '78 a dispute began to brew within the Union, one premised on the question of structure and labour, as the administrative tasks needed to manage the growing Union were ballooning beyond control. The Union's staff at the time argued that they were swamped in work, managing eleven active volunteer committees, concurrent governmental lobbying for the PLR, remaindered editions, and copyright law, as well as booking and managing author tours and producing the Union's censorship guide, which was distributed to over 13,000 schools across the country.<sup>29</sup> Some Union members – who named themselves the TWUC Ten – were also upset at the scale of this administration, which, they felt, led to neglect from the Union's staff. But, rather than adding support or funding for their workers and their labour, the group demanded that administrative tasks be drastically scaled back. Too much of their membership dollars, they asserted, were going to political and committee work, which did not benefit them directly. There are rumblings here of the Union's persistent tension between craft and industrial unionism. And while this conflict would bubble up over a period of a few years – with the Union putting in place sliding-scale dues to create more revenue, and then backpedaling on that plan after significant member resignations – what most interests me is that the valuation of (female) administrative labour became a specific point of conflict for a membership that, ostensibly at least, positioned itself as being invested in and supportive of equitable labour practices.



Ellen Powers's 1978 Executive Director's report, included in the minutes to that year's AGM, speaks to the scale of the work that the Union had been involved in that year, as she enumerates their successes and growth, with a membership that now stands at 354 authors – growth of 462% since the organization's founding five years before.<sup>30</sup> A quick closing paragraph, from Powers, notes that she had been "out of the office for 2½ months for maternity leave" (Writers' Union of Canada, "Minutes..." 5) and while a "backlog" of work collected in her absence, even though she "work[ed] from home during this period," it has "now been cleared up" (5). Attentive, as Marian Engel, Margaret Laurence, and Alma Lee have made me to the conjunction of domestic space and Union labour, this little sentence, of course, caught my attention.

It turns out that in a (much longer, five page) draft version of this same report Powers had defended and detailed her own, and her staff's, ongoing labour in service of the Writers' Union.<sup>31</sup> In that draft, she notes that "the Union has made, in the past two years, some kind of magical leap into the public consciousness and this speaks mountains for our credibility but it has added many hours of work" (3) for her team. She describes the fact that the office receives at least "eight telephone calls and two written public enquiries each day" (3), and notes that she and her staff take the time to "help because people know we exist and because they have nowhere else to turn" (3). There are echoes, here, of Marian Engel and Margaret Laurence's early rallying statements, and to the labour of nurturance that the Union – and its women – effected in the service of Canadian authorship, even beyond their own members. Tying her labour directly to her domestic realm – as Engel and Laurence had done before her – Powers expands, in this draft, on

her maternity leave, noting that she had “worked until a week before [her daughter] was born and was working from home two weeks after she arrived” (4) – even though a fifteen-week maternity leave had been federally instituted in 1971. The material entwining of the domestic and professional spheres of the Writers’ Union’s work continued beyond its founders, then, as Ellen Powers’s time with the organization reflects a similar overlap between nurturance roles.

In 1977-78 all of the Union’s public service-work, as well as the support of Union committees, lobbying, and touring, fell to just one part-time and two full-time employees – Executive Director Ellen Powers, Tour Director Ruth Clarke, and part-time Administrator Sue McColl. This, Powers notes, “means an enormous amount of overtime” (4), “all of which is unpaid” (4). She gestures to the affective nature of this arts-administration over-load, as she notes that “I, Ruth and Sue have necessarily asked ourselves... why do we do it? Why put up with all the grief and aggravation? The response is simple. We believe in what we are doing” (5). “We know that the Union is doing a vitally important job,” she writes, for both “individual writers and for the writing community at large, and we are proud to be associated with it, and to contribute, with our energy, to its success” (5). Powers specifically links the administrators’ labour – their energy – to the ongoing collaborative work and success of the organization, highlighting not only the value of their work, but the efficacy of its affective dimensions. The Union’s work is ‘vital’ to its industry, and their administrative labour is, in turn, vital to the Union. One wonders, though, why this version of Powers’s report was not the official one communicated to the members at the 1978 AGM? Its biting assessment of the Union’s

lack of structural support for its workers is striking, and likely wouldn't have landed well with a membership already in conflict about roles and structures. For our purposes, though, it is important to recognize that the heavy load of operational labour for the organization – operational labour for the betterment of Canadian authorship – was only increasing as the Union's advocacy resulted in 'success.' Success for whom? we might ask. And success by whom? As with Engel, Laurence, and Lee before her, in Powers's time much of the labour of the Union's achievements continued to be enacted by a small group of committed and dedicated women.

The Writers' Union's legal advisor, Marian Hebb, also wrote to the Union around this same time, in the Spring of 1978, beginning her letter to the National Council with the words: "As you know I have been doing legal work for TWUC for the past two years without payment" (1).<sup>32</sup> Hebb explains her position at the time – that she had taken on Union work on an 'ad hoc' basis in 1976, prior to her call to the bar, providing legal research on an informal basis to both the Union and to its individual members. Hebb's background in editing and publishing had positioned her uniquely to inform the Writers' Union's endeavors, and she worked with both members and committees on a consultative basis. Hebb's labour was integral to several important Union projects, including defining a standard contract, setting up a grievance committee and its procedures, lobbying for copyright reforms, and pressuring the government into tougher legislation on illegal remaindered editions of Canadian books. Hebb's letter to Council – in which she asks that they establish a more formal (paid) arrangement thereafter – notes that her "time records over the past year show that [she has] spent well over 100 hours on" (1) the copyright

project alone, drawing direct attention to her investment in the Union's endeavors and the contribution of her labour. Hebb, too, draws attention to the affective dimensions of that work as she notes: "I have very much enjoyed my past association with TWUC" (2), but that it is now time for the organization to recognize, and pay for, her work, "on a formal basis" (2).<sup>33</sup> I draw attention to Powers's and Hebb's words, to reveal the extra-administrative labour they – and other women like them – invested into the Writers' Union as an organization. Their volunteer, overtime, and unpaid labour helped to establish integral reforms in the Canadian literary and publishing industries, and it is imperative that we recognize the structural role these women played in establishing, maintaining, and growing the Writers' Union, its credibility, and its success.

All of this is not to say that the Writers' Union did not appreciate the dedication of its staff. Indeed, almost every Chairman's AGM report over my study period draws attention to the efficacy of the Union's administrators. In 1978, as Hebb and Powers were advocating for more remuneration and support, then-Chairman Charles Taylor wrote that "there are very few of [the Union's] activities" in which Marian Hebb "hasn't been productively involved" (Writers' Union of Canada, "Minutes, Annual General Meeting... [1978]" 2). He asserts: "I don't know how we could have managed without her" (2).<sup>34</sup> Of Powers, he writes, "Ellen's grasp on all of our activities and concerns is quite phenomenal... she has earned a great deal of respect for the Union throughout the whole industry" (3). He continues: "her willingness to labour for long hours has never faltered... nor has her total dedication to the welfare of the Union and its members" (3) – drawing

attention, again, to the Executive Director's ongoing affective entanglements with the organization's work, and the material efficacy of that labour.

I continue to wonder, though, about the Writers' Union's broader investment in the project of unionized labour, as they called for equitable compensatory practices for their members, but, it seems, did not accord their own employees with the same advantages. Was it, perhaps, an investment in the 'craft' part of the Union's definition of labour which allowed for the organization to value the material production of (relatively-elite) literary producers, but not the material production of the (feminized) administrative staff? While that year's AGM did provide for an ongoing retainer for Marian Hebb's labours – who continues, by the way, to work with the Union to this day – Powers resigned from the organization the following year, due, in part, to ongoing tensions about administrative labour.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, by 1979-80 a complete turnover of the office staff had occurred, as Mary Jacquest took over as Executive Director, Randy Haunfelder as Tour Director, and Terri Favro – who had previously worked for the Union as a summer student – as Administrative Assistant. Before they left, McColl and Powers submitted their thoughts to the Union on structure and office organization, and, in her "Chairman's Report" summing up that year's operations, June Callwood notes that it was their "affection and concern for the Union" (6) which had prompted them to do so.<sup>36</sup> Callwood notes that many of their recommendations have now been "implemented with beneficial results" (6) – such that the Union continued to benefit from these women's knowledge and expertise even after their departures. I draw such detailed attention to the administrative background labour of the Writers' Union's work, for without the affective

investments and material labour of women like Powers, McColl, Hebb, and many more women who succeeded them, the organization's most celebrated interventions would likely never have been possible.

During this same period, as the Union grew and its member demographics changed, feminist concerns also came into the foreground of the organization's discourse. Letters between female Union members in the late 1970s and early 1980s refer to an informal women's caucus, which I, unfortunately, have not been able to trace. With overlapping organizational memberships, it is possible that these women are referring to the Women's Caucus of the League of Canadian Poets, established in 1982 – though the dates do not quite line up. According to Andrea Beverly, it was a 1981 report by Sharon Nelson published in the League's newsletter that led to the formation of the League's official women's caucus the following year. What I have not been able to ascertain, however, is if there was a corollary Writers' Union women's caucus, which met informally around Union meetings. I believe there was, but have not been able to corroborate it with archival documentation. Sharon Nelson's 1982 essay "Bemused, Branded, and Belittled," however, originally published in *Fireweed*, appears to have become a foundational document for whatever coalitional work the Writers' Union's women were engaging in at this time, as photocopies of it exist in several female members' fonds, included specifically in their Writers' Union files. In it, Nelson discussed "the situation of women writers [in Canada] and... their exclusion from the cultural mainstream" (66), as she calls for "equity of opportunity and equality of representation for all Canadians regardless of gender" (100). Nelson's report critiqued

inequity in everything from government funding bodies to newspaper and magazine reviews, from academia to cultural organizations. She even calls The Writers' Union of Canada out directly, for their membership structure and their \$150 per year dues, which, she argues, make institutions like the Union function as "invisible colleges" (70) that privilege status in their membership criteria, and tacitly exclude particular individuals – often women – who have less access to publishing milieus and who are more economically marginal. Ultimately, Nelson calls for "equal representation of the sexes at all levels of arts administration and in all projects and organizations funded by the government" (100). Supported by Nelson's data, the Union's informal women's caucus took their concerns directly to the floor of the 1983 AGM, advocating for the establishment of a survey committee to investigate structural discrimination against women writers. This is the first formal evidence I can find of a women's caucus, which is so named in the minutes to the Spring 1983 AGM, but does not appear anywhere else in the Union's files.

In November of 1983, the survey committee, headed up by Audrey Thomas and Sandy Duncan, sent that survey to the over 400 members of the Writers' Union. The Union's "Sex-Based Discrimination in the Writing World" Questionnaire was four full pages long, and included this initial instruction: "This questionnaire is designed to elicit elements of discrimination between writers on the basis of sex, as mandated by the motion presented by the Women's Caucus at the [1983] A.G.M.; that The Writers' Union of Canada survey its members with regard to the status/position of its women members" (1).<sup>37</sup> The extensive survey asked about full-time and part-time writing-related jobs,

number of grants and prizes applied for and received, number of anthology inclusions, number of reviews written or received, and number of rejections. It asked about writer-in-residence positions, public readings, and teaching positions. The survey also solicited income data: the amount of one's advances, fees per review, and what percentage was paid to an agent. It asked how many editors or publishers one had had, and whether they were male or female. It included two particularly provocative questions: "Do you think there is such a thing as 'women's literature'?" (4) and "Do you think there is discrimination on the basis of sex in the writing world? If so, what kind?" (4). Wonderfully, the survey even made a gesture towards education of the membership about gender-based inequity, as one question asked "have you read Sharon Nelson's report? Would you like a copy?" (4). The survey was sent out to all members of the Union – both male and female – with the intention of collecting comparable data between the sexes, from which inequities could be extrapolated. The extensive survey was completed by 147 people, thirty-six percent of the Union's membership.<sup>38</sup> The survey respondents were sixty percent women and forty percent men. At this point, in 1983, the Union's membership demographics were split at forty-eight percent women to fifty-two percent men.

With some historical perspective, it is obvious reading the survey now that it was much too broad to be statistically useful. Indeed, Sandy Duncan and Audrey Thomas begin their "Preliminary Report" about the questionnaire responses with the words: "we are neither questionnaire designers or statistical analysts" (1)<sup>39</sup> – registering their own hesitancy about the nature of the data which the questionnaire produced. Still, the



survey's results offer a fascinating snapshot of a particular moment in Canadian literary history, including some useful anecdotal and qualitative information that deserves an entire study unto itself. For my purposes, it is important, first, to recognize the material labour of the women who initiated its production and who diligently collated the nearly six hundred pages of responses. The survey results were published in small batches, presumably because of the scale of the questions that had been posed. Duncan and Thomas's seven-page "Preliminary Report" was produced first, in order to report some results of the survey back to the membership at the 1984 AGM. It focused only on those two most provocative questions posed by the survey – about 'women's literature' and 'sex discrimination.' Anne Innis Dagg's later report, "Small Presses," collated the data from that part of the survey, while her more comprehensive report "Are Canadian Women Writers Fairly Treated: Final Report on Sexual Discrimination," offered a statistical analysis of the whole survey. These two latter reports were both completed in July of 1984. Looking through these long, highly detailed reports underscores the extent of the labour these three women offered in service of this initiative. With this work Sandy Duncan, Audrey Thomas, and Anne Innis Dagg were trying to find an initial foothold in a vast field of discriminatory industry practices, to quantify their community's experience of inequity. This was not easy work, nor was it work that was well received by the majority of the membership.

In some ways, the most instructive part of the survey's data was the vehemence with which many Union members responded. As Duncan and Thomas note in their "Preliminary Report," the survey's answers made them feel "angry, then depressed and

overwhelmed... [due] to the amount of anger and misogyny both directed at us personally... and to the topic” (1). Note the articulation of their affective entanglements with the data and the particularly taxing nature of this work. They explain that several respondents dismissed the questionnaire entirely, calling it “useless, divisive, [and] busy work” (1). The report cites that sixty seven percent of the male respondents, and forty one percent of the female respondents did not think there was any sex-based discrimination in Canadian writing. This denial, even by women writers in the membership, could be influenced by a range of factors, not least of which the elite nature of the members themselves, who had, after all, already published at least one book (recall that Sandy Duncan’s “Bemused Branded and Belittled” had already called the Union out for its potential biases). One man, aged 73, simply wrote, “Sorry, but I can’t help to grind your ax. I’ve never encountered any evidence of it in my world” (4). Not in ‘his world,’ indeed – one that had been mediated and built mainly by male writers.

Several more nuanced responses from female Union members cite the systemic, invisible nature of much of the discrimination they have faced. One female respondent, aged 48, notes: “women are almost never adequately represented on juries, arts councils, publishing companies, nor are women given...books to review” (4). Another woman posits: “maybe we could have a group of women talking about it on a continuing basis...after 25 years in publishing I have... a load of rage and vast experience to draw on” (4). One man’s response (aged 35), stands out for its allyship: “Yes,” he simply begins, “it is the same kind of discrimination as everywhere. Old patterns acting in the now” (4). For Duncan and Thomas “the variations in both content and emotional

responses to the questions lead us to believe that the issue of discrimination on the basis of gender in the writing world is a highly charged...issue” (5). The tone of Duncan and Thomas’s initial report is dispirited – these women had worked hard to craft a survey they felt would capture as much information as possible, only to have it dismissed by a large swath of the still mostly male membership of the Writers’ Union. Some particularly virulent responses from male members noted that “suspected discrimination is in the mind of the victim (M.68)” (1); “there is no discrimination except of the self-made variety (M.53)” (1); and – most shocking – “if you don’t like discrimination have a sex change operation (M. 47)” (1). Perhaps not surprisingly, in the face of such violence, the survey also revealed that many of the female members of the Writers’ Union were hesitant to talk about gender-based structural discrimination in their industries.

Most productive, for my purposes, are Duncan and Thomas’s astute assessments of how these forms of discrimination are able to operate within the Union itself. “The amount of misogynistic anger, avoidance, and denial,” they write, “from both men and women, is depressing; we would like to believe that the members of the Writers’ Union are more sensitive and liberated than the general public” (6), an idea which, they imply, this survey has skewered. They continue:

The Writers’ Union has always had an equal number of male and female members who have attended AGM’s in equal proportion. We have always prided ourselves on being non-sexist, and mutually concerned with the welfare of other writers. It is time that we as individuals and Union members look closely within ourselves and at all aspects of the writing world to

sharpen our awareness of discrimination. When we have noted it we must draw each other's attention to it so we can combat it with our collective strength. (6)

In statements like this one we see how the veneer of the Writers' Union's collectivity might be challenged, as its founding operational impetus – which Duncan and Thomas allude to here, the economic stability of Canadian authorship – never accounted for, considered, or accommodated other intersecting forms of inequity.

With this survey and its report, though, Duncan and Thomas had initiated a call to action within the membership, to begin to be more aware of and concerned about gender-based inequity. They end their report with six recommendations for the membership – the final one being the most pointed call to coalitional equity-based action, perhaps, that the Union had ever seen. “We further recommend that each of us who thinks the issue of discrimination is divisive consider both the broad implications of a society with any hidden controls, and our need as members of a Union to work together” (7) they write. “Discrimination is no longer just a women's issue; men must realize that discrimination against anyone discriminates against everyone” (7). From my perspective, these words will also echo loudly when similar challenges to racial discrimination become central to the Writers' Union's operations. And indeed, they continue to echo loudly today, as one wonders if and how the collective now broadly referred to as CanLit has ever really grappled with the call to coalitional action against discrimination raised here. Instead, as one survey respondent astutely noted, “it's invisible... and very hard for us to recognize (F. 38)” (3).

Eventually, Anne Innis Dagg crunched the numbers from the remainder of the survey to draft the Union's "Final Report on Sexual Discrimination," a quantitative, statistical report of the survey's results. In it, Dagg declared "Canadian women writers, on average, are short-changed in every facet of the writing world" (13).<sup>40</sup> Heather Menzies noted, in a letter to Dagg at the time, that "this final report deserves the widest possible publicity, and the women who write for a living in Canada deserve whatever corrective actions that might then follow" (1).<sup>41</sup> This suite of reports became the rooting point for a brand-new Writers' Union initiative, the Status of Women Writers' Committee, which was officially put in place at the 1985 AGM. A motion was passed at that meeting that "each committee of TWUC, in carrying out its work in its respective area of concern during the next year, address itself to the ways in which women writers are overtly and covertly discriminated against" ("Minutes, Annual General Meeting... [1985]" 4).<sup>42</sup> The committee's structure was one of collaborative research and practice, as each member of the Women's Committee liaised with another Union committee head to "investigate, monitor, research and report" (4) on the status of women writers within their operational purview.

Over the next few years this mandate led to ongoing and productive collaborative work between many Writers' Union committees and female members – in everything from education to funding opportunities to cultural visibility. In conjunction with the curriculum committee, for example, the gender disparity in position and pay within Creative Writing faculties was researched. In April of 1987, Writers' Union Chairman Rudy Wiebe wrote to the chairs of every Creative Writing department in Canada, noting

in his letter: “it is important for working women writers in Canada to have access to fulltime teaching positions” (1)<sup>43</sup> in these departments. “Where women are [currently] employed to teach creative writing,” he notes, “it is invariably as part-time or visiting lecturers” (1). This, after the women’ committee’s research had revealed that only two women were then employed in full-time positions in Creative Writing departments nationally. The unequal gender makeup of Canada Council juries was also researched and addressed, as Daphne Marlatt compiled a list of 73 female union members willing to sit on juries, which was eventually adopted by the Canada Council for use. In August of 1987, after Pierre Berton had taken over the Chair-ship of the Union, he wrote directly to the head of the Canada Council, expressing that “The Writers’ Union of Canada has been concerned that the Writing and Publication section has not invited enough women writers to serve on juries” and that “there has been a serious gender imbalance” (1)<sup>44</sup> in their work. Note that in both cases the Status of Women Committee – and its then-chair, Myrna Kostash – leveraged the clout and allyship of the Writers’ Union’s (male) Chairmen to effect the committee’s advocacy work.

Berton’s ‘Book Pages’ committee also worked with Status of Women from, 1986 onwards, to add gender as a data point in their extensive studies of Canadian book reviews. The *Book Pages Survey* concluded that of the 2504 Canadian authored titles reviewed in Canadian periodicals in 1987/88, only 754 of those books were authored by women (30%). An even smaller percentage of the reviews had actually been written by women.<sup>45</sup> Berton’s introductory comments to the report note that “the members of the Union’s Status of Women Committee have been saying for some time that women writers

and women reviewers have not been given fair shake by most of the daily newspapers in Canada” (v). According to Berton, this inequity “is made devastatingly clear” (v) in the survey data, and, the Union hopes that “this unacceptable gender imbalance will be recognized and corrected by book editors and publishers across the country” (v). To that end, in 1988, Status of Women produced a “List of women members willing to write book reviews” which was sent out to every major literary publication in the country, with the hopes of producing a shift in the number of reviews written by Canadian women, or, at very least, opening up an opportunity for women writers in the membership.

All of these advocacy initiatives, which spanned several Union committees and many years, were underpinned by the labour of the members of Status of Women Writers’ Committee, including Marguerite Andersen, Sandy Duncan, Anne Innis Dagg, Myrna Kostash, Daphne Marlatt, Heather Menzies, Judith Merril, Hope Morrit, Erika Ritter, Audrey Thomas, and Aritha Van Herk. Whether these initiatives had material effects on the literary industry is difficult to track, but the heightened consciousness of gender inequity was an important operational shift for the Writers’ Union, particularly since it was an organization that continued to rely so heavily on the material and affective labour of women. In light of the ongoing and extensive work of the Writers’ Union’s women, I would like to add a third conjunction to Christl Verduyn’s statement about the conditions under which female writers in Canada have operated, which I cited earlier in the chapter: *both/and/also*. The women who laboured in service of the Writers’ Union and its members were often *both* mothers *and* writers, women and artists, but they were *also* organizers, activists, collaborators, and disruptors. Laurence, Engel, Lee, Callwood,

Powers, Duncan, Thomas, Dagg, Kostash, and so many others, *also* dedicated a raft of unpaid volunteer labour to the Union's advocacy in support of Canadian authorship. This on top of their own professional work, and on top of the other causes that they may have laboured in support of.<sup>46</sup> Many of these women worked to nurture not only their homes, their children, and their literary production, but they also, at the very same time, crafted and nurtured an industry for their work. That industry was, at nearly every turn, hostile to their efforts, and as such, this 'also' – which represents an enormous amount of organizational labour – is often effaced in the narrative of Canadian literary history. As the Writers' Union's story makes clear, though, women writers consistently intervened in the structures that influenced the production and dissemination of Canadian literature, coaxing a new form of our literary industry into existence, and creating new opportunities for women writers in the Canadian literary landscape.

The success of the collaborative work of the Status of Women committee, however, raises an important question. Why was the same institutional support not offered to Indigenous writers and writers of colour within the membership when they raised issues of racial inequity within the organization and industry? As I will show in the next chapter, in the late 1980s and early 1990s it was women of colour who began to call out the systemic inequities against racialized members of the Writers' Union, both within the organization and in the broader literary industry. While the members of the Status of Women Committee – who were all white women, incidentally – were able to make their concerns heard and have them integrated into the broader system of the Union's initiatives and structures, similar space and institutional support were not accorded to



people of colour who had corollary concerns. As we will see, in the late 1980s, it was Indigenous women and women of colour who took up the burden of organizational labour, both within the Union and against it, challenging the racism that was being levelled at their communities.

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> *Canada Writes! The Writers' Union of Canada Members' Book*, 105

<sup>2</sup> These jobs also tend to skew to a younger demographic than the Canadian average – being taken up, mostly, by women between the ages of 25 and 34 – while income tends to be lower for these positions than for the overall Canadian labour force. While specific data for arts-related non-profit Executive Directors and for arts-sector volunteers have still not been tracked at a granular level, these recent data from the Cultural Human Resources Council provide at least a sense of the overall trends in the sector. See *Labour Market Information for Canada's Cultural Sector – 2019*, particularly pages 18 to 29.

<sup>3</sup> TF Fonds, Box 98, File 20.

<sup>4</sup> See letter to Robert Weaver, 8 March 1974, where Engel apologizes for missing a lunch with him, because she was “politicking with a librarian about PLR” (Verduyn and Garay 127).

<sup>5</sup> ME Fonds, Box 32, File 6.

<sup>6</sup> Until very recently, when current Executive Director, John Degen, took on the position in 2012. Consider, too, that almost every piece of paper found within the 156 boxes of material that make up the first to third accruals (1971 to 1994) of the Writers' Union's archive would have, at some point, passed through the female Executive Director's hands.

<sup>7</sup> According to the membership lists for the founding meeting in 1973, and the members' book *Canada Writes!* published in 1977.

<sup>8</sup> The details of Lee's role at Anansi and her move to the Union remain murky. Anansi's archival records, recently acquired by Library and Archives Canada, will help to clarify this important point when they are accessible.

<sup>9</sup> TF Fonds, Box 210, File 25.

<sup>10</sup> I think, here, of the Union's entry in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, written by Margaret Atwood – one of the few publicly available descriptions of the Writers' Union's history.

<sup>11</sup> GR Fonds, Box 29, File 3.

<sup>12</sup> The text of the newsletter includes an ironic typo, wherein this sentence reads “to ensure that the work to which we have set our hands will at lease unable us....” Whether this mistake was Laurence's, or the typist's, is unclear.

<sup>13</sup> TWUC Fonds, Box 42, File 8.

<sup>14</sup> TF Fonds, Box 210, File 25. The draft is attached to a letter from Laurence to Findley, dated November 23, 1973, just a few weeks after the founding meeting in Ottawa.

- <sup>15</sup> See TF Fonds, Box 210, File 28 for final version. Sylvia Fraser, Timothy Findley, Terrence Heath, Andreas Schroeder, David Lewis Stein, and Alice Munro worked on this committee with Laurence and were all accessible to the membership for help.
- <sup>16</sup> TF Fonds, Box 210, File 26.
- <sup>17</sup> AC Fonds, Box 44, File 1.
- <sup>18</sup> See Christl Verduyn and Kathleen Garay's *Marian Engel: Life in Letters*.
- <sup>19</sup> ME Fonds Box 26, File 31. There are two drafts of the address included in the file, both undated. I quote, here, from the second version included in the file, which is likely the document's first draft.
- <sup>20</sup> See ME Fonds, Box 26, File 14, for Engel's typescript of this article. A clipping of the published piece was appended to the Union's "Newsletter #7," dated April 1974. See TF Fonds, Box 210, File 28.
- <sup>21</sup> See William French, "Authors' Library Dues Are Long Overdue" for information on the formation of the first Public Lending Right executive. For a more detailed discussion of the history of the establishment of the PLR program see Roy MacSkimming's *Public Lending Right in Canada: Policy Foundations*, produced by the Canada Council upon the 25-year anniversary of the organization.
- <sup>22</sup> Alma Lee left the Writers' Union in 1976 to lead another major organization into being, The Writers' Development Trust (now known as The Writers' Trust of Canada). While she was the founding Executive Director of the trust, she also remained involved in the PLR campaign throughout, sitting on the first consultative committee in 1981 and on the founding committee in 1986. A much broader study of Alma Lee's role in the Canadian literary landscape would be insightful, as she went on, later, to found The Vancouver International Writers and Readers Festival in 1988, which remains ongoing to this day as the Vancouver Writers' Fest. Lee's influence on the structures of the industry, and on opportunities available to Canadian authors, is indelible and ought to be studied further.
- <sup>23</sup> This figure has been calculated using previous financial reports from the PLR Commission, beginning with the first year's payout of \$2,747,949 (1986/87) and tracking each year's total payouts, up to 2020's landmark \$14,781,301 in funds distributed to Canadian authors. For more detailed information about the PLR program, see Chapter one.
- <sup>24</sup> TWUC Fonds, Box 27, File 1.
- <sup>25</sup> TWUC Fonds, Box 27, File 1.
- <sup>26</sup> TWUC Fonds, Box 42, File 8.
- <sup>27</sup> TWUC Fonds, Box 42, File 8.
- <sup>28</sup> Atwood's reticence to declare herself or her work as 'feminist' has been well documented and may inflect her statements about the Union's relationship to gender here. In *Margaret Atwood: Feminism and Fiction*, Fiona Tolan discusses how Atwood "has famously refused to be drawn into...an allegiance" with the term feminism, "and over the years has repeated in various guises the formula perfected after the publication of her novel, *The Edible Woman* [1965], about which she said: 'I don't consider it feminism; I just consider it social realism'" (2). Tolan calls this Atwood's "refusal to be drawn into the feminist camp" (2).
- <sup>29</sup> See *C\*ns\*rsh\*p: Stopping the Book Banners*, Writers' Union of Canada, 1978
- <sup>30</sup> There were 63 founding members of the Union in 1973, according to the documents produced for the November 1973 meeting in Ottawa.
- <sup>31</sup> It looks like this draft version was circulated to the Union's Executive as copies exist in both Timothy Findley and June Callwood's archival files. See JC Fonds, Box 9, File 5, or TF Fonds, Box 211, File 1.
- <sup>32</sup> TF Fonds, Box 210, File 47.

<sup>33</sup> In future iterations of this project I would like to expand on Hebb's integral role in defining the financial and legal aspects of the Union's work. I envision a chapter that specifically deals with remaindered editions, copyright reforms, and the ways the Union leveraged political lobbying into legal and financial reforms for its members.

<sup>34</sup> TF Fonds, Box 211, File 1.

<sup>35</sup> I should note that when Powers decides to step away from the Executive Directorship in 1979 she cites her desire to spend more time with her daughter, and the Writers' Union is supportive and accommodating. Powers did, ultimately, decide to retain an association with the Union, doing contract work as necessary to assist the organization's work. This kind of ongoing commitment from arts administrators is often what keeps non-profit organizations, like the Writers' Union, afloat.

<sup>36</sup> JC Fonds, Box 9, File 6.

<sup>37</sup> TWUC Fonds Box 136, File 4.

<sup>38</sup> There is some discrepancy in the archival files about the number of surveys returned. Duncan and Thomas' initial report about the survey notes 149 responses (TWUC Fonds, Box 136, File 4). Several later reports of statistical information tabulated by Anne Innis Dagg put the number at 147 (TWUC Fonds, Box 136, File 4 and Box 136, File 5).

<sup>39</sup> TWUC Fonds, Box 136, File 4.

<sup>40</sup> TWUC Fonds, Box 136, File 4.

<sup>41</sup> TWUC Fonds, Box 136, File 4.

<sup>42</sup> TWUC Fonds, Box 119, File 12.

<sup>43</sup> TWUC Fonds, Box 136, File 6.

<sup>44</sup> TWUC Fonds, Box 136, File 6.

<sup>45</sup> See pages 8 and 9 of the *Book Pages Survey* for detailed statistical data about the representation of women in Canadian review culture in 1987/88.

<sup>46</sup> For Engel, this included an influential position on the Board of the Toronto Library from 1975 to 1978. Laurence spent her latter years advocating vocally for nuclear disarmament. June Callwood founded Jessie's Centre for Teenagers in 1982 (now Jessie's: The June Callwood Centre for Young Women), and established Casey House, a hospice for AIDS patients, in 1988. Alma Lee continued her advocacy on behalf of Canadian authorship well beyond the Union, becoming the founding executive director of The Writers' Development Trust in 1977, and, later, the founder and artistic director of The Vancouver International Writers and Readers Festival.

### Chapter 3 – Invisiblized: Race and the Writers’ Union

“Accepting that we live in a racist society, we can expect that councils, funding bodies, and professional groups such as ... The Writers’ Union of Canada will reflect the racism present in the society at large. It may not be the aggressive type of racism by commission; it is often the more gentle and therefore more pernicious type of racism by omission”

– M. NourbeSe Philip<sup>1</sup>

In the spring of 2019, as I neared completion of this dissertation and began work on this final chapter, I received an email from long-time Writers’ Union member Susan Swan. I had recently delivered a paper titled “Appropriation and Exclusion: Re-reading the Tribe of The Writers’ Union of Canada” at The University of Ottawa’s Canadian Literature Symposium; Swan’s email articulated her concerns with my work and with my reading of the Writers’ Union’s relationship to race. Notwithstanding the fact that Swan missed the presentation of the paper itself and therefore had very little notion of what it discussed – the Union’s ongoing reliance on the word ‘tribe’ and its colonial resonances, as discussed in the Introduction to this project – she critiqued me for, as she put it, accusing the Writers’ Union’s founding members of exclusion. She cautioned me against the presentism she believed was evident in my work and asserted that I had to be careful to contextualize my research with historical facts rather than relying on my current (i.e. contemporary) perceptions about appropriation and race.

I begin this chapter with Swan’s admonition of my work-in-progress because it is indicative of a prevailing trend in the Writers’ Union’s relationship to race: the confusion

of structural critique – which can and should lead to organizational development and growth – with accusation. Over the now 48 years of the Writers’ Union’s development it has been embroiled in one racially inflected controversy after another, wherein calls for structural amendments to policy by BIPOC authors have often been deflected into defense of white members against charges of racism, thereby missing the point of – and the potential that could be borne from – the original critique. I begin here not to centre myself or Susan Swan, but because, from my perspective, Swan’s admonition of this research is extremely dangerous: it is an articulation of power that attempts to foreclose scholarship intended to challenge the prevailing narrative about The Writers’ Union of Canada and its founding. For, that is – and always has been – the purpose of this portion of the dissertation: to trace the experiences of BIPOC authors’ work within and against the Writers’ Union, via their archival traces, beginning before the organization officially came into being. I begin here because this incident speaks to the ongoing processes of erasure and silencing that continue to oppress Black authors, Indigenous authors, Asian authors, and authors of colour – and their experiences, their labour, and their stories – both within the Writers’ Union, and in CanLit more broadly.

The intention of my rereading in Ottawa of the ‘tribe’ of The Writers’ Union of Canada was to reconsider the shape and structure of the organization and its mythos from the perspective of BIPOC authors. I cited their critiques in order to ask questions about the organization’s reliance on an appropriative, and therefore potentially exclusionary, central concept, wondering aloud if the call to tribal collectivity has been a longstanding hindrance to the Union’s development of its organizationally stated goals of inclusivity

and diversity. Do the ‘tribe’s’ colonial and nationalist underpinnings tacitly sway Indigenous writers and writers of colour away from the Union’s particular articulation of collectivity? Is the Union’s operational reliance on this concept part of the reason that defining and articulating a strong stance against appropriation has proved so challenging for the organization, to this very day? And is the membership’s reliance on this operative ideological concept part of why addressing instances of racism, appropriation, and exclusion have proved so difficult for the Union, from the moment of its inception?

Following Tuscarora writer Alicia Elliott’s 2017 characterization of CanLit as a “raging dumpster fire,”<sup>2</sup> I have come to think of the word ‘tribe’ and its deeply colonial resonances as just one of many embers burning under the surface of the Writers’ Union’s carefully crafted collectivity. Membership criteria is another; equitable representation is another; censorship another – all of which are intimately connected to racial inequity. If we think of racism in Canadian writing as a fire that smolders slowly underground, just below the surface, we can imagine how, under particular conditions, those embers would flare up into flame. And, in the fire’s early days, these flare-ups might be easy to extinguish, subdue, or restrict. As the environmental conditions change, though – become drier, more arid – these small flare-ups add up, and the potential for bigger, more aggressive fires grows. The Canadian national myth of inclusivity, diversity, and multiculturalism has persistently tried to suppress these flare-ups, but racism is always present in Canada, tied, in part, to our colonial histories of violence and oppression. For the Writers’ Union, which aligned itself so intimately with Canadian nationalism, the tension about what and who constitutes ‘Canada’ has always sat just under the surface of

the organization's work. And while the organization ostensibly argues for equity, the fire burning below the surface asks: equity for whom? Equity mediated by whom?

Racism in Canadian writing and publishing communities has, historically, emerged in flashpoints of controversy and conflict, the most public, for the Writers' Union, being 1994's Writing Thru Race conference. But there are countless other incidents, accumulated over many years, that precede a flashpoint like that groundbreaking conference of BIPOC authors. The project of this chapter is to combat a deracinated presentism by recuperating the stories, perspectives, and experiences of authors of colour in relation to the Writers' Union, to capture the other embers burning below the – archival, historical, and social – surface. While our literary histories often position the Writers' Union's involvement in race relations as *beginning* with Writing Thru Race in 1994, the archives reveal a much longer trajectory of racialized conflict within and around the organization that provides important context for the very controversial and public battles about appropriation and race that exploded in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Canada, and indeed, which continue to this day.

This chapter will trace that historical context to establish an understanding of the often-challenging relationships that racialized authors have had with the Writers' Union, from its inception. Turning to the archives, I will reveal that concerns about racism and exclusion were raised and recognized early on in the organization's development, long before Writing Thru Race became a flashpoint for race relations in Canadian writing. The chapter will begin by discussing early BIPOC authors' experiences in the Writers' Union, before turning to specific equity, anti-appropriation, and anti-racist advocacy work that

racialized authors enacted in the Union from the 1980s onwards. This chapter's intention, then, is not only to highlight these important labours and interventions, but to invert the typical narrative about the Writers' Union's relationship to race – shifting the chronotope from discussions centred on 1994's Writing Thru Race events, to earlier instantiations of how race, racism, appropriation, and inequity were raised within the organization. I hope, in future versions of this project, to engage the labour and activism of Writing Thru Race with a similar level of archival attentiveness. For now, my focus will be on events that occurred pre-1992 and which have, thus far, remained largely obscured and silenced in our literary and cultural histories – by both the archive and by the structures of power in Canadian writing and publishing, which, so often, have served to marginalize the needs and perspectives of racialized authors.

My work, as a white settler scholar and anti-racist accomplice,<sup>3</sup> is to amplify the voices and narratives of Black authors, Indigenous authors, Asian authors, and authors of colour, who have often been omitted from the official narrative of the Writers' Union and its development. For historical context is important in order to re-state and remember that authors of colour in Canada have been agitating for change for many years and that the work of the current generation of activist-authors is part of this lineage. My ability though, as a white scholar, has its limits when I talk about the experiences of racialized authors in Canada. Future iterations of this project will need to look to collaborative work with BIPOC colleagues working in social justice venues and in Canadian literary history to consider how the histories and stories of pivotal activism on the part of authors of colour and Indigenous authors within the Writers' Union's membership ought to be



remembered, celebrated, and redeployed. I am able, however, to look to the archive, as I use it to guide me towards and through the reflections of Union members themselves.

Due to the nature of our nationalist and colonial structures of power and record keeping, we can assume that many incidents of racism and inequity were, and continue to be, suppressed. Because the Union was filled with writers, however, and because of their public profiles, we have an unusually large archive of commentary on and record keeping about the organization to draw from. Those records, while still woefully inadequate in reflecting the work and writing of BIPOC authors in the membership (or outside of it), can still offer snippets of information that help us to see the embers – the smouldering of racial tension that sat just below the organization’s (and larger industry’s) surface. I must be clear, though: for the BIPOC authors I will discuss, structural racism has not been theoretical or metaphorical – it has not lived only underground – it has, rather, been experienced as the embodied, daily, lived, and pernicious effects of oppression.

I must also be clear that this work of establishing context is nothing new. It is precisely the labour that racialized members of The Writers’ Union of Canada have been attempting to engage in since the organization’s inception with greater or lesser degrees of success, depending on the structural barriers in place at each of their given moments. The epigraph to this chapter, drawn from M. NourbeSe Philip’s 1989 critique of racism within Canadian arts institutions – including The Writers’ Union of Canada – is but one such example. This chapter’s corollary project, then, is to recuperate and bring together the narratives of this important labour – of the work, engagement, community building, and information gathering enacted by Black authors, Indigenous authors, Asian authors

and authors of colour within and against the Writers' Union. By narrativizing the historical context through archival documents, my hope is to establish that by the time Writing Thru Race happens in 1994, it is no wonder the Union is due for such a massive flash point of racial conflict – it had been at least twenty years in the making. While the chapter's drive is, ostensibly, historical, I intend to look back to help us see where we are. As Larissa Lai notes in her conclusion to *Slanting I, Imagining We*, historicizing projects like this one can place “both writer and readership in a strange temporal space in which we are hailed into a moment that has passed, and yet a moment that remains constitutive of how activists, academics, writers, and citizens have our social, political, and discursive being in the present” (211). I wish to always remain cognizant of the current-day oppressions that continue to emanate from these historical events, as I look to historical context to ground current experience. As Daniel Coleman and Donald Goellnicht have articulated a similar idea, tracing “the roots and routes of ‘race’ in earlier periods can alert us to the challenges attendant on thinking ‘race’ into the future” (2). While this chapter will follow a chronological historical structure, then, we must recall that all of these incidents are entwined and mutually imbricated, influencing each other across time and space: in Union member memories; in the legacies of policies and amendments; in the power structures that govern the organization. So too, these are not merely historical events; for BIPOC authors implicated in many of the incidents I will discuss, the effects continue to be very real – physically and emotionally, financially and structurally – having tangible reverberations upon their lives and upon their careers.

\*\*\*

When the Writers' Union was formed in 1973, Austin Clarke was the sole person of colour in the membership. His inclusion in that elite group is, in and of itself, remarkable – it speaks to the fact that Clarke was the most prominent Black author in Canada at the time, considered a 'serious' prose writer in the language of the Union. Several connections likely brought Clarke into the fold of the fledgling organization: he was neighbours, friends, and colleagues with Marian and Howard Engel<sup>4</sup>; he was working with editor (and later, Union member) Dennis Lee at Anansi, prior to the Union's founding, on his short story collection *When He Was Young and Free and He Used to Wear Silks* (1971); and he was interviewed, along with many other founding Union members in Graeme Gibson's *Eleven Canadian Novelists* (1973), whose publication coincided with the Union's inception. While Clarke is included in the list of founding members of the Writers' Union,<sup>5</sup> his name never appears in any official history of the organization's work, and his labour towards its founding has been largely forgotten.

Austin Clarke, though, not only attended, but sometimes hosted, the earliest informal meetings which led to the eventual formation of The Writers' Union of Canada. Clarke lived just down the street from Marian Engel on Brunswick Avenue in Toronto, and his home, too, was often used as a meeting space for the growing group of interested authors. As Matt Cohen remembers these early meetings, "Austin Clarke's study...was large enough to seat a dozen people (some on the floor), and lined with beautiful shelves containing a whole library's worth of books, including various editions of his own already considerable publications" (*Typing* 182). Cohen's gesture here to the professionalism of Clarke's space is important: while he was the only racialized author involved with the

organization, he was, clearly, one of the more established authors working to found the Union. Clarke may not have had the celebrity status of Margaret Laurence, who became the public de-facto leader of the group, but by 1973 Clarke had already published four novels, as many as Laurence at that time, and more than most authors involved with the Union's formation (Graeme Gibson and Timothy Findley, for example, had only two novels each under their belts by 1973). Because Clarke was geographically proximal to the people he was working with on the Union – particularly Engel and Gibson, whom he could talk to on the street or by phone – unfortunately no records of their early collective work and planning survive in letters. Two letters from Margaret Atwood, however, dated January and February of 1973, respectively – prior to the official founding meetings of the Union – help us place Austin Clarke at the centre of the burgeoning organization. Atwood's January letter is in response to one from Clarke, noting that "it was good to meet you also; the Writers' Union is an odd thing, writers are so involved in their individual worlds it was really surprising to see them all talking together. It went much better than I'd expected" (1).<sup>6</sup> Written January 3<sup>rd</sup> of 1973, Atwood is likely writing about the very first quasi-formal meeting of interested writers, which took place on December 16<sup>th</sup> of 1972 at Ryerson University. This sentence, then, specifically ties Clarke to that event, implying – though there are no guest lists to confirm it – that Austin Clarke was present at that very early organizational meeting of just 15 or so potential members. Moreover, Atwood's following letter, from February of that same year, confirms not only Clarke's presence, but his involvement in continued work for the organization. In a quick note at the letter's end, Atwood writes: "I won't see you on the 5<sup>th</sup> as I'm not on that

committee – but Graeme will” (1).<sup>7</sup> While the committee in question is not named, these letters help us to place Austin Clarke as having been one writer among the relatively small group of writers who volunteered their labour in service of the Union’s founding.

Clarke’s archival files about the Writers’ Union include several undated drafts of the organization’s constitution, as well as five pages of handwritten notes about its development. These lead me to believe that Clarke was a member of the early constitution committee – along with Engel, Laurence, Callwood, Cohen, and Gibson. While it is impossible to know when these undated drafts and notes were written, their existence definitively places Austin Clarke as having had a hand in the development of the structure of the Writers’ Union and its policies, even before the organization was officially launched.<sup>8</sup> Clarke’s notes describe the structure of the Union, including how the executive is to be formed and how members might form committees, as well as lists of potential policy initiatives (wherein he places a \* beside “dealing with libraries” (4)<sup>9</sup> – an enduring interest for him, as he concurrently sat on the board of the Toronto Metropolitan Library). Likely, these pages date from sometime before the June 1973 planning meeting, as they include a notation about associate members, an idea that was bandied about early on in the Union’s development but later abandoned.<sup>10</sup> One page, in particular, hints that these notes are from the crafting of the constitution, as Clarke lists the headings that might delineate the document, and plays with the words that would, eventually, come to define The Writers’ Union of Canada’s constitutional statement of purpose: “promote and foster” (5). Originally, Clarke had “promote and strengthen” (5), but he has crossed out the latter word in favour of the expression of nurturance that, I argue in Chapter One,

became so integral to how the Union's work moved forward. On the first page of Clarke's notes, a small marginal list includes "political art / concept art / oppressed people" (1), implying that Clarke had his own communities of marginalized and racialized authors in mind as he laboured within this new collective to establish its goals, aims, and intentions.

Structurally, we must always remember that racialized writers have not had access to the same publishing opportunities as white authors in Canada, particularly in Austin Clarke's generation. As George Elliott Clarke pointed out in his 1996 essay "Africana Canadiana: A Primary Bibliography of Literature by African-Canadian Authors," "Austin Clarke would have remained the sole published-in-Canada, anglo African-Canadian novelist from 1964 to 1974 when Truman Green and Frederick Ward both released novels" (116).<sup>11</sup> But Canadian publication and writing fiction were not necessarily criterions for inclusion in the Writers' Union, merely that one's book be a prose trade book, published with a reputable publisher, within the last seven years. And indeed, while the pool of racialized authors was certainly small in Canada in the early 1970s, George Elliott Clarke's work establishes that there were definitely other Black authors, other than Austin Clarke, working and writing and publishing both fiction and non-fiction works. Structurally, then, I wonder: was it this notion of 'reputable' publication that became an impediment – for many – to inclusion in the Writers' Union's ranks? As George Elliott Clarke points out, in the absence of mainstream publishing access, Black authors often turned to alternative sources for publication, including small presses and self-publishing opportunities. "Given the reluctance of mainstream Canadian publishers to handle black writers," Clarke writes, "small presses...produced most of the literature" (115) at the

time. Moreover, he notes that, in 1996 at least, “self-publication remain[ed] a critical necessity for many black Canadian writers” (115), given lack of access to other publishing opportunities. The same idea holds true for Indigenous authors, Asian-Canadian authors, and other authors of colour in Canada, as many turned to smaller presses to represent their work. Lee Maracle’s *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel*, first published in 1975 by Richmond BC’s LSM (Liberation Support Movement) Press, comes to mind, as does the establishment of Theytus Books in 1980, a direct response to the lack of publishing opportunities for Indigenous authors. Furthermore, as George Elliott Clarke’s “Primary Bibliography” notes, such lack of access also had effects on the forms of the work that many racialized authors explored, as poetry, chapbooks, serialized short stories, and other easier-to-produce (or self-publish) items became the norm, rather than full-length books of prose.

Prose writing, whether fiction or non-fiction, requires resources – of time, of funding, of publication access – that potentially limited the pool of Black, Indigenous, Asian, or POC authors who were eligible to apply to the Writers’ Union. The membership criteria, which limited members to “prose writers” who had at least one “trade book published by a commercial or university press within the previous seven years” (“Constitution [1973 - Final]” 1),<sup>12</sup> was designed specifically to professionalize the Writers’ Union’s membership and keep amateur authors at bay. What exactly defined a ‘trade book,’ however, was hotly debated, and has proved difficult for me, as a researcher, to define. In letters, articles, and administrative documents from the early 1970s the terminology of ‘reputable’ presses versus ‘vanity’ presses dominates, as the

Union tried to limit membership to ‘serious’ professional writers. The tenets that determined inclusion or exclusion on these terms, however, remain unclear. There are no documents in the Union’s files that explicitly define which presses fell into which category, and it appears that individual decisions were left to the Union’s membership committee, who had final say on any membership issue. Is it possible that small racialized presses were considered vanity presses by early Union executives? And is it, by extension, possible that authors who published with these presses were structurally excluded from entrance into the organization? It is certainly possible, if not likely, as the Writers’ Union reflected the structural barriers of the industries and communities that surrounded it. Gershon Antonio Williams’s *The Native Strength* (1968) or Truman Green’s *A Credit to Your Race* (1973) for example, would not have rendered their authors eligible to join the Writers’ Union, because both books were self-published. Fredrick Ward’s *Riverslip: Black Memories*, published in 1974 by Tundra Books, may have made him eligible, depending on how the membership committee defined the place and status of Tundra Books at the time.<sup>13</sup> LaVern Barnes’s novel *The Plastic Orgasm*, published by McClelland & Stewart in 1971 would certainly have made her eligible, as would Cyril Palmer’s extensive back-catalogue of children’s literature, which remained in print when he moved to Canada in 1974. None of these Black authors, though, found their way into the community of the Writers’ Union.

Chinese-Canadian author Adrienne Clarkson – who would, much later, become Canada’s Governor General – had published two novels and a non-fiction book by the time the Union was founded in 1973 (*A Lover More Condoling* in 1968 and *Hunger*



*Trace* in 1970 with McClelland & Stewart, and *True to You in My Fashion: A Woman Talks to Men about Marriage* in 1971). While her name was included in the original lists of invitees to the founding meetings, Clarkson did not attend either of those events. It appears, however, that Clarkson did join the Writers' Union sometime in 1974, and that her tenure with the organization was quite short-lived, as her name is gone from the registers of the organization thereafter.<sup>14</sup> Trinidadian-Canadian writer Harold Sonny Ladoo's name also appeared on those initial invitee lists, but as he was killed before the Union launched it does not appear that he had any interaction with the organization.

By the time of the Union's second AGM, in the spring of 1974, Métis authors Maria Campbell and Howard Adams were considering joining the organization. Archival documents suggest that Maria Campbell travelled to Ottawa for the 1974 AGM with other Albertan authors, including Rudy Wiebe, likely supported by a grant from the Alberta provincial government for travel.<sup>15</sup> Campbell had published *Halfbreed* with McClelland & Stewart the previous year, joining an elite group of M&S published authors who were central to the Writers' Union's founding. Campbell travelled to the AGM with Wiebe speculatively, it appears, and did not join the Union officially until sometime afterwards, as her name does not appear on any membership lists until after 1975. Howard Adams was also at that 1974 meeting, and it appears he joined the Union just as his second book – the scathing anti-colonial *Prison of Grass: Canada From the Native Point of View* – was released in 1975. At the time of his affiliation with the Writers' Union, Howard Adams was an active member of the Métis Society of Saskatchewan, the Chair of Saskatchewan's Red Power League, and a committed Marxist. One wonders what these

two important anti-colonial community organizers thought of the rhetoric, efficacy, and whiteness of the Writers' Union they had joined. I wonder, particularly, what they thought of the Writers' Union's so-called 'anti-colonial' work – i.e. anti-British, anti-American, Canadian nationalist work – which varied considerably from Campbell and Adams' anti-colonial resistance to *Canadian* colonization. Answers, of course, are far beyond the scope of the archival holdings that remain, as neither Adams nor Campbell show up much in the Union's collections, beyond their names listed on the registers of the organization and their submissions to the Union-produced members' book, *Canada Writes!*.

In a wonderfully ironic touch, however, Howard Adams's name – alphabetically – was often the very first name on those lists of Union members, inadvertently foregrounding the organization's otherwise very minimal Indigenous presence. Indeed, in that first Union membership book, *Canada Writes!*, the very first image of a member-author is Howard Adams, clad in buckskin, staring directly at, and challenging, the reader, creating a fascinating disjunction between his anti-colonial work and the pro-Canadian-nationalist underpinnings of the Union's rhetoric and structure. This image, and Adams' accompanying biography – which details his family's history as Métis guerilla warriors in the Riel Rebellion, his extensive publication history, and includes his self-description as a “radical militant and red power advocate” (3) – appear directly after the Union's origin story, which celebrates the “tribal sense” that “came into focus” (xii) during the organization's founding days. To have this wonderfully subversive quirk of administrative organization front a book about the otherwise almost exclusively white

membership of the Writers' Union is, I imagine, something Adams would have appreciated. Maria Campbell's entry in *Canada Writes!* similarly gestures to her activist work in the community, and cites a quotation from *Halfbreed* that speaks to the importance of coalition-building in the face of colonial violence and racism. Campbell writes: "I believe that one day very soon people will set aside their differences and come together as one. Maybe not because we love one another, but because we need each other to survive" (59). Her words here are not dissimilar to those proposed by the Union's founders, as they articulated their desire for collective labour and accountability to achieve equitable treatment. As the Writers' Trust once described it: "Margaret Laurence referred to fellow Canadian writers as 'the tribe' – a group of people collaborating for their shared survival" (*A Writer's Life* 1). For Maria Campbell, of course, this survival went far beyond mere literary endurance – she speaks, instead, of the survival of her culture, her traditions, and her community, in the face of oppression. It is in these moments of disjuncture that the problematic colonial underpinnings of organizations like the Writers' Union and their corollary, the Writers' Development Trust, become more clear, particularly as Indigenous peoples in Canada continue to fight for corporeal, cultural, and environmental survival. The largely white membership of the Writers' Union used this language of survival to argue for material subsistence and fair contracts. And it is not to say that the work of establishing literary equity was not important, but that, perhaps, the fundamental disjunction between positionalities is part of what created – and maintained – such tension in the Union's definition of collective community

activism, as it echoed the structural erasures that racialized authors were experiencing beyond it.

The presence of such radical anti-colonial thinkers and writers as Austin Clarke, Maria Campbell, and Howard Adams in the Writers' Union's ranks suggests that there were high hopes for the potential of the Writers' Union, as an organization, to represent them and their interests. The Union's rhetoric of community, equity, development, and change were not unlike the things these authors and activists were calling for in their own communities through their advocacy work, and indeed, there may have been great potential here for coalitional work between the two varying, but related, concepts of 'anti-coloniality.' The presence of authors like Adams, Clarke, and Campbell, so early on in the Union's development, speaks to the fact that they may have thought this organization could help them achieve more equitable footing for racialized authors within the Canadian writing industry. But it is also striking, then, that none of the early BIPOC authors who joined the Union seem to be involved in the inner workings of the organization, beyond Austin Clarke's initial foray into the framing of the constitution. Maria Campbell is a member for at least five years, yet never sits on any committees – at least not that I can find. Howard Adams, it appears, left the Union sometime after 1979, and returned in the early 1990s, as he is absent from all intervening members' books produced by the Union. Adams, too, is never active on any committees and, as far as I can ascertain, only periodically attended AGMs. Austin Clarke seems to have had a much more ambivalent, if potentially contentious, relationship with the organization after its founding, as he resigns in 1979, citing "a straying from basic principles" (Callwood

“Letter to Austin Clarke” 1).<sup>16</sup> Early racialized authors’ ambivalent relationships with the Writers’ Union may be instructive, inasmuch as none of these writers have ever commented publicly on the organization, its work, or their involvement in it, though they were present for pivotal years of the organization’s development and essential meetings about policy amendments to the Canadian literary industry. Adams, Clarke, and Campbell, in particular, had histories in community organizing and continued to enact that work beyond their affiliation with the Writers’ Union – one wonders if, perhaps, the Union did not live up to the standards of community-focused activism that these activist-authors were used to. Potentially, the lack of direct involvement of these authors with the Writers’ Union’s operations speaks to the fact that other communities became more valuable for them and for their survival, practically and artistically. As Michael Bucknor’s work explores, for Clarke, that became a transnational community developed through his teaching and diplomatic work. The same might be said of Adams, whose teaching at UC Davis brought him into contact with another community of radical thinkers beyond the Canadian context. Maria Campbell’s work continued apace in her own communities as she turned to film, theatre, and academic work through the 1980s and beyond. Since the archives speak so quietly about all of their time in the Writers’ Union, I’m still left wondering: what was it that made these authors join the organization, and what, more to the point, kept them from actively participating in the organization’s development?

One approach would be to consider, then, what the treatment of the BIPOC authors admitted into that early group of Writers’ Union members looked like. For being

included in the group is one thing; being welcomed, heard, and effectual is quite another. While files about this period and the experiences of early BIPOC members are minimal, a curious journal fragment from Helen Weinzweig's papers illuminates Austin Clarke's initial experiences with the Union. The typed one-page fragment stopped me cold when I put my hands on it in the archives, with its chilling opening question:

“Writers' Union organising meeting –

Nine out of ten had blue eyes

Or at least light eyes

What is the significance of this fact?” (1)<sup>17</sup>

Weinzweig's undated journal page, which reflects on what it might be like for Clarke to be “black in this room full of bourgeois whites” (1), continues:

Austin Clarke – sure of himself, on the edge of arrogance, yet his face and voice very kind. He spoke in a pontificating manner, yet beautifully, his phrases measured and separated portentously. Still, what he had to say was not very profound, though his delivery promised great insights. Scott was merciless with him – wouldn't even look at him as he said, what's your point. (1)

It is impossible to know exactly which meeting Weinzweig is writing about here, as the fragment is not dated and her archival papers are not catalogued chronologically. Her mention of Scott, however, provides a hint, in that F. R. Scott was present at the first two official meetings of the organization: in an advisory capacity at the first Neill-Wycik planning session in June of 1973, and as chair of the founding meeting in Ottawa in

November of that year, where the constitution was ratified. Clarke's involvement in drafting that constitution and the structure of Weinzweig's description lead me to believe that this was likely the former meeting, in Toronto, which means that Clarke's treatment was observed by, and therefore tacitly sanctioned by, a group of over 60 (white) writers from across the country. Recall that, at that time, Clarke would have been the only person of colour in the membership. The fact that it is only Weinzweig's journal fragment that survives to tell this story is striking – her history, as a Jewish immigrant to Canada, was likely part of what made her attentive to injustice and to the workings of power. Yet it seems as though her criticisms and recollections were limited to her own personal writings; likely, in part, a reflection of her own place on the margins of this elite group of Canadian writers.<sup>18</sup>

Weinzweig's reflections on the racial makeup of the room, and Clarke's treatment within it, offer a stunning gaze into the racism levelled at Clarke by what he would call the 'establishment' of Canadian writing. Weinzweig writes: "I felt the nightmarish aspects of our behaviour build up as the Scotts and Bertons and Gibsons and Atwoods made their statements from their white cloud world" (1). Relating these statements directly to operational power, she notes that "the roomful of people simply accepted everything they had to say without even a hint of question. I could see A Clark flip, his logic slips, he makes a fool of himself, and manipulates himself into getting cruelly put down by Scott, which once more must prove to A Clark what a bunch of bastards they all are" (1). As Weinzweig notes that "A Clark resigns from the committee" (1), one wonders if this is the constitutional committee, and if this fragment helps explain the

curious lack of continued documentation, in Clarke's own files, of his involvement with the Union. Perhaps he pulled back in this moment, withdrawing his labour from the Union's processes? Perhaps Clarke decided this community was not one to which he would dedicate his time? Weinzweig's final sentence speaks to the pain this incident must have caused Austin Clarke, as she highlights the embodied nature of this discrimination: "our way of silence and sycophancy must surely be more barbaric than any ancient rite," she writes, "we cut the heart out without an anaesthetic" (1).

While Clarke never wrote directly about the Writers' Union, his reflections from an essay published in his 2015 memoir *Membering* titled "Invisibility" detail how, "for years and years, [he] withered in the ranks of the unmentioned and probably the unmentionable" (268) in Canadian writing. "Times were the occasions too many to number," he writes, "when the list of Canadian writers was published, to the exclusion of the name Austin Clarke – and of all other black writers in the country" (268-269). He continues: "I know the punishment of the Establishment, which is a secret, silent, vindictive agency of putting one in one's place" (269). Who was the establishment as Clarke saw it? And did that establishment align with The Writers' Union of Canada? Given that Clarke never wrote directly about the organization or his involvement in it, we cannot explicitly know. We do know, however, that structurally, the Canadian writing industry often excluded Black authors, Indigenous authors, and authors of colour from its community, limiting opportunities for publication and overall access. This structural racism of the broader industry and culture was, inevitably, replicated in organizations like the Writers' Union. And, much like the Canadian nation, the prevailing narrative of the



Writers' Union is that it was accepting, non-judgemental, and colour blind; the prevailing mythos is that since Austin Clarke was included in the Writers' Union, the organization – as an entity and as a collective – must not, could not, have been exclusionary. With more context, however, we can begin to see how this narrative, propped up by white privilege and supremacy, begins to fail. Helen Weinzweig's journal fragment directly challenges the mythos of Union inclusivity. It provides a record of her dissent, an in-situ reflection on a moment that at least 60 of Canada's most successful writers and cultural critics were present for, but never, it seems, reflected on – at least not publicly. Weinzweig's reflections capture the micro-aggressions and violences that BIPOC members may have faced in their involvement with the Writers' Union, and they give us more context with which to read the absences of racialized authors from the organization and its records.

If I, as a researcher, risk placing my own contemporary judgements about race politics upon the early Writers' Union members and their actions – if I risk presentism – Helen Weinzweig's fragment provides a corrective: she was there, in that moment in 1973, witnessing and observing what she determined to be racist behaviour, specifically calling out the privilege and myopia of the white writers at the centre of the organization – the “Scotts and Bertons and Gibsons and Atwoods” (1) – who were making operational decisions for the Union from their “white cloud world” (1). While Weinzweig's impressions and recollections provide important information, what does not survive, unfortunately, is any record of how Austin Clarke may have felt about this experience. Nor is there any record of what he was presenting to the Writers' Union's founders at the time. What was Clarke speaking so passionately about? What initiative or endeavour did

this burgeoning community of CanLit shut down? Or was it, instead, a criticism that Clarke was offering, which Scott used his considerable power to silence? Unfortunately, as yet, we cannot know; as so often occurs around the records and stories of people of colour, the archive contains only fragments, and no transcript of that first Union meeting survives.<sup>19</sup>

Philip Marchand's August 1973 article in *Saturday Night*, "Getting the Right Chaps in, Keeping the Wrong Chaps Out," does describe that June meeting, taking its titular cue from novelist John Peter, who reportedly chose these words to express what he felt was a necessary membership consideration in one of the weekend's organizational meetings. Who, one wonders, might these "right chaps" be? And who defined right and wrong? Marchand's article gestures to the challenges of defining membership criteria throughout, as he notes that the debate about who should be able to join the Union was the only divisive point of the conference. He places Austin Clarke directly in the middle of that debate as he notes that the "only faint sparks" of dissent "were struck, typically, by Austin Clarke, who, untypically, was actually sitting on the panel right up there with what he called the 'Establishment'" (20). While Clarke's name is not listed on any of the official agendas or programming from the weekend of meetings, it appears as though Marchand is describing the meeting's opening panel, where representatives from various arms of the literary industry spoke to the potential membership. The agenda notes that on Friday June 15<sup>th</sup> 1973, F.R. Scott would mediate a panel of invited guests from the Canada Council, the Ontario Arts Council, the Canadian Book Publishers Council, the Independent Publishers Association, the Canadian Booksellers Association, and the

Canadian Library Association. A letter from the Canadian Library Association to Graeme Gibson a few days before the event explains that they have asked Austin Clarke to “represent the CLA officially” on the panel, as he is a “trustee of the Metropolitan Library Board” (1).<sup>20</sup> Clarke was fulfilling a dual purpose on this panel then, as both an invited expert in cultural policy *and* as a potential member author. This makes the treatment witnessed by Helen Weinzweig – although we cannot know for sure if this is the same meeting or panel she was discussing – all that much more vile.

Marchand’s reporting about Clarke’s words and role, unlike Weinzweig’s, focuses on a description of Clarke’s own attitude and seems to blame him for making trouble in the meetings. Marchand lingers on details of Clarke’s style of speech – how he draws “out his sentences in a faint West Indian drawl” (“Getting the Right Chaps In...” 20) – noting that this facility for engaging speech is, “unhappily...conjoined with no genuine flair for controversy” (20). Marchand disparagingly comments that “Austin Clarke has a genius for taking the most ludicrous parts of an argument and displaying them in all seriousness until they collapse from public mortification” (20). According to Marchand, Clarke called out Barry Britnell, one of his co-panelists and owner of Toronto’s Britnell’s Book Shop, for the fact that “no book under his name ever appeared displayed in the window of that store – not once in five long years of passing by” (20). Marchand underpins the whole article with mocking contempt for Clarke’s efforts, figuring his statements as the complaints of an angry Black man – why else, indeed, must he continue to mention Clarke’s “West Indian” heritage? It is revealing, though, that one of the only pieces of public record that mentions Austin Clarke’s name in conjunction with the

burgeoning Writers' Union does so with a tone of such disparaging mockery. For, read another way, Marchand's record of the meeting shows that Clarke was highlighting a fundamental structural disparity: that the work of other authors present in the room were featured more prominently than his own (racialized) work in Britnell's window.

Another mention of Clarke's dissent is figured, by Marchand, as a ludicrous copyright gambit, as Clarke reportedly "stood up" after the panel "to complain about certain outrages and piracies committed against authors' copyrighted property" (20). Marchand quotes Clarke as saying: "At a hospital in Toronto – it has something to do with veterans or the blind – I know for sure there are volunteer workers... who take books and record them on audio tapes" (20) for the patients. Marchand bemoans Clarke's concern with mocking contempt: "What a battle cry for a fledgling pressure group" (20), he writes. "Up against the wall volunteer workers! This is the Writers' Union taking shit from nobody!... No more treats for the blind at our expense!" (20). The one and only image accompanying the article is a comic that depicts this idea – a blind man listening to a book with a sign behind him listing costs per chapter of fiction, 25 cents for the first, and 10 thereafter – again, mocking Clarke's attempts to raise a structural concern. Marchand reports that the panel, and the Union's potential membership, dismissed Clarke's "rant" (20) about this copyright infringement – but it is worth noting that, less than a decade later, under the auspices of the Copyright committee, the Union advocated for just such copyright protections for audio transcriptions (and any other form of replication) of member works. This advocacy would, eventually, lead to the formation of Access Copyright in the late 1980s. In other words, Austin Clarke was doing important

early advocacy work – he was both labouring for his presence as a Black Canadian author and contributing to the collective labour that the Union was asking of its members as they tried to identify and correct industry inequities for the betterment of all authors. Yet Clarke’s name, and his dissent, become a disparaging undercurrent in this article about the Writers’ Union’s first organizational meeting – the only piece of public record, I should note, that even exists about what occurred over those three days in June of 1973.

As noted in the Introduction, there was considerable dissention, at the time of the Union’s founding, about membership criteria and structure. The decision to highlight the primacy of professionalism in authors accepted as members was taken after much discussion and debate in these early planning meetings. Evidence of further debate exists in the written correspondence, as prospective members offered their opinions and concerns about the potential structure of the union and its limitations. Many of these were directed to John Metcalf, as the chair of the membership committee, and one letter, from Jane Rule, is particularly striking for its argument against strict professionalization. Rule argues for a two-tier membership system – the associate member idea similarly laid out in Austin Clarke’s notes about the constitution – wherein professional authors could control the main organizational operations, with which anyone, including amateur authors, could be involved and benefit from the collective’s advocacy. As Rule notes: “the people who need this union most are those not yet published who, okay, might never publish, but might also be the youngsters who will contribute most to Canadian letters” (1).<sup>21</sup> Rule’s prescience about the problems that could (and would) come to face the Union is striking, as she writes, “I would rather see a union with that broad base and concern for the future

than a small, in group professional bunch, jealous of standing, with the danger of using their exclusiveness against people who need their help and support” (1). Rule directly addresses the structural challenges of marginalized writers as she takes aim at the Union’s vocal advocacy against what they called ‘vanity presses,’ as she contends that “some of the best writers in the world could only be heard through vanity presses at first” (1) – including herself – and noting that “Canada, too, has its greats, not to be excluded from unions because of fear of amateurs. If this union is going to be adult and useful, it mustn’t be narrowly professional and afraid of the kids” (2). Again, as with Weinzwieg, perhaps it was Rule’s relative marginality that compelled her to make these assertions and express her perspective. As one of the first openly queer writers in the Canadian landscape, Rule understood, intimately, the structural limitations and inequities of mainstream publishing. Her letter helps us ascertain that the replication of structural inequity and lack of access was part of what limited the involvement of marginalized authors in the Writers’ Union, from its beginnings. Whether that marginalization was due to class, sexuality, citizenship, or race, Rule is pointing out a potential flaw in the Union’s structure that limited involvement based on a concept of professionalization that was largely ill-defined.

For there were other writers looking to gain access to this elite group, with little success. Authors Bharati Mukherjee and her husband Clark Blaise lived in Montreal at the time of the Writers’ Union’s founding. Mukherjee’s *The Tiger’s Daughter* was published with Houghton Mifflin in 1971, while Blaise’s first novel appeared just as the Union was forming, 1973’s *A North American Education*. Blaise, it seems, was involved with the Writers’ Union from its inception. As a friend and collaborator of John Metcalf

and David Helwig, Blaise had been included in several of their collections of short fiction, and this is likely what brought him into the orbit of the would-be Writers' Union. A December 1972 letter from Graeme Gibson requesting Blaise's presence at the first organizational meeting at Ryerson firmly establishes his involvement with the Union as foundational. Gibson's letter is intended "to reinforce our hope and request that you come to the organizational meeting" (1), as he notes that it is "essential... that you all turn up and contribute so that the organization will be defined by working writers" (1).<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Blaise ended up sitting on the first membership committee as the organization formed; along with his friend John Metcalf, Fred Bodsworth, Timothy Findley, Larry Garber, Farley Mowat, Alice Munro, and Rudy Wiebe, Blaise helped to craft the lists of Canadian authors who would be invited to join the first planning meeting of the fledgling Union in June of 1973. In this process – likely at the December 1972 meeting mentioned in Gibson's letter – Blaise raised Mukherjee's name, and asked for her to be included on the working list of interested authors. As Mukherjee was the more published author of the two of them, this, surely, was reasonable. But when Metcalf sent out the first draft of the list of authors in January of 1973 – soliciting input from his fellow committee members – Bharati Mukherjee's name did not appear. In a February 7<sup>th</sup>, 1973 letter in response, Blaise writes: "I've added 3 names. You can see, from one of them, that the very thing I wanted so much to avoid has happened, either through accident, oversight, or design" (1)<sup>23</sup> – referring to the omission of Mukherjee's name. He continues: "It probably makes little difference" what caused the omission, for indeed "Bharati has made her own interpretation" (1). Blaise's letter goes on to detail the "Canadian racism" (1) that he has

witnessed against his wife, in everything from Canada Council funding, to publication, and now, to her exclusion from this fledging community of writers. He closes his letter confessing to “feeling betrayed, and without a single support left” (1) as this community that was supposed to have been a lifeline has become another source of anger and resentment. “What I’m regretfully saying is that I’m striking one name from the original list [i.e. his own]. It would be impossible for me,” Blaise writes, “to remain in the union with Bharati not in it, and it would be impossible to get her to join as some sort of token” (1). He closes the letter mournfully, writing: “This is very painful; this has been very painful” (1). Note the anguish with which Blaise writes, which was, no doubt, much more pronounced for Mukherjee herself. Unfortunately, none of Mukherjee’s letters from this period remain in her archive, which is housed, with Blaise’s, at the University of Calgary. Thus, Mukherjee’s immediate perspective on this incident has been lost.

Metcalf’s February 8<sup>th</sup> letter in response notes that this was merely a working list, and he seems to convince Blaise and Mukherjee to allow their names to be included on the official list of invitees to the June 1973 meeting. Citing the economic precepts that formed the core of the Union’s necessity and intention, he explains that, to him, “a union is a union and must proceed as such” (1)<sup>24</sup> – meaning that there is no room for exclusion. He relays that the membership committee has “come out solidly against any form of exclusiveness. If anyone resident in Canada has written a book (prose) then the general feeling is that they are needed in a union which by and large will deal with publishers, etc. for the general good of all writers. Nationalism, racism, ‘taste’ etc. cannot play any part in our financial dealings with publishers/agents/booksellers” (1, emphasis in



original). Perhaps his most pointed comment is that Mukherjee’s “publishing/distribution /publicity problems are exactly the same as ours” (1), and that he has added both of their names back onto the invitees list. Metcalfe gestures, here, to a concept of collectivity based on economic precepts and necessity, not ideological positioning or identity. He misses, however, that Mukherjee’s publishing/distribution/publicity concerns, were, in fact, different and, indeed, *more* difficult than those faced by the ‘our’ that made up the majority of the Union, for they were inflected with the challenge of being a racialized author in a field dominated by white voices and structures. Just as Austin Clarke’s comments about the book store windows would indicate, there were broader structural inaccessibility and inequity concerns for racialized authors – in both the industry of, and in this burgeoning ‘community’ of, Canadian writing.

In Blaise’s February 13<sup>th</sup> response to Metcalfe he explains that he has “further doubts” about the situation that he “need[s] quickly laid to rest,” as he asks “why, after I had made such a considerable fuss about it in Toronto, was B’s name left off the list?” (1, emphasis in original).<sup>25</sup> “Was it a decision from Atwood & Co. that she wasn’t sufficiently Canadian?” (1) he continues, or “that she was at best a harlequin romancer?” (1). Note his reference here to the discourses of both nationalism and of ‘serious’ or ‘professional’ writing that underlie the Union. Blaise agrees to their names being re-added to the list of invitees, but notes that Mukherjee “has been angered, hurt, etc. beyond ever participating in such a thing, and there doesn’t seem to be any way that I can make it with her out” (1). In his response of February 19<sup>th</sup>, Metcalf notes that “the first list (Gibson’s) represented as many names as came to his mind, and” he believes, “omissions

were probably just a matter of speed, forgetfulness, etc. ... I don't really think there was any slight or insult intended" (1).<sup>26</sup> Metcalf includes a new list that does feature both Blaise and Mukherjee's names within the collective. Indeed, the committee's work to expand the pool of potential members led to a list of 123 Canadian authors, including four authors of colour: Austin Clarke, Bharati Mukherjee, Adrienne Clarkson, and Sonny Ladoo. Given this gesture towards inclusion, Blaise allows his name to be used on the official letter of "invitation to join the proposed Union" drafted by Metcalf and sent out "on behalf of the selection committee" (1)<sup>27</sup> on March 6<sup>th</sup> of 1973 to all 123 potential members of the would-be Union – including Mukherjee. The issue raised its head again, however, when Mukherjee's name was omitted from the official list of founding members of the Writers' Union that was published in preparation for the November meeting in Ottawa. Blaise's name appeared in this important list of founding members, which would, over time, be repeated over and over again in the Union's documents. Mukherjee's name, however, is conspicuously absent. This seems to have been the last straw, in response to which Blaise withdrew his membership from the still fledgling Union. Their involvement was so attenuated, and his resignation so early in the organization's development, that neither Blaise nor Mukherjee has official files within the Writers' Union's archives – they have, structurally, been left out of the story about the Writers' Union, both practically and archivally.

While Blaise and Mukherjee's involvement in the Union is difficult to trace due to this lack of information, two curious letters close out Blaise's Writers' Union of Canada file, one from Marian Engel and another from Graeme Gibson, both addressing the

omission of Mukherjee's name from the Union's official membership list. They are dated June of 1974 and December of 1974, respectively, more than a year after the initial invitee list's omission, pointing to the amount of time and emotional labour that Mukherjee and Blaise must have spent in this state of limbo within the creative community that surrounded them. Engel's letter to Blaise is so casually dismissive of their concerns that it is troubling. Engel writes, flippantly, "I'm sorry Bharati's name wasn't on the lists. I guess we had her too closely bracketed with you – sad, but that happens" (1).<sup>28</sup> As we know, Engel was a strong and ardent feminist, and so her explanation for this dismissal of Mukherjee, and by extension, her prolific work as an author and academic, based solely on association with her husband, seems disingenuous. Moreover, Engel was present at that December 1972 meeting where Blaise described himself as having made "a considerable fuss" about Mukherjee's inclusion. Engel's strange dismissal continues, however, as she writes: "and you know, we're really provincial about spelling so somebody probably committed that act of neglect without malice. I dunno. I wasn't on the membership committee. Metcalf's the man" (1, emphasis in original). Were I either Blaise or Mukherjee, this letter would have infuriated me. Note Engel's tacit admission that the name was left off because of spelling, not only because of Mukherjee's association with her husband. And further, note Engel's attempt to shift the blame to someone else, to another part of the organization, to another committee – little did she realize that Blaise himself had been a member of that membership committee, and even then, couldn't secure Mukherjee's inclusion. Engel's letter – written in her official capacity as Chairman, on Writers' Union letterhead – goes on to enumerate the successes

of the Union's first year of operation, and boldly asks Blaise to re-join and pay his dues. It is chilling in the banality of its acceptance of Mukherjee's exclusion.

Graeme Gibson's letter to Blaise, dated six months after Engel's, implies that the issue continued to smoulder, as he notes that he has "written, finally, to Bharati in an attempt to explain and apologize for the initial screw-up in our dealing with her" (1).<sup>29</sup> "What I said to her is that I hope she, and I'm saying the same thing to you now, that you will write to me with your grievance so it might be possible to clear the air" (1). Gibson notes that "the Union cannot afford (even if it was prepared to do so, which it isn't) to alienate writers in this country. If people don't want to join for personal reasons that is one thing, but if they are put off joining by our behaviour, or by misunderstandings, then that is another... and I'm hoping that you will be able to see your way clear to joining (rejoining) us. In the same way that Bharati will" (1). Gibson writes with a genuine attempt to make amends, but as the letters end here there is no suggestion that that ever occurred.<sup>30</sup> The reality is that the Writers' Union had made a clear delineation of exclusion and structurally – organisationally – they weren't able to answer why. The Union lost two important authors in this incident, and the effects upon the broader definition of its collectivity cannot be measured. The writing community in Canada was, at the time, a small one, and the community of racialized authors even smaller – presumably Mukherjee's perception of the Writers' Union and its work was not a positive one, and potentially, that had a ripple effect on how other BIPOC authors perceived the organization.

While Mukherjee's perspective on these incidents is absent from the archives, she did go on to write a landmark piece about racism in Canada in *Saturday Night* in 1981 titled "An Invisible Woman." (Note that both Mukherjee and Austin Clarke characterized their reflections on CanLit in the same terms – of invisibility). In "An Invisible Woman" Mukherjee reflects on this moment of exclusion from the Writer's Union, noting that she was not "invited to join... even though at that particular moment I was a Canadian and Clark was not" (39), explaining that her Indian citizenship, as a member of the commonwealth, allowed her quicker access to Canadian citizenship than her American-born husband. Mukherjee outlines the excuses proffered from the organization, detailed in the letters above: that Blaise's invitation included her; that they did not know how to spell her name; that her book had been published by an American publisher. Mukherjee asserts that, on the surface, these things might be "easy to forgive as an instance of the persistent amateurism of the Canadian soul" (39). "But," she continues "if you scrutinize just a little harder, and if you've dipped into the well of forgiveness far too often, you see a very different interpretation. *If you don't have a family compact name, forget about joining us,*" she writes (39, emphasis in original). Mukherjee notes how helpful the recognition of a community of her authorial peers would have been to her at that particular moment, and reflects that, in consequence of such exclusion, while she was "simultaneously a full professor at McGill, an author, [and] a confident lecturer" she was also "a house-bound, fearful, aggrieved, obsessive, and unforgiving queen of bitterness" (39), due to the invisibility and exclusion that Canadian culture levelled upon her, and specifically, this "gap, in the cultural consciousness of the Canadian literary establishment" (39) that

excluded racialized authors like herself. “I cannot describe the agony and betrayal one feels,” she writes, of “hearing oneself spoken of by one’s own country as being somehow exotic to its nature” (38). Eventually, Mukherjee and Blaise left Canada and Canadian writing for the United States, citing systemic racism as a limiting factor in the growth and development of her career.<sup>31</sup>

What kinds of repercussions did Mukherjee’s exclusion, and her later public comments about it, have upon the Writers’ Union and its interactions with communities of BIPOC authors in Canada? We cannot know. It is probable, however, that the tacit forms of exclusion experienced by Bharati Mukherjee may have served to push other authors of colour from the membership or convinced them not to apply in the first place. For if you cannot see yourself within a community, why be involved in it? Or, if you see someone like you actively denied entry, why make any attempt to join? While Blaise and Mukherjee’s involvement with the Writers’ Union was foundational, it was not for positive reasons. Their experience and, in particular, Blaise’s vocal resistance to Mukherjee’s treatment, set up a tension about race early on in the Union’s development that likely echoes through later operational concerns about racial inequity. Though race will not specifically become an issue again for the Writers’ Union for another 15 years, those embers continued to burn, and the next time race comes to the forefront of the organization’s discourse, it eventually blows up into a media firestorm.

In the late 1980s a series of events conjoined to bring race and racial inequity to the forefront of the Writers’ Union, in a way that it had never been raised before. The confluence of these events led to material interventions by BIPOC authors both within the

membership and outside of it, and the period produced a wealth of important cultural commentary about race in the Canadian writing industry that continues to materially inflect the way we study and think about inequity in the Canadian context. As Daniel Coleman and Donald Goellnicht have described it, it was a period where “women of colour and First Nations women sought to make the point that, even in cultural movements and institutions devoted to political activism, their voices were not being heard and that the white majority was, despite its multiculturalist rhetoric, reluctant to share power with writers and artists deemed Other” (12). Coleman and Goellnicht cite Makeda Silvera’s 1983 address to the Women and Words conference in Toronto, about race and representation, as one part of this increasingly public discourse against racial inequity. The 1987-88 Women’s Press incident, where the issue of voice appropriation divided the press’s editorial board is another, as is a conflict between June Callwood and protestors outside the 1989 PEN International Congress – including M. NourbeSe Philip – that spilled over into the Writers Union’s operations.

Before delving into how the Union was implicated in these incidents, it is important to pause and consider that the late 1980s and early 1990s were a particularly charged moment for race politics in Canada. Multiculturalism, as a concept, was recognized in the 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the official Multiculturalism Act was given Royal assent in 1988 (though it had been introduced as an official government policy by Pierre Elliott Trudeau in 1971). In 1990, Elijah Harper stood up in the Manitoba legislature and said ‘No’ to the Meech Lake Accord, and Mohawk warriors stood their ground at Oka, bringing issues of Indigenous sovereignty into the national

spotlight. Literary circles in Canada were similarly peppered with increasing racial consciousness in these years, as writing came to be funded and defined based on its ‘ethnic’ origins. A 1990 *Globe and Mail* article titled “The Fight for a Truly National Literature” featured George Elliott Clarke’s story of having to apply for a multicultural writing grant for his first book, despite his being a seventh-generation Canadian, and the book’s focus on one of Canada’s oldest communities (Vincent). Clarke notes that he has been marked as ‘ethnic’ in his own country, and highlights the consistent shutting out of culturally diverse authors from the “white literary mainstream” (C1). Note how Clarke’s words echo both Mukherjee’s and Weinzweig’s, highlighting the structural embeddedness of *practices* that are constitutive of hierarchies of privilege and access.

As for the Writers’ Union, whose membership had grown steadily since its founding days, more BIPOC authors were beginning to get involved in the organization. The number of racialized members grows slightly as the membership expands, with five BIPOC authors in the membership in 1977 – making up 2% of the Union’s 205-person collective.<sup>32</sup> The distribution shrinks by 1981, with only four BIPOC authors in a membership of 323 people (1%).<sup>33</sup> By 1988, there are 13 BIPOC authors involved with the organization, in a membership of over 600 people, again making up 2% of the overall membership. Over the same period, the demographic distribution of visible minorities sat between 4 and 8 percent of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, “Number and Proportion of Visible Minority Population”). And while structural opportunities for BIPOC authors to gain access to publishing began to open up over this same time period, clearly the Writers’ Union’s membership did not, yet, reflect that shift. A panel on “The



Writer and Social Responsibility” at the Union’s May 1987 AGM recommended “that more writers from Canada’s ethnic and minority groups be invited to join the Union” (Lacey C9). While details about this panel are scant, it is important to note the timing of this recommendation – occurring in the Spring of 1987, it was *before* the Women’s Press incident brought the language of appropriation and racism in publishing to the forefront of Canadian media discourse. The recommendation, then, suggests that the Union’s membership was aware of the organization’s demographic disparities, and, moreover, that they were aware of the discussions about access, equity, and race that were occurring outside the organization, but which had not yet blown up in the media. I can find no indication that the Union initiated any actions to solicit new members after this recommendation, however, or that any operational change followed this motion. It wasn’t until two years later, in 1989, that advocacy for racialized authors became central to the Writers’ Union’s discourse. Even with a relatively small proportion of the demographics of the organization, it was then that BIPOC authors began to take on direct advocacy roles and make waves within (and against) the organization, particularly Indigenous authors Lenore Keeshig-Tobias (Ojibwe) and Daniel David Moses (Delaware-Tuscarora), and Caribbean-Canadian author M. NourbeSe Philip.

We must remember, as we engage this history, that the entwined inputs, effects, and results of very public debates about race and access, and how they, in turn, shaped events and policies within the Writers’ Union, are difficult to tease out. Many BIPOC authors were taking up questions of race, privilege, and power around this time, across various venues and cultural institutions. Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, Daniel David Moses,

and Tomson Highway first met in 1986, for example, to form their “Committee to Re-Establish the Trickster,” a collective aimed at challenging stereotypes about Indigenous culture and creative practice.<sup>34</sup> Makeda Silvera and Stephanie Martin founded Sister Vision Press in 1985, dedicated specifically to publishing the work of Black women and women of colour.<sup>35</sup> Entwined with the incidents and events I will detail below, all this is to say that discussions about racism and appropriation in Canadian publishing (and more widely, in Canadian culture), were not exclusive to the Writers’ Union in the late 1980s and early 1990s; many of the debates, however, were waged within the contours of the organization’s structures and committees – particularly the Union’s “Rights and Freedoms” committee.

This committee had first been struck in 1978, under the name of the “Political Committee.” Charged with “protecting books from the book-banners” (Callwood, “Memo To Members...” 1), its members took on high-profile debates in the late 1970s, as both Margaret Laurence and Alice Munro’s works had been banned from high-school curricula. The committee thus began to focus the Union’s enduring, and very public, advocacy against censorship, and over the intervening ten years, the committee morphed into the “Rights and Freedoms” Committee, intended for “lobbying against all forms of censorship; protecting the freedom of expression; and responding to government legislation” (*Who’s Who in the Writers’ Union of Canada [1988]* 369) on behalf of members. But as with so many Union committees, we might ask, rights and freedoms for whom? Rights and freedoms by whom?

When the Women's Press's editorial board split in the Summer of 1988, it was the Rights and Freedoms committee that waded into the controversy on the Union's behalf – even though none of the authors involved were members. Some context is important here: in June of 1987, the Women's Press sent out a call for pieces of short fiction to be anthologized in a collection called *Imagining Women*. As the editorial process progressed, three stories originally offered publication were pulled from the collection, because their (white) authors had appropriated the voices and experiences of Black and Latina characters. This led to a very public and acrimonious splintering of the press<sup>36</sup> – and this is where the Union got involved. Then-Chair of the Rights and Freedoms committee, Libby Scheier, writes to the Women's Press in June of 1988, expressing the Union's perspective: that the press is in breach of contract.<sup>37</sup> A public statement by the Union then followed, cited in a *Globe and Mail* article by Lisa Rochon: "To our mind, such writing is not by definition racist, and the attempt to impose such rules represents an infringement on freedom of expression and imagination, as well as an unwarranted personal attack on the authors in question" (C5). The Writers' Union thus recommends "to our members that they not do business with the Press until it can be shown that recognizable professional standards have been reinstated" (C5). Note the invocation of the language of professionalism, here, and the conflation of structural amendments to policy with personal attacks. I particularly wonder: who is the 'our' that these statements deploy? 'Our mind' and 'our members'? As we've noted, at the time, the Union's membership of racialized authors was small, but increasing – though it does not seem like this 'our' represents their particular interests. It is important to recall, too, that these public

statements were made on behalf of a Union defending an author who was *not* a member of their organization – Jan Bauer, who, having not yet published a book, was not eligible for membership in the Union’s collective. Why would the Writers’ Union publicly go to bat for a non-member author, particularly in such a contentious battle? The Union’s answer would have likely reflected the concerns of their white middle-class majority, which sought to protect the freedom of (their) expression and combat the censorship of (their) writing.

I draw attention to this incident because the language deployed by the Union to challenge The Women’s Press will encapsulate the organization’s (and indeed, much of Canadian culture’s) attitude toward structural racism in the coming years. So often, efforts to highlight embedded and structural inequity have been, and continue to be, characterized as censorship, limitations of freedom, and/or personal attacks or accusations. M. NourbeSe Philip wrote about this phenomenon, and specifically about the Union’s involvement in – and ongoing discussion about – the Women’s Press incident, in an essay titled “The Disappearing Debate: Or, how the discussion of racism has been taken over by the censorship issue.” First published in *This Magazine* in 1989, and later anthologized in her book of essays, *Frontiers*, Philip notes that while “racism was the issue that detonated the explosion at The Women’s Press; to the exclusion of any other, censorship became the issue that has monopolized the media’s attention” (270). This, she asserts, also played out in a “long-winded, rather tedious debate that took place in... [the] newsletters of the Writer’s Union” (269) of Canada. “Censorship of white writers,” Philip writes, “censorship of the imagination; censorship by publishers; censorship in all its

myriad forms became, in fact, *the* privileged discourse” (270, emphasis in original). This language of privilege is important – Philip is pointing out how the dominance of the dominant structure is mediated and upheld via privilege. And, as we know, privilege, acclaim, and celebrity had always been central to how the Writers’ Union articulated itself. Philip continues: “one very effective way of ensuring that this type of racism remains marginal to the dominant culture is to have another issue that is more privileged, such as censorship or freedom of speech” (271) that can be taken up. And, in Philip’s observations – and, we might say, in the Writers’ Union – “racism...has never been as privileged a discourse as censorship” (270).

In this particular instance, The Women’s Press had attempted to take a strong anti-racist stance, and that attempt at structural amendment drew the ire of very powerful cultural forces, of both the Writers’ Union and of the media. Philip asks her readers to “note here how the debate about these issues once again fails to address the issues and concerns of Black writers, [and] how the controversy is continually presented in terms of issues for white writers” (280). Returning to the Union, where white writers and their concerns made up a strong majority of the membership (98% in 1988), and where the protection of that majority’s professional and economic survival was the stated organizational priority, this myopia is perhaps not surprising. For my purposes, though, it is important to note that The Women’s Press’s anti-racist publishing guidelines, as well as the series of letters between the writers and editors involved with the incident – which are all included in the Writers’ Union’s archival files – indicate that the organization was well aware of the complex and developing questions about racism, censorship, and freedom of

expression, which would find their way directly into the Union’s operations in the coming years. And indeed, that by the summer of 1988, the Union had already publicly asserted its position – one that supported authors against censorship, to the exclusion and detriment of their racialized members.

It was the Writers Union’s 1989 AGM that brought these three pivotal discussions – voice appropriation, censorship, and racism – into its own operations. In many ways, they would come to be conflated and entwined for much of the Union’s history ever since. It was a particularly charged AGM, as tensions ran high, and “minority” writers and their concerns were, largely, pushed to the side. The headline that came out of the weekend of meetings, “Writers Reject Bid to Study Plight of Minorities in Publishing,” written by H. J. Kirchhoff for *The Globe and Mail*, sums up this overriding organizational dismissal of BIPOC authors and their concerns quite succinctly. At the time, the Union’s thrust had been clearly aimed at campaigns against censorship, as the Rights and Freedoms committee vocally battled Bill C54 – a proposed federal anti-pornography legislation that they were concerned would constrain artistic freedom. The AGM’s Friday session took up the question of censorship, and, at the behest of author Brian Brett who voiced his concerns with the policies and requirements of the Haida Band Council, ended up taking aim at Indigenous communities and protocols. According to Kirchhoff, who reported on the AGM meeting, Brett had been working on a novel set in the Queen Charlotte Islands, and “was told by the Haida that he could not visit their land without signing a form giving the Haida the right to vet anything he wrote before it was published” (A19). Indeed, the Masset Band Council had instituted a procedure for artists

and writers visiting their territories, the ‘Reserve Visitor Permit,’ in order to manage myriad intrusions into their communities, particularly by non-Native cultural producers.<sup>38</sup> The Writers’ Union voted to approach the council on Brett’s – and all other Union members’ – behalf, “in the hope of finding a compromise” (A19) to this perceived act of censorship. This relatively innocuous vote marks an important shift in Union policies, as it is their first explicit foray into dealing with Indigenous communities and issues of access and representation. The fact that a group of four white authors were appointed to take on the visitor permit question – Cynthia Flood, Christie Harris, Susan Musgrave, and Ron Nelson, who were likely unprepared for the exigencies and nuances of engaging with an Indigenous council about their territories – speaks to the fact that the Union was unaccustomed to dealing with Indigenous communities, and, likely, given the events that followed in the AGM, that the Union’s Indigenous members did not sanction this particular approach.<sup>39</sup>

For, the following day, Lenore Keeshig Tobias would launch a discussion that continues to reverberate through the Canadian literary industry, as she used her platform on a panel about racism in publishing to call on white writers to stop telling native stories. The panel featured Douglas Gibson, a publisher at McClelland & Stewart, and Keeshig-Tobias, an Ojibwe author and activist. This meeting is now famous in our literary history, not for its association with the Union, but for the article it produced: Keeshig-Tobias’s “Stop Stealing Native Stories.” As the editors of the *Introduction to Indigenous Literary Criticism in Canada* note, Keeshig-Tobias “became one of the most influential spokespeople of the appropriation of voice controversy which started in The Writers’

Union of Canada, when she asked non-Natives to stop stealing native stories. The debate then moved to the pages of *The Globe and Mail*” (Macfarlane and Ruffo 33), where the now oft-cited text of her appeal was first published. As H. J. Kirchhoff described that Writers’ Union panel, Keeshig-Tobias and her panel-mate couldn’t have been further apart in their approaches to racism in writing and publishing, noting that “Keeshig-Tobias’ claim that non-native writers should not tell native stories” was countered by Gibson’s “unequivocal statement that there is no racism in Canadian publishing” (A19). For Gibson’s part, he claimed he had been mis-quoted; writing a letter-to-the-editor of *The Globe and Mail* the following day, Gibson conceded that “the question of racism was hotly debated and aroused fierce passions” (A6) at the AGM but that “what [he] said was far from unequivocal” (A6). Gibson writes: “My exact words were, ‘I am not aware of any racism in Canadian publishing’” (A6). M. NourbeSe Philip, also writing a letter-to-the-editor in response to Kirchhoff’s reporting on the AGM notes that she is “appalled and yet, strangely, not surprised at the unwillingness of the Writers’ Union of Canada to deal with racism” (“Racism in the Book Business?” D7). Citing her own experience with McClelland & Stewart’s recent rejection of her novel *Harriet’s Daughter*, she calls out Douglas Gibson’s assertions directly, noting that “although race was never mentioned” as a factor in her book’s refusal, her communications with the publishing house made it clear that “lack of marketability... was a euphemism for their concern about the race of the characters” (D7). One wonders what the Writers’ Union was thinking, putting a white executive from a prominent publishing house on a panel specifically about race. But



perhaps this is the ‘not surprising’ element that Philip speaks of, wherein the banality of the obliviousness to inequity is, in and of itself, striking.

While we cannot know how closely Keeshig-Tobias’s remarks that day echo her later words in “Stop Stealing Native Stories” – as no verbatim record of the meeting is available<sup>40</sup> – the strategies she uses in that piece to impress upon readers how problematic literary appropriation might be strikingly mirror many of the concerns that the Union’s founders pointed out about their own (relative) marginality. Calling voice appropriation an act of “cultural theft” (A7), Keeshig-Tobias employs the spectre of American cultural imperialism to try to get her audience to understand how Indigenous communities might feel about having their stories told by someone else. “How do Canadians feel about the U.S. mythos defining them and their country?” (A7) she asks – which of course was one of the Union’s key founding concerns. Keeshig-Tobias also points out the economic and structural disparities that allow for “Canadians [to]... use native stories, symbols, and history to sell things – cars, tobacco, or movies” and asks, “but why hasn’t Basil Johnson’s *Indian School Days* become a bestseller? Why hasn’t *Half Breed* [sic] by Maria Campbell been reprinted?” (A7), and why, moreover, has “Campbell, as one of Canada’s ‘celebrated’ authors, never received a writer’s grant?” (A7). The Writers’ Union of Canada had asked similar questions, in its early days, about structural access of marginal writers, but what they perceived as ‘marginal’ was typically economic or geographic in its orientation, not racialized. “Our voices have been marginalized” writes Keeshig-Tobias, about Indigenous writers, as the “Canadian cultural industry” steals “native stories as surely as the missionaries stole our religion and the politicians stole our

land and the residential schools stole our language” (A7). The Union had not yet reckoned with anti-Canadian-colonialism, nor with racialized otherness – and, indeed, as we have seen, in its early days the organization actively attempted to shut those conversations down. But at the 1989 AGM it was Lenore Keeshig-Tobias who forced these discussions to come to the forefront of the organization’s discourse, in a way that had never been possible before. In so doing, the panel set off a series of incendiary debates among the Union’s membership that lasted for the next several years, and which, in some ways, are still reflected in our critical discourses today.

Of course, even though Keeshig-Tobias had laboured and advocated for these discussions to become part of the Union’s operations, that does not mean they were well received. In the following day’s session, Judith Merrill proposed that the Writers’ Union “establish a task force to look into the relationship between the publishing industry and cultural minorities in Canada” (Kirchhoff, “Writers Reject...” A19). As Kirchhoff comments, this motion, presented as an act of allyship by Merrill, “seemed harmless enough,” but it “provoked a number of comments and questions from the membership: What’s a task force?... How much will it cost?... Where will the money come from?... What does ‘cultural minority’ mean?” (A19, ellipses in original). The immediate – and economically inflected – pushback against Merrill’s motion is, perhaps, not surprising for a Union that so often fell back on these founding concerns. M. NourbeSe Philip wrote specifically about this moment in “The Disappearing Debate,” where she notes that the Union “failed to endorse” the task force “despite significant attempts by a female and feminist minority” (*Frontiers* 281). At the same time, “the Union *did*, however, pass a

motion ‘condemning the failure of the law of Canada to protect the freedom of expression’ (281). Philip calls this moment a “tawdry display of white male privilege” (281) as she avers that a “more suitable appellation” for the Union would be “The Old Boys’ Network of Writers” (281). For Philip, the incident is indicative that “there is an evident and appalling failure on the part of white writers to grasp the fact that, despite their relatively low incomes, as a group they are extremely privileged and powerful” (281). This is the kind of inattentiveness to structural and operational power that the Union so often fell back on, and indeed, that Clarke, Weinzwieg, and Mukherjee had already pointed out.

One wonders, though, what brought Judith Merrill to the point of making such a suggestion, and it is unfortunate that no record of these exchanges exists.<sup>41</sup> The motion was struck down upon a vote, suggesting that issues of structural racism, which had been discussed for the entirety of the Union’s weekend of meetings, were not prioritized by the membership. Or, perhaps, that the question of racism was too complex to tackle. Kirchhoff cites Ven Begamudré, “one of only two ‘visible minority’ writers” in attendance at the AGM that year, who reportedly responded that “he opposed the motion because it seemed patronizing” (“Writers Reject...” A19). Begamudré’s dissent, of course, could have been for a variety of reasons – not the least of which, as one of only two racialized members in attendance, may have been the potential of being foisted with the labour of challenging structural racism. Perhaps the flattening of diverse instantiations of race and difference were also part of his reluctance? Or concern over a group of white writers debating and discussing issues which they knew comparatively little about? Note that those two racialized writers were in a meeting with over a hundred attendees.

Indeed, that weekend, the Union’s membership had made its hostility toward efforts to deconstruct racial inequity quite clear. As Kirchhoff describes, once racial issues were raised at the seminal 1989 AGM “racism and feminism formed a sort of subtext to the whole meeting, reflected informally between sessions...by a constant stream of jokes playing off the ‘women of colour’ movement” (A19). He describes how a member in a multi-coloured dress was called “a woman of colours;” a Scottish member was “a man of plaid” (A19). At a later AGM a group of white writers called themselves “writers of pallor” and claimed inequity (Ross C15). The fact that these ‘jokes’ were 1) able to be made in the formal context of an organization that claimed to advocate for fair practices, and 2) presented as harmless in the media coverage of the debates, is troubling. Such comments, though, epitomize the white-supremacist ideologies that racialized writers were seeking to deconstruct, and give us a hint at the discomfort – inequity, anger, even rage – that racialized Union members might have felt in the contours of the organization.

In response to the disregard of the concerns of BIPOC members, a group of authors decided to come together and form the “Ad Hoc Committee on Racism in Writing and Publishing” after the 1989 AGM. The committee was comprised of both Union members and non-Union members, and was relatively racially diverse, with Indigenous authors Lenore Keeshig-Tobias and Daniel David Moses and Trinidadian-Canadian author Dionne Brand joined by white authors Judith Merrill, Susan Crean, Libby Scheier, Barbara Carey, and Marguerite Andersen. The work of this ad hoc committee is difficult to trace; because it was formed outside of the Union’s official structure, it does not have

any dedicated files in the Union’s archive. Indeed, reference to the make-up of the committee survives in only one document, their undated “Questionnaire on Racism in Writing and Publishing,” likely distributed in the fall of 1989.

The gloss at the beginning of the questionnaire notes that this group has “organized to deal with the issue of racism in writing and publishing, a concern which The Writers’ Union of Canada and other writers’ organizations have refused to address” (1).<sup>42</sup> The two-page questionnaire includes questions about “racial affiliation” (1) and forms of writing engaged in: number of manuscripts submitted? Rejected? Accepted? The number of grants applied for and received? Number and quality of reviews? The survey’s most direct questions ask if one writes from their cultural background, and, if so, “do you think you have ever been discriminated against because you write from your cultural background?” (2). The questionnaire includes yes or no check boxes for a series of industry-related entities: “By editors? By publishers? By producers? By grant agencies?” (2). Each question is followed by two blank lines that ask “How?” – how has each of these arms of the cultural industry affected you if, indeed, you felt such discrimination?

The questionnaire’s detailed engagement with the structure of Canadian publishing reflects an increasing awareness about, and interest in, issues of racial equity, even if only held by a very small break-out group of the Union’s members. Its existence is also an important marker of coalition building between racialized and white writers, as the ad hoc committee used the Union’s drive towards data-oriented activism in service of racialized authors, here, for the very first time. Unfortunately, though, I cannot yet locate any discussion of how the questionnaire came into being, how and by which committee

members it was compiled, who it was circulated to, or where the data it produced ended up. There is a suggestion, in a later Union committee report, that the questionnaire garnered few responses, such that it was not statistically useful. Those responses, though, would – even if limited – provide valuable early insight into the experiences of racialized authors in the Canadian literary industry. The fact, though, that this survey survives only as a fragmented relic in another committee’s files is telling in and of itself – for the ways that the experiences of racialized authors were, and continue to be, invisibilized.<sup>43</sup>

Around the same time this questionnaire was produced, in the fall of 1989, another racially inflected controversy exploded in CanLit – this time, centred around PEN Canada.<sup>44</sup> PEN’s 54<sup>th</sup> Annual Congress, occurring in Toronto and Montreal, was picketed by protestors advocating for the rights of racialized authors. The group was called “Vision 21: Canadian Culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Multicultural Women Writers of Canada,” and the pamphlets they handed out at the entrance to the Congress read: “Pen Canada Locks out Writers of Colour.”<sup>45</sup> June Callwood, then the incoming president of PEN Canada – and former Chair of the Writers’ Union – told the protestors assembled at the entrance to ‘Fuck off’ as they handed her a pamphlet. A media firestorm erupted about the incident, with M. NourbeSe Philip calling out structural racism on one side and June Callwood being accused of, and defended against, racism on the other.<sup>46</sup> While the contours of this particular incident deserve to be studied and accounted for in more detail, for my purposes it is most important to note that by the time Vision 21 picketed the 54<sup>th</sup> PEN Congress, June Callwood would have been well aware of the circling discourse about racism in Canadian publishing. As then president of PEN, past Chair of the Writers’

Union, and current member of the Writers' Union's Rights and Freedoms committee, Callwood would have been uniquely positioned to help address the structural issues that Philip and Vision 21 were highlighting. Instead, there was immediate conflict, and the public media discourse once again centred on individual freedoms, freedom of speech, and charges of racism against Callwood – thereby centring the white experience and marginalizing the protestors and their concerns. Whether or not June Callwood was racist dominated the headlines, but what was lost in this firestorm was the question of whether or not powerful cultural brokers in Canada were willing to use their positions to address structural racism in publishing. And according to Vision 21 at the time, they were not.<sup>47</sup>

M. NourbeSe Philip had long been a vocal advocate for artists of colour, particularly Black women writers like herself. The archives reveal that Philip had been petitioning the Writers' Union to address structural racism for at least two years prior to her involvement with Vision 21. Moreover, several pieces of criticism that she wrote in these charged years call out the Union directly, as she enacted pivotal cultural advocacy work for her community of racialized artists and writers.<sup>48</sup> In 1986, then a member of the Union, Philip suggested that the organization set up a committee to investigate racism in publishing. In her seminal 1989 piece investigating the state of structural racism in Canadian arts organizations, "Gut Issues in Babylon: Racism and Anti-Racism in the Arts," Philip notes that she wrote to the Union in 1986 "expressing interest in setting up a committee, or working on a committee such as the Rights and Freedoms Committee, which would look at racism in publishing" (24). Unfortunately, Philip writes, "the Union neither acknowledged my letter nor responded to my request" (24). While I have not been

able to locate this particular letter,<sup>49</sup> subsequent communications from Philip to the Union's office clearly articulate her hope that the Union might begin to address racism in publishing. In a February 1988 letter Philip writes to update the Union on her receipt of a recent award, and appends an article she has recently written for *Fuse Magazine*, "about funding of artists and how this relates to multiculturalism and racism" (1) in Canada.<sup>50</sup> Philip notes: "I believe, and public response has confirmed this, that this is an extremely relevant article which addresses issues which the Union should be addressing. It is an article which ought to be kept in your files as part of your resource material" (1). Note Philip's informational advocacy here – she is, as a Union member and expert on cultural policy, providing her organization with evidence of structural inequity and is asking that the organization consider taking these issues on. The structure of Philip's letter leads me to believe she was a member-author at this time – why else would she be keeping the organization abreast of her accomplishments – but a curious note at the top of the page, dated March 31<sup>st</sup>, might reveal why her suggestions and requests went unanswered, and, indeed, why I can find no copy of her article in the Union's files. "She's suspended" (1) is scrawled across the top of the page – by whom I do not know, and for what, I have no idea. But the words stand out, particularly knowing what we know about Austin Clarke and Bharati Mukherjee's early interactions with the organization.

The letter is, curiously, buried in a file that dates from the early 1990s, and, attached, is a fragmentary single page from a published interview with Philip. On that page, highlighted, is Philip's assertion that she "sent a letter to the union asking them to set up a committee to investigate racism in publishing and offered to be on it. I never



heard back” (29).<sup>51</sup> Was Philip suspended for speaking out publicly against the Union? Certainly, many other member-authors had done so in the past, and had not faced any sanctions; nor did the Union’s constitution allow for such ideological suspensions. So what happened? Philip, it appears, remained a member, and was included in the 1988 member’s book for the Union – published several months after her February 1988 letter – where her biography notes that she is “the first accredited Caucasianist,” a “specialist in Caucasian life, affairs and culture” (*Who’s Who in The Writers’ Union of Canada* 335). A tongue-in-cheek dig at academic and colonial structures that tokenized the study of African peoples, and, likely, a reminder to her Union that her cultural advocacy work was informed, attentive, and necessary.

For this idea of studying white “affairs and culture” – and, indeed, challenging those structures of power – was central to Philip’s advocacy in these years. “Gut Issues in Babylon,” published *before* the Vision 21 incident with PEN Canada, but *after* this letter to the Union’s office, demonstrates that Philip had been engaging in this context-building advocacy work for many years, across artistic sectors. While her jumping off point in the article is The Women’s Press incident, the piece’s “intention was to look at the arts in general to see whether there had been any attempts made” by cultural institutions “to identify the practice of racism and to deal with it as The Women’s Press had attempted to do” (19). Philip thus positions the article as “taking the pulse of professional organizations” (20) – one of which was The Writers’ Union of Canada. In her analysis of the Union, Philip asks a question that continues to reverberate in my mind: “Is the Union genuinely interested in ridding the writing and publishing world of racism or merely

interested in protecting the turf of its white middle-class membership?” (24). This is a good question. And, Philip’s gesture, here, to the investments and intentions of the community of The Writers’ Union of Canada continue to structurally inflect my own analysis of the organization’s work at the time. For it feels undeniable that racialized authors and their concerns were consistently shut out of the Union’s operations – despite many attempts at making those issues part of the collective’s concerns. Philip notes that she has had access to the “Writers Confidential” portion of the Union’s newsletters – where debates between members about appropriation and racism had, and would continue to, play out – and that these “confirmed her concerns that, for the most part, union opinion reveals a profound lack of concern for the practice of racism in the writing world” (24).

Philip’s public critiques, and the foundational work of the ad hoc committee on racism, taken together, seem to have helped catalyze the movement towards official recognition of racial inequity by the Writers’ Union as an organization. At the following year’s AGM, in the spring of 1990, the idea of a committee intended to address structural racial inequity was tabled again. While it was still hotly debated, the vote, this time, was unanimously in favour of establishing what would become the Writers’ Union’s “Racial Minority Writers Committee,” set up to “define a place for racial minority writers in the writing and publishing community” (“Report on the Racial Minority Writers’...” n.p.).<sup>52</sup> According to a Union report, the committee came to fruition because “writers within TWUC expressed concern that the organization meet the challenge of supporting the movement for ‘wholeness’ in the arts in Canada (1). Note the language used in these

statements – it reveals a reluctance on the part of the (still largely white) membership to specifically name *racism* in either the name of the committee, the reasons for its necessity, or its statement of purpose. Nonetheless, Lenore Keeshig-Tobias boldly took on the first chair-ship of this committee, with “Althea Trotman (Afro-Caribbean/Ontario), Fred Wah (Chinese/Alberta), Ajmer Rode (East Indian/British Columbia), Alookook Ipellie (Inuit/Ontario), [and] Rick Shiomi (Japanese/Ontario)” (2) working alongside her. Thus, the committee was “geographically and racially representative, with four TWUC members and two non-members” (2). The group’s attentiveness to the structural make-up of the committee itself – comprising members and non-members from across the country and from various backgrounds – demonstrates their intentions in action. They were committed, from the outset, to creating equitable collectives that represented diverse and varied positionalities, and the rhetoric of structural diversity and inclusivity can clearly be seen across the breadth of the committee’s documents, which read very differently from previous work done by the Union, or, indeed, from any other work being done by Union committees at the time.

The 1990 AGM thus marks an important shift in the Writers’ Union’s history, as advocacy by and for BIPOC authors begins to get some traction at the operational level. Not immediately, and not without opposition, but for the first time in the organization’s history, racialized members take on prominent advocacy roles, and their work actually becomes part of the Union’s operational structure. It must be noted, though, that this was not top-down structural and institutional change; the Union’s executive does not call for reflection and change based on the broader shifts happening in the publishing industry

around them. It is the authors themselves who agitate and speak up and organize, and who take up the burden of labour to make change within the organization – enacting important advocacy work for their communities that continues to echo through our current moment.

As Althea Prince – formerly Trotman – remembers, though, advocating for the kind of representation they wanted from and within the Writers’ Union was challenging. In her series of essays, *Being Black*, Prince remembers: “we did not sit comfortably with the name of the Racial Minority Writers Committee” (119) from the outset, she notes, as “the category ‘racial minority’ was so clearly related to our relationship with the dominant ‘other’ that we sought in vain for some politically more acceptable name” (120). While the Racial Minority Writers Committee was the official language employed and accepted by the Union, the committee themselves began using the acronym RMWC to represent their work – decentring the power dynamic and language of minoritization. In early documents, they sometimes even labelled their work as being for “The Racial Minority Writers Access to Mainstream Publishing Committee.”<sup>53</sup> This unwieldy title helps us to understand the thrust of the committee’s intentions: to increase access to mainstream opportunities for racialized writers. Beginning that work, officially, in the fall of 1991, the committee’s mission statement, “to define a place for racial minority writers in the Canadian writing and publishing community” (“Report on the Racial Minority Writers’ ...” n.p.), guided their work. They took on a three-pronged approach, citing “learning, equality, and communication” (2) as their main goals as they worked towards two operational objectives: “to give priority to re-establishing and expanding the network with racial minority writers in the form of a questionnaire survey” (2); and “to conduct a

Planning Session which would facilitate the voices of racial minority writers to discuss issues and needs” (2). Thus began the work for what would soon become “The Appropriate Voice” – a conference and planning session, specifically for racialized writers, held in May of 1992. First, though, the committee re-examined the notion of informational advocacy – approaching data collection about the experiences of racialized writers in Canada with considerably more institutional support than their ad hoc predecessors.

The hope was that the information collected by this second survey would help shape the goals and intentions of the eventual planning session. The first step, though, was to establish a detailed and credible database of racialized writers in Canada. I believe this was the first such list compiled by a major Canadian literary organization – at least that had such geographical, formal, and ethnic reach. Considering the relatively low number of racialized authors in the Writers’ Union’s membership at the time (just 2% at the last count in 1988, 13 people of a membership of 605), the results were striking. The RMWC produced a database of over 250 ‘minority’ writers in Canada, all working, published authors in 1991, who might be interested in participating in the committee’s interventions, and, potentially, in the Writers’ Union one day. While not all of these people would have been eligible to join the Union – some were poets, others essayists, some didn’t yet have a book published – the list provides an important insight into the sheer scale of professional racialized writers in Canada, most of whom had hitherto been marginalized from accounting about the industry. With the help of regional, governmental, and industry contacts, the list continued to grow as the committee

approached the planning session, with one later version representing a full 330 racialized writers working in Canada at the time (1991/92).<sup>54</sup> Recall that the names of just four racialized authors had been included on the Union's very first mailing lists in 1972/3. In the early days of the Union's mythos, and indeed, when the Union made that motion to increase representation in their ranks in 1986, the prevailing attitude was that there were few to no racialized writers eligible to join the organization – which, of course, was incorrect. While the shape and makeup of the Canadian literary industry had clearly diversified in those intervening twenty years, we must remember the concept of invisibilization. There were, undoubtedly, more than four racialized authors working in Canada at the time of the Union's founding, and many more in 1986, who remained invisibilized in the Union's articulation of collectivity. We must also remember, then, that the majority of the 330 authors sought out by the RMWC for this survey remained – for the time being at least – *outside* of the Writers' Union's ranks.

The second iteration of the “Racial Minority Writers Committee Questionnaire” was sent out to the initial list of 250 authors, and focused on the structural professional experiences of racialized writers. How many works have you: submitted, had reviewed, had accepted, had rejected?, the survey asked. “Do you belong to a literary or writers’ organization?” (1).<sup>55</sup> What kind of work do you make? Have you applied for or received funding or grants? Ninety-eight surveys of 250 were returned, creating an as-yet never-before assembled data set about the experiences of racialized authors in Canada. While this data deserves to be studied in a project all of its own – particularly the answers to the final question which asks for “other literary concerns/comments” (2) – the statistical

report that was generated from the data is useful for framing the experiences of racialized writers in the Canadian literary world.

The report details the ethnic make-up of the respondent authors – “29% First Nations, 1% Inuit, 17% African, 26% Asian, and 27% of other ethnic decent” (“Report on the Racial Minority Writers...” 13)<sup>56</sup> – and identifies the forms of writing most prevalent for this population – fiction, non-fiction, and poetry being the most common. The respondents were equitably distributed gender-wise, with 53% women and 47% men, and the majority of respondents – a full 96% of them – wrote from the perspective of, and utilized the stories of, their cultural background or heritage. This, in and of itself, is an important figure, both for what it says about racialized authors’ investments in their communities and storytelling, and for the ways that their work might be discriminated against for its racialized content. Strikingly, though, only 15 respondents declared that their work had ever been rejected on the basis of their cultural background. Far more, instead, noted that they could not explicitly know if this was the reason for, or the nature of, their rejections. This reticence to directly name racial discrimination likely reflects the tacit modes of inequity and inaccessibility that people like Austin Clarke and Bharati Mukherjee had been commenting on a generation before. The forms of writing engaged in by the respondents helps to reveal this structural disparity, as the majority had been published in journals (58%), but only 20% had books published. Surprisingly – and wonderfully – of those authors, the rates of reviews were quite high, as 75% of them noted that their publications had been reviewed regularly, a figure that likely would have been much lower had this survey been conducted in the 1970s prior to the Union’s own

review auditing procedures, which had helped open up more space for reviews of Canadian books post-1986. While less than 50% of the respondents had ever applied for funding or grants, of those, 70% were successful in their requests – again, a number that likely would have been much lower in previous generations of racialized authors. The relatively high rates of reviews and grants also gestures to the professionalism of this group of respondents, who must have been established authors in their fields. For a group – broadly understood as ‘minority writers’ – who had had little to no access to structures of funding and promotion just twenty years before, the achievement that these survey results convey reflects a significant and productive shift in representation and access.

That is not to say, of course, that there didn’t remain significant work to do to support the ongoing work of, and activism for, racialized writers. This data, though, provides us with a snapshot of the experiences of BIPOC authors in Canada in the early 1990s, and could provide a helpful baseline from which to consider current equity policies and procedures in Canadian publishing, and whether or not they have developed or changed. Recall that at the time the RMWC initiated this survey, no institutions were keeping this kind of data. The Canada Council had only just begun their own diversity initiatives and even they were not recording data that helped elucidate the experience of BIPOC authors within their institution – at least not data that is publicly available.<sup>57</sup> The work of the RMWC, then, was pivotal, in as much as they made this survey data available and, what’s more, they used it to create guideposts for their upcoming planning session – allowing the respondents’ concerns and needs to directly shape their policy and planning decisions. From the respondents’ answers to the survey’s final question, the committee



generated two lists – one of issues and one of needs – that became central to how the planning session progressed. The list of ongoing issues for racialized writers identified things like appropriation of voice, access to publishing venues, ghettoization, rejection, and reviewing standards (“Report on the Racial Minority Writers’ ...” 19) as issues that required discussion and intervention. The list of needs reflected the ways that respondents believed these issues might be addressed, through things like community outreach, education and curricula development, and funding, individually and collectively – for racial minority presses, for example – in order to increase “access to the mainstream” (20). Note, here, that many of the issues raised and focalized by the RMWC echo the Writers’ Union’s own founding concerns, as racialized writers struck out to achieve similar forms of cultural access and economic stability for their literary labour.

The RMWC’s main founding task was to organize what they called a ‘planning session’ – a conference event where racial minority writers could come together to discuss their needs. They hired an administrative coordinator, Caribbean-Canadian activist and organizer Yvonne Bobb Smith, whose labour became central to the advocacy and efficacy of the group. Smith brought considerable experience with her, both as an organizer and as an academic, as she pursued her PhD in education at the same time as she coordinated this event. Much like prior administrators in the Union, Bobb Smith’s work deserves to be highlighted, as her labour was directly oriented towards arts reforms – this time, inflected with her considerable experience as an activist and academic specifically invested in the experiences of women of colour.<sup>58</sup> Bobb Smith, along with the members of the RMWC – Fred Wah, Althea Prince, Rick Shiomi, Ajmer Rode, Alookook

Ipellie, and Lenore Keeshig-Tobias – worked for a full year to shape and craft this event, which would bring racialized authors from across the country together, en masse, for the very first time.

Two hundred and fifty people were invited, and sixty-two people attended The Appropriate Voice conference and planning session, held at Geneva Park outside Orillia, Ontario, from May 21<sup>st</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup>, 1992. Involvement was limited to “racial minority attendees,” defined by the committee as “those members of the writing community of Canada, whose origins are First Nations, Inuit, African, and Asian, and who are going to meet to define our place in the literary community of Canada” (“Report on the Racial Minority Writers’...” 2). Note the embedded gesture to the labour that was being requested of this group – the committee’s structure of inclusion asked, from the very outset, that people come prepared to work in coalition to define their community. The ‘our’ here, then, is a very different ‘our’ from that collectivity which had, so often, defined the broader Writers’ Union. Indeed, most of the attendees to Appropriate Voice were not even Union members – and it was, perhaps, this reaching outside of the organization that made the weekend’s events so inspiring and productive.

The program for the conference began in Toronto, as the RMWC hosted a public event on May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1992, intended to “celebrate diversity” (6) with readings from selected conference attendees: Marie Annharte Baker, Ven Begamudré, Maria Campbell, Surjeet Kalsey, Lee Maracle, Roy Miki, and Samuel Selvon. Note the presence of Maria Campbell, who had left the Writers’ Union many years before – her specific involvement speaks to the ways that Appropriate Voice sought to de- and re-construct the shape of the

Union's established collectivity in productive ways. Samuel Selvon's presence, too, is instructive – as an internationally acclaimed writer, Selvon's involvement with this burgeoning collective, many of whom were emerging writers at the time, is striking. He had moved from England to Canada in 1978, and joined the Writers' Union sometime thereafter. While Selvon had likely been a Union member for over a decade when *The Appropriate Voice* was convened, I have never seen his name appear in the Union's papers, prior to this important event. Over 100 people attended the readings that night – a significant mark of interest in, and solidarity for, the RMWC and its work. According to the conference report, the readings were “impressive and inspiring” (5), and they began to set the stage for “the creation of an atmosphere of openness and solidarity” (5) among the group of assembled authors.

Afterwards, attendees boarded busses bound for Orillia, Ontario and the YMCA's Geneva Park Conference Centre, where the group would spend the weekend in collective planning sessions aimed at articulating their needs and concerns as cultural producers. Collaborative and collective work was built into the structure of the weekend's proceedings, as the agenda made room for both “full circle discussions” (7) and “small group dialogues” (7). Indeed, participants themselves “agreed on the structure, form, and content of work sessions” (7) as the weekend progressed. Reading the agenda and planning documents for the event, I have consistently been struck by this formal and structural attentiveness – the committee specifically made space for collaboration and community-building, wherein discussions and ideas could develop. The small group sessions asked participants to break out into “affinity groups” (14), where they were

prompted with questions: “Where and how do our writing issues occur in the contexts of the institution, the individual, and the community?” (14), for instance. Or, “How do we name these issues? How do we define these issues?” (14). Note, again, the invocation of an ‘our’ and a ‘we’ that are productively reaching outside the collective of The Writers’ Union of Canada. And moreover, an ‘our’ and ‘we’ that are attentive to individual experience, opinion, and dissent. The latter questions, about naming and defining issues of concern for ‘minority writers,’ in particular, invoke the idea that these authors were coming together to do foundational work – the work of naming, defining, and putting a shape around, the experiences of racialized cultural producers in Canada. This was, for both the Union and for CanLit, foundational activist work, as the group sought to articulate their connected and intertwining concerns.

The agenda also specifically made time for engagement together – much time for buffet meals, receptions, and storytelling. Most striking, is the half-hour of Saturday’s program labelled simply “J O Y” (15) in the agenda. This kind of attentiveness to collective celebration – to the acts of simply being together – speaks to the necessity of an event like *Appropriate Voice* and to its great potential, not only for community-building against and outside of institutions, but for community-being, community-recognition, and community-care. The event which followed those joyful moments was “EXTEMPORIZING: Reading/Storytelling/ Dialogue” (15) – which speaks to the ways in which this joy was channelled and focalized in the weekend’s events: towards active and dialogic engagement with stories, storytellers, and the cultural and political valences

of their work. The conference wrapped up on the Sunday with another collective session, an hour described in the agenda, simply as “VOICES – writers speak” (15).

For authors who had so often been silenced by the broader structures of the Union (or the industry, or the nation) this attention to claiming space to speak and to be heard encapsulates the RMWC’s intentions for the weekend quite aptly. Larissa Lai, who attended the event, has called *Appropriate Voice* a “beautiful” example of “cross-racial alliance at work” (*Slanting I, Imagining We* 26), wherein writers of colour and Indigenous writers came together “to talk about issues of common concern and to identify barriers to writing and publishing in Canada” (26). Organizer Althea Prince has noted that “there was determination” at *Appropriate Voice*, “to work together with all the storytellers of Canada – and we were not speaking of the nebulous band-aid called ‘multiculturalism.’ We were speaking of anti-racism and humanitarianism – that is to say: equality, recognition of people’s dignity, and complete, equal distribution of power” (*Being Black* 118).

The RMWC’s report back to the Writers’ Union notes that the issues and concerns raised by attendees over the weekend “were connected to or framed within three major concerns” (“Report on the Racial Minority Writers’...” 7) – “curriculum,” “access to publishing,” and “access to related organizations” (7), as they explain that “few racial minority writers belonged to The Writers’ Union of Canada, for example” (7). Note that while these concerns are similar to those of the Union’s founders, they strike out in a different arc. The Union’s founders felt, in the early 1970s, that there were no organizations representing their needs as producers, and here, racialized authors were

saying that while those institutions and organizations may now exist, they are often not accessible to, or reflective of, the particular needs of racialized writers. The RMWC's report on the conference notes that "there was somewhat of a reluctance (for many reasons) on the part of these writers to join these organizations" (7). Ultimately, the group acknowledged that "joining mainstream organizations would give racial minority writers access to existing services" (8) and would, simultaneously, "provide the opportunity to build a place for this group within these organizations" (8), including the Writers' Union. I am struck, however, by the labour embedded in this notion – that it will be the authors themselves who need to build a place for themselves and their concerns within the Union, and, more broadly, in the organizations and institutions of CanLit.

The attendees of *Appropriate Voice* thus articulated their intentions to gain access to these institutions and structures, while maintaining their own collective work through "a type of floating caucus" (8) which would: form "links and bridges for racial minority writers within and outside existing organizations" (8); assist in "addressing racial minority writers' concerns both within and outside these organizations" (8); and disseminate "information to racial minority writers regarding matters of writing and publishing" (8). The attentiveness to inter-organizational coalition is particularly instructive. It calls to mind something M. NourbeSe Philip had written in 1989: "the weight of racism in the writing world... does not reside with the individual white writer, but in the network of institutions and organizations that reinforce each other in the articulation of systemic racism" (*Frontiers* 277). This "Racial Minority Writers Collective" – a slight riff on their RMWC committee within the Union – sought to

address this operative network as they resolved to “form a national collective to facilitate a discussion of [the] issues of racial minority writers” (“Report on the Racial Minority Writers’...” 8). An ongoing Steering Committee was struck, so that this work could move out beyond this planning session’s events, as organizers agreed, collectively, to: create a position paper on cultural appropriation; implement a newsletter for the new collective; and initiate plans for a future conference dedicated to racialized writers – what would, eventually, come to be Writing Thru Race, held in Vancouver in the spring of 1994.

Beyond the emergent energy of coalitional organizing that was born from *Appropriate Voice*, one of the most important things to come out of the conference was the group’s clear and forceful statement against cultural appropriation. The writers assembled for *Appropriate Voice* had worked together that weekend, defining what, exactly, this concept meant to them. Indeed, while conversations about appropriation had been ongoing for at least 5 years – since the Women’s Press incident – definitions of the problem had issued largely from white writers and editors, rather than having been defined by racialized writers themselves. The *Appropriate Voice* planning session thus accepted the following resolution:

Whereas cultural appropriation exists as an historical and systemic phenomenon of oppression; and whereas cultural appropriation is understood to be taking – from a culture that is not one’s own – intellectual property, cultural expression and artifacts, history and ways of knowledge, and profiting at the expense of the people of that culture by means of linguistic domination, social and economic exploitation and ghettoization, which results

in silencing and misrepresenting those people; and whereas we respect and encourage the freedom of imagination and the freedom of expression; be it resolved that we affirm and emphasize the responsibility and accountability that goes with that freedom (10).

I quote this resolution in full in order to highlight its very specific language: historical and systemic oppression are recognized here immediately, as is profiting from a culture that is not one's own. Words that specifically name the harms of these practices are also present: "domination;" "exploitation;" "ghettoization." The language of accountability and responsibility to communities and stories is also here. I cannot help but think that this is exactly the type of motion Austin Clarke had in mind when he scrawled "political art / concept art / oppressed people" in the margins of his notes on the Union's constitution. Here, racialized writers in the Appropriate Voice collective were strongly and specifically naming the terms upon which they wanted to move forward, as they engaged with established organizations like the Writers' Union.

It is difficult to capture, then – after the joy and coalition of Appropriate Voice – the disappointment, anger, and resentment that Althea Prince, Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, Ajmer Rode, and Fred Wah must have felt when they presented this motion to the Writers' Union on behalf of the RMWC. It was June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1992, at the Union's AGM (held just two weeks after Appropriate Voice), where, Althea Prince remembers: "several white writers spoke with passion against the motion put forward by RMWC on voice and cultural appropriation. They spoke of feeling that they were being censored" (110). While racialized writers had met with such energy and such success, the AGM reminded them



that very little had changed in the broader arc of CanLit's institutions. The good and urgent work of the collective of racialized writers was subordinated by the fervour that erupted at this AGM about the Union's position on cultural appropriation. Just as M. NourbeSe Philip had argued several years before, this conversation was, once again, dominated by censorship discourse, such that the concerns of the Appropriate Voice collective were decentred and delegitimated. Beyond just their concerns, I want to be clear to point out that their labour, too, was effaced. The Writers' Union's members completely re-wrote the appropriation statement at that AGM – literally and structurally invisibilizing the work of the sixty-two-person collective who had drafted the original piece. The new motion, passed by the membership at the 1992 AGM, reads:

Whereas we resolutely affirm the freedom of imagination and the freedom of expression of all writers everywhere; but whereas cultural misappropriation exists as a form of oppression; and whereas cultural misappropriation is understood to be taking – from a culture that is not one's own – intellectual property, cultural expressions and artifacts, history and ways of knowledge, and profiting at the expense of the people of that culture; and whereas cultural misappropriation is among the factors which have contributed to the exploitation and misrepresentation of cultures and the silencing of their peoples; but whereas there has always existed among peoples an interchange and sharing of ideas and cultural forms, usually referred to as 'influence' and 'teaching;' and whereas human rights work depends, globally, on people giving accounts, fictional or journalistic, from

countries not their own, and none of the above shall be construed as an interference with that process; and whereas censorship is a growing world-wide problem for writers and none of the above shall be construed as an endorsement of censorship, or as an attempt to imprison writers in cultural ghettos, nor to encourage racial or ethnic segregation; be it therefore affirmed that The Writers' Union of Canada recognizes and affirms the responsibility and accountability that attend the freedom of imagination and the freedom of expression (Writers' Union of Canada, "Motion" 1).<sup>59</sup>

The RMWC's tight, 110-word anti-appropriation statement was nearly unrecognizable, and the opacity of the Union's prose, here, is striking. The new motion simultaneously shifts attention away from appropriation discourses to the needs and protections of the Union's largely-White membership, while its existence allows the organization to say it is addressing the concerns of racialized writers. Note, though, the clear, direct affirmation – in the motion's very first line – that freedom of expression trumps all else. This is a significant departure from the *Appropriate Voice* version, which had so succinctly and directly addressed the terms and implications of 'cultural appropriation.' Instead, here, when cultural *misappropriation* is identified, the language of structural and historical oppression employed by the RMWC has been completely stripped away. Recall that this structural engagement was the committee's, and *Appropriate Voice*'s, main aim – to identify and define the structural access concerns of racialized writers. With one motion, the Union's broader membership had decentred structural critique and re-centered their own needs.

And what of the word misappropriation? Is it synonymous to appropriation? No. Rather, it is a slight of hand away from the original issue, and, what's more, a slight of hand away from the persistent and underlying concerns of racism and inequity that the appropriation debate bore out in the first place. For misappropriation means "to appropriate or assign wrongly" (*OED Online*) – a fundamental rhetorical twist that structurally still allows for appropriation to be acceptable, as long as it is not done 'wrongly.' The use of the word "but," throughout the motion, also speaks to the subordination of these urgent and fundamental questions of equity. With this motion the Union seems to be saying, we will make and support this motion, *but* writers can still be "influenced" by another culture; fictional and journalistic accounts of the other are still acceptable, if they are part of "human rights work;" and, what's more "none of the above shall be construed" as censorship. M. NourbeSe Philip had already written in 1989: "for some, artistic freedom appears to be alive and well in Canada, these writers, however, pay not the slightest heed to the fact that the wider context includes many who, because of racism, cannot fully exercise that artistic freedom. In Canada, that wide context is, in fact, very narrowly drawn around the artistic freedom of white writers" (*Frontiers* 285). The substantial edits made to the RMWC's appropriation motion not only effaced the concerns and the labour of the group of racialized writers, but they served to reinscribe that narrowly drawn demarcation line, which privileges the artistic freedom of some more than others.

Althea Prince recalls that 1992 AGM, writing: "in the end the report was watered down by the inclusion of some qualifiers, agreed upon by the RMWC" (*Being Black* 115)

– represented, at the AGM, by Prince, Keeshig-Tobias, Rode, and Wah. Sanja Khanna, reporting for *Rungh* about the AGM, noted that Ajmer Rode perceived it as an “historic, emotional event” (34), as he remembered that “the wording of the resolution... was altered under considerable duress” (34). According to Rode, “Lenore and I were fine tuning the wording of the resolution at the breakfast table... when Union members Margaret Atwood, Michael Gilbert, and Candice Savage came along” (34). Rode notes that they then “started collectively working on the resolution, discussing it word by word” (34). Prince explains that while the committee members “were not ecstatic” with the new motion, “we all felt it was a first step with which we could live” (*Being Black* 115). Meaning that something was better than nothing. For the concept of appropriation to be recognized by the Union at all was, indeed, something. But the force of the original motion had been lost in its new, Union-revised, edition. Prince notes that the RMWC “later came under fire from many writers of colour for allowing this change in the motion” (115), gesturing to the affective dimensions of the advocacy this group had taken on. She recalls that by the time of the AGM – which, I should reiterate, occurred just thirteen days after the massive undertaking of *Appropriate Voice* – the committee was exhausted. “We were rattled at the end of it all,” she writes, “and we were few in number” (115). Consider that while these four members of the RMWC were representing a much broader community of racialized writers, at this meeting they were structurally in the minority. The Writers’ Union, at this point, had over 850 members, and, as we have seen, this broader community had demonstrated, time and again, their hostility for the work of racial equity.

We must be careful, then, not to ascribe the historical credit for the productive work of events like *Appropriate Voice* to the Writers' Union per se – though the organization's name was attached to the meetings, and some members were involved, coalitional activist labour for racialized members had, largely, moved outside of the Union itself. And it would continue to do so, as a steering committee of largely non-Union members worked towards *Writing Thru Race* two years later. While the Union continued to support the work of the RMWC as it moved towards this ground-breaking and controversial conference, acrimony and anger continued to smoulder in the organization, which would eventually blow up into the media firestorm that surrounded the event. *Writing Thru Race*, though, would not have been possible without the prior coalition building that occurred at *Appropriate Voice*, nor without the work of the first RMWC or the Ad Hoc Committee on Racism and Publishing. Nor, indeed, without pioneers like Clarke, or Mukherjee, or Philip, who advocated for themselves in the best ways that they could. These flashes of anti-racist dissent built upon one another over time, and are inflected with the material and immaterial labour of the racialized writers who took on this work. That, I think, is what most needs to be remembered.

So too, we must use this historical context-building to help us recall and remember the ongoingness of racism. Thirty years have now passed since *Appropriate Voice*; forty years have passed since Bharati Mukherjee's "An Invisible Woman;" almost fifty years have passed since Austin Clarke spoke in front of the founders of the Union. And yet, very little has changed. Over the six years that I have been researching, working on, and writing this chapter, CanLit and Canadian cultural studies more broadly have

been implicated in several racialized incidents, including 2017’s “Appropriation Prize” editorial in the Writers’ Union’s *Write Magazine*, and the racial profiling of Shelby McPhee, a Black scholar from Nova Scotia attending 2019’s Congress of the Arts and Humanities at UBC. As I complete final edits on this chapter, in the Spring of 2021, the Black Canadian Studies Association calls for the boycotting of all Congress related events, and – as of this writing – sixteen other humanities related academic associations have withdrawn from those structures in solidarity. CanLit, as an institution – as an industry, as a field of study, and as a community – is marked by structural anti-Blackness, anti-Indigeneity, anti-Asian discrimination, and white supremacy, and my work in this chapter will not stop that, nor will it pretend that there are easy ways to address it. What I have hoped to do, however, is to highlight the powerful coalitional work of racialized writers, academics, and thinkers, who have been speaking back to CanLit and its institutions – including The Writers’ Union of Canada – for decades.

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> “Gut Issues in Babylon: Racism and Anti-Racism in the Arts,” *Fuse* April/May 1989, 23. This essay was later also reproduced in Philip’s *Frontiers: Selected Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture, 1984 – 1992*.

<sup>2</sup> Elliott’s “CanLit is a Raging Dumpster Fire” first appeared online via Open Book. It was later reprinted in *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins*, edited by Hannah McGregor, Julie Rak, and Erin Wunker.

<sup>3</sup> I’m thinking, here, of the call to coalitional complicity in anti-colonial, anti-racist work raised by Indigenous Action Media in “Accomplices not Allies: Abolishing the Ally Industrial Complex, An Indigenous Perspective.” The authors write: “the risks of an ally who provides support or solidarity (usually on a temporary basis) in a fight are much different than that of an accomplice. When we fight back or forward, together, becoming complicit in a struggle towards liberation, we are accomplices” (2).

<sup>4</sup> Clarke and Howard Engel had some connection via their work for the CBC and their letters reveal a close friendship. Austin’s letters to Marian Engel are warm and collegial, dating back to 1968 when he congratulates her on a publication (see Verduyn and Garay, *Marian Engel Life in Letters*, 69-70). Clarke directed his March 1968 letter to “Comradess Mariannovich Engelofsky”

(69) suggesting not only that the group had a longstanding friendship beyond the Writers' Union and its work, but that that friendship was, at least to some extent, forged in and attentive to dissent.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Writers' Union of Canada "Membership Brochure," JC Fonds, Box 8, File 8.

<sup>6</sup> AC Fonds, Box 35, File 3.

<sup>7</sup> AC Fonds, Box 35, File 3.

<sup>8</sup> Recall that the Constitution remained in flux up until the founding meeting in Ottawa in November of 1973 and was debated hotly at that meeting and the gathering held in Toronto the previous June. As discussed in the Introduction, its drafting was a long process that focalized the ongoing organizational debate about who ought to be included in the Union and what its mandate ought to cover. Thus, these early drafts in Austin Clarke's files suggest he was involved in and central to that early debate process, and, likely, that he was on the committee drafting the constitution.

<sup>9</sup> AC Fonds, Box 44, File 1.

<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that the idea of associate members was specifically presented as a way of getting developing authors involved in the organization. I will return to this idea later in the chapter.

<sup>11</sup> This essay was also later published in Clarke's *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature*.

<sup>12</sup> AC Fonds, Box 44, File 1.

<sup>13</sup> By 1977, with the publication of the first Writers' Union first membership book, *Canada Writes!*, the Union had collated an extensive list of publishing houses within and outside of Canada that their membership had published with. Tundra Books is on this list, as are many other small presses operating at the time. The Union expressly notes, however, that the list merely reflects publishers "with whom our current membership has published" (388). It is still not, then, a list that clearly defines eligibility, but one that at least helps give us some hints about what connections constituted inclusion.

<sup>14</sup> Clarkson's archives were not accessible for this project – recently donated to Library and Archives Canada, her fonds are currently undergoing accession and remain closed. In time, this may be a useful source for teasing out the details of her involvement with the Union.

<sup>15</sup> See TWUC Fonds, Box 42, File 11 for a letter to Rudy Wiebe from Alma Lee, 20 November 1974, discussing payment for Maria Campbell's airfare.

<sup>16</sup> While I have not been able to locate Clarke's side of this correspondence, or his resignation letter, this September 1979 letter from then-Chair of the Union, June Callwood, notes that she is "appalled to read [his] letter of resignation. As a founding member myself, I have not been aware of straying from basic principles" (1). She continues: "I would appreciate knowing where you feel the Union has betrayed its goals" (1). If Clarke answered this letter, his comments would be useful and revealing, but I have not, unfortunately, been able to find these important letters. It is possible that they are located in Clarke's restricted membership file within the Writers' Union's archives. It is important to note that Clarke's intention seems to have been to sever ties with the Union completely – in an internal memo about the status of 1979/80's membership dues, Clarke's name is included on a list of "definite" resignations from the organization (see JC Fonds, Box 8, File 11).

<sup>17</sup> HW Papers, Box 34, File 105.

<sup>18</sup> The archival finding aid for Weinzwieg's papers notes that this fragment is a "typed journal page re: Austin Clarke, et al at Writers' Union Meeting, Various Pages, 1993 – 1994." It is likely mis-dated in the finding aid, which is understandable, given that the fragment was grouped with various journal pages ranging from the 1970s to the 1990s. I am confident, however, that

Weinzweig is reflecting on the June 1973 planning meeting here. I must note that my research is indebted to the original archivist of Weinzweig's collection who took the time to note the contents of this one fragment – without that notation in the finding aid, this important documentary reflection about Clarke's experience with the Union would have been a needle in a haystack, and, likely, would have been lost.

<sup>19</sup> The Writers' Union's Fonds description includes a notation that Box 42, File 7 of the collection includes a 'tape transcription' of the June 1973 conference. Unfortunately, the file does not actually contain a transcript or any details about the meeting.

<sup>20</sup> AC Fonds, Box 44, File 1.

<sup>21</sup> JWM Fonds, Box 13, File 32.

<sup>22</sup> CB Fonds, Box 17, File 46.

<sup>23</sup> JWM Fonds, Box 13, File 32.

<sup>24</sup> CB Fonds, Box 17, File 46.

<sup>25</sup> JWM Fonds, Box 13, File 32.

<sup>26</sup> CB Fonds, Box 17, File 46.

<sup>27</sup> JWM Fonds, Box 13, File 32.

<sup>28</sup> CB Fonds, Box 17, File 46.

<sup>29</sup> CB Fonds, Box 17, File 46.

<sup>30</sup> It is curious that no membership files exist for either Blaise or Mukherjee in the Writers' Union's fonds, particularly because this letter from Gibson to Blaise notes: "It seems clear from whatever letters (copies) there are extant that we indeed did write to you and included her in those letters" (1). The 'we' Gibson refers to seems to be the Union and its staff, and yet none of the Union's extensive outgoing correspondence files, member files, or grievance files – that I can locate – reference Blaise and Mukherjee or this incident. Moreover, no other letters from the Union (or Gibson), are present in Blaise's otherwise quite detailed archival files, implying that he never received any further communications about this incident from the Union. While Mukherjee's portion of the archives in Calgary is quite limited, her files, similarly include no correspondence from the Writers' Union, Gibson, or anyone associated with the organization about this issue. The one and only Union document in her files is the invitation letter, sent March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1973 from John Metcalf, and signed by the rest of the membership committee, including her husband. Where these other letters have gone – or if they existed in the first place – remains a mystery, which makes their continued omission from the record of the Writers' Union even more compelling. It is worth noting that Gibson's archival collection at the University of Toronto does include an entire box of restricted Writers' Union material that cannot be accessed until 2027.

<sup>31</sup> Future iterations of the project would benefit from an interview with Blaise, to reflect on both his and Mukherjee's interactions with the Union's collective. Mukherjee, unfortunately, passed away in 2017, taking her memories of these incidents with her. Their recollections, however, would reflect another angle on the Union's founding that has never been captured.

<sup>32</sup> *Canada Writes!* includes entries from Howard Adams, Maria Campbell, and Austin Clarke, along with Réshard Gool and Michael Ondaatje. Gool and Ondaatje appear to have joined the Union around 1976, though tracing their involvement with the organization has been difficult. Ondaatje's archives at Library and Archives Canada are currently restricted, and may be useful for future iterations of this project.

<sup>33</sup> By this time, all the early BIPOC authors involved with the Union had left, with the exception of Réshard Gool. Howard Adams, Maria Campbell, Austin Clarke, and Michael Ondaatje are all absent from 1981's *The Writers' Union of Canada: A Directory of Members*. Meanwhile, Indian Canadian author Saros Cowasjee, Indigenous author Alice Masak French (Inuvialuit), and Japanese Canadian writer and journalist Ken Adachi had joined the Union's ranks.



<sup>34</sup> See Daniel David Moses's "The Trickster's Laugh: My Meeting with Tomson and Lenore" for more details about their collective work that began outside of the Union.

<sup>35</sup> See Emma N. Awe's "Sister Vision Press," produced by the Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity, for a brief history of their work.

<sup>36</sup> See Thaba Niedzwiecki's *Print Politics: Conflict & Community Building at Toronto's Women's Press* for more information, particularly Chapter 2, "(Anti)Racism at the Women's Press."

<sup>37</sup> See TWUC Fonds, Box 135, File 1 for a series of letters that document the Union's exchanges with The Women's Press around this issue.

<sup>38</sup> While I have not been able to ascertain what year the Haida Band Council instituted their visitor permit program, it is important to note that both the Council of the Haida Nation and the Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve continue to require all researchers to have an approved application before visiting or beginning work with, on, or about, the community.

<sup>39</sup> As I have not yet been able to locate the details of the correspondence that occurred between the Masset Band Council and the Writers' Union's representatives, this will remain a point of future research for me.

<sup>40</sup> The finding aid for the Writers' Unions Fonds includes a curious note about audio cassettes of Annual General Meetings. I have not, unfortunately, been able to access them, due to Covid-19 restrictions. I hope, in time, to see if these tapes include the contents of this pivotal 1989 AGM.

<sup>41</sup> At the Vancouver Writer's Festival the previous fall (October of 1988), Judith Merrill had interviewed Ursula K. Le Guin. According to an article about that event in *Kinesis*, by Nym Hughes, "Merrill raised the issue of white women writers in Canada being asked by women of colour not to write from the point of view of a woman of colour" (23). Merrill, here, was likely referencing the ongoing and very public debate being waged around Women's Press. Hughes quotes Merrill as saying: "I react very strongly to this... I think writers should try anything" (23). A potential clue to Merrill's shift of stance, and her later allyship with 'minority' writers in Canadian publishing, lies in Le Guin's response. "I think we should never tell each other we should write this or that" she begins, "we must not censor, but I differ from you. Perhaps as an anthropologist's daughter... I know Native Americans as people who have been spoken for – considered not able to speak – for a couple of hundred years and who do not want to be spoken for. I would feel not only intensely self-conscious, but appropriately guilty" (23), she says, to write from a Native point of view. Nym Hughes also notes that Jeanette Armstrong was in the audience for this exchange and that she too weighed in on the issue of appropriation during that event. Hughes writes: "it seemed a bit amazing – sitting in a mainstream arts event listening to women discuss racism and writing and feminism while hundreds listened" (23). Perhaps Merrill listened, in that moment as well, and her attempts to bring the discussion into the Writers' Union, some seven months later, were silenced.

<sup>42</sup> TWUC Fonds, Box 133, File 1.

<sup>43</sup> This word comes from Larissa Lai's reflections on Writing Thru Race and Appropriate Voice in *Slanting I, Imagining We*. She cautions that such "radical work of coalition building" is "always a struggle, and, until recently, largely invisibilized" (4).

<sup>44</sup> PEN Canada is a division of PEN (Poets, Essayists, Novelists) International, which advocates for freedom of expression of writers. The Canadian chapter of PEN was founded in Montreal in 1926, and, in the early 1980s, it split into English and French centres, located in Toronto and Montreal, respectively. Margaret Atwood, Graeme Gibson, and several other prominent founders of the Writers' Union had been central to the Toronto chapter's inception. Indeed, between 1984 and 1990, the Presidents of the organization were Atwood, Findley, Gibson, and then Callwood – all former Chairs of the Writers' Union. This would be a valuable node of future study, as no history of PEN Canada has yet been published.

<sup>45</sup> See TWUC Fonds, Box 133, File 1, for copies of the Vision 21 pamphlet and Union correspondence about the incident.

<sup>46</sup> See articles such as: H.J Kirchhoff's "Charges of Racism Spark Protest at Writers' Congress;" "No PEN Pals;" Bronwyn Drainie's "Minorities Go Toe to Toe with Majority;" and M. NourbeSe Philip's "Incident at Congress" for more details.

<sup>47</sup> In November of 1989 Vision 21 sent out a letter to all organizations and institutions that had supported the PEN Congress financially, including the Writers' Union. These documents, signed by M. NourbeSe Philip, Brenda J. Lem, and Gillian Morton, make clear that Vision 21 was seeking broader reforms to the cultural industries in Canada, as they note that "racism is present in all the arts in Ontario and Canada, manifesting itself differently in each arts discipline" (1). What the group asked for, was that powerful cultural institutions – and their members – support a public inquiry into structural racism in the Canadian arts, to "make recommendations for structural and systemic changes within those organizations" (4). See TWUC Fonds, Box 133, File 1 for copies of this correspondence. An in-depth study of Vision 21's work would be productive to recoup this group of author-activists' labour, and to situate their work in the broader arc of racialized cultural conflict that occurred around this time.

<sup>48</sup> See Philip's collections *Frontiers: Essays and Writing on Racism and Publishing* and *Blank: Essay & Interviews* for a sense of her prolific activist writing at this time, particularly her pieces "Journal Entries Against Reaction: Damned If We Do and Damned If We Don't," "The Multicultural Whitewash: Racism in Ontario's Arts Funding System," "Letter: September 1990 – Am I a Nigger? Incident at Congress," "The 6% Solution," and "The Disappearing Debate: Or how the discussion of racism has been taken over by the censorship issue."

<sup>49</sup> This letter is likely in Philip's restricted membership file in the Union's archive. All individual membership files in the Union's collection are sealed, requiring specific permission from an author for access. Philip's file, in future, might be able to provide valuable insight about her time with the Union. Philip, however, has also kept an extensive private archive (as revealed in Linda Morra's *Unarrested Archives: Case Studies in Twentieth-Century Canadian Women's Authorship*), which I hope she might one day be willing to share for the purposes of this research. An interview, and access to her archives, would provide valuable context for, and information about, her advocacy work within (and outside of) the Union. Several other letters from Philip do exist in the Union's Rights and Freedoms Committee files, as she exchanged letters with then-Chair of the committee Libby Scheier in 1989 (see TWUC Fonds, Box 135, File 3). It appears that Scheier was trying to get a sense of what happened and how the Union responded to Philip's concerns, but as the letters end abruptly there is no clarity about what the Union's position was, or, indeed, if Philip was suspended or why. It appears that Philip – like Austin Clarke before her – had an on and off again relationship with the Union, which is not surprising, given the opposition they both faced when raising concerns about racism and inequity.

<sup>50</sup> TWUC Fonds, Box 225, File 22. While Philip's original inclusion is no longer attached to this letter, I believe it was likely her article "The Multiculturalism Whitewash: Racism in Ontario's Arts Funding System," published in the Fall of 1987, that she's referring to here. It has since been reprinted in her collection *Frontiers: Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture*.

<sup>51</sup> I have not been able to locate the source information for this document. It is a photocopy of a single page of what looks like a magazine interview with Philip, likely from a Toronto periodical, but unfortunately, I have not been able to track it down. I have included the page number from the photocopied fragment, 29, but do not know which publication or time it originates from. See TWUC Fonds, Box 225, File 22 for Philip's letter and this attached fragment.

<sup>52</sup> TWUC Fonds, Box 133, File 12.

<sup>53</sup> See TWUC Fonds, Box 133, File 2 for examples on various agendas and committee documents.

<sup>54</sup> TWUC Fonds, Box 133, File 4.

<sup>55</sup> TWUC Fonds, Box 133, File 11.

<sup>56</sup> TWUC Fonds, Box 133, File 12.

<sup>57</sup> The Canada Council had convened an Advisory Panel for Racial Equality in the Arts in 1990, after the Women's Press incident, to look at appropriation and systemic racism. Their work occurred simultaneously with that of the RMWC, and their report *Recommendations of the Advisory Committee to the Canada Council for Racial Equality in the Arts and The Response of the Canada Council*, was published in January of 1992, just a few months before *Appropriate Voice*. Richard Fung wrote about his experiences on this advisory committee in his 1993 piece "Working Through Appropriation."

<sup>58</sup> Yvonne Bobb Smith completed her PhD at the University of Toronto in 1998. Her attentiveness to equity and activism, particularly by and for Black women, is evident in several publications that have stemmed from this work, particularly 1999's "There Is No Place Like Home: Caribbean Women's Feminism in Canada" and her book *I Know Who I Am: A Caribbean Woman's Identity in Canada* (2003).

<sup>59</sup> TWUC Fonds, Box 225, File 2.

## Conclusion

In some ways, I am ending this story of the Union just as it really begins. There are another thirty years of advocacy projects, industry amendments, and cultural controversies to cover; there are thousands of pages of archival documents left unengaged; there are pivotal, field-shaping events that are yet to come. But this has been by design. So often, when there is coverage of, or recognition of, the Writers' Union, it is centred around either flashpoints of controversy or celebrated successes. My aim, in this dissertation, has been to highlight the minutiae – of labour, of people, of their affective entanglements with the organization. So too, it has been to highlight the structural inner-workings of the Writers' Union, to help us consider the organization's own entanglements – with nationalism, with celebrity, with social hierarchies, with the industry of Canadian literature that it both supports and is supported by.

Much research and work remains to be done, and, while I close these pages after almost ten years of thinking about the Writers' Union, in some ways I feel like I have only scratched the surface. I envision, in the future, what I am calling an 'extra-union' interview project – one that engages people so often on the margins of the organization's history and celebrates their presence, their labour, their recollections, and, maybe even their dissent. People who may seldom be captured in these pages, if at all, but whose cultural presence intersected with the Union in productive and challenging ways. I'm thinking, here, of people like Dennis Lee, who openly dissented from the Union in its early days, but who later joined and was involved in several important committees. What had changed, for Lee, I often wonder? People like Clarke Blaise, whose early

interventions in the Union were so painful. What does Blaise remember of that time, and would he be willing to share? People like Larissa Lai, Monika Kin Gagnon, Afua Cooper, and Dionne Brand – who were all present for, and involved with, Writing Thru Race, and who have continued to comment on that event’s legacies. What labour did they, specifically, take on in service of the conference, I wonder? Brand, remember, had also been part of that very first ad hoc Committee on Racism and Publishing – does she have any recollections of that time, and of what brought her into the community of that particular committee? Moreover, I am thinking of someone like Roy Miki – who took on the central public role of bringing Writing Thru Race into being. How much time did he dedicate to that project; how much energy and time and labour did it cost him? I am thinking, too, of people like Alma Lee and Marian Hebb, whose labour in service of the Writers’ Union was foundational. I am thinking of people like Audrey Thomas and Anne Innis Dagg, who were the driving forces behind the Status of Women committee’s work and who have never publicly spoken about their affiliation with, or their labour in service of, the Union. I am thinking of someone like Michael Ondaatje, who joined the Union in the mid-1970s, and, while he left for a few years, rejoined at some point and remains a member to this day. What shifts has he seen in the organization over those years and what value has membership brought to him?

I would love to reflect further on the role of the community of the Writers’ Union in conversation with these important cultural critics and writers. They would, I think, capture even more diverse and productive perspectives on the organization than have emerged so far. While Christopher Moore’s oral history project *Founding the Writers’*

*Union of Canada* has been invaluable for this research – particularly as it captured the recollections of several founding members who are now no longer with us, Graeme Gibson chief among them – its focus was on the earliest days of the Writers’ Union’s existence. I suspect there are many more people out there who might offer a take on the Union’s day to day work, and whose perspectives and voices have not yet been captured – particularly those whose perspectives might look productively outside the bounds of the Union itself.

I also envision a book project that stems from the pages I present here. One that is augmented by a chapter dedicated specifically to the labour of Writing Thru Race – that engages Roy Miki’s voluminous archives at the University of British Columbia; that engages the writing of Larissa Lai, Scott McFarlane, Dionne Brand, Althea Prince, and so many others, in thinking through the legacy of that important event; that highlights the coalitional labour that Writing Thru Race required to come into being. I envision vignettes dedicated to Union initiatives and endeavors that I have not covered here – particularly the Union’s financial advocacy, which has led, by my count, to almost a billion dollars invested in Canadian literary makers by the various institutions that Union members’ labour helped to spawn: Access Copyright and The Writers’ Trust, in particular. I envision a chapter specifically about governmental reforms, one that considers how the Union leveraged cultural notoriety into governmental action, by putting pressure on those – so often – arcane and hermetic systems: tax reforms, remaindered editions, copyright law, libel law, censorship laws. These initiatives, while not as conspicuous, are probably where some of the Writers’ Union’s biggest cultural efficacy

rests, as they have indelibly changed the shape of the Canadian literary industry. I envision a chapter, too, dedicated specifically to Graeme Gibson and what led him to corral the early group of interested authors to take on this work. Margaret Atwood has recently said that it was his time in the military which compelled him to organize people – and that intrigues me.

I engage in this work – both the work of the dissertation, and what might come beyond it – because I also envision a field that is attentive to the operative exigencies of power, privilege, and institutionalization. My lens is informed, always, by labour and social justice concerns, as I more broadly position myself and my work as critiquing the structures that underlie our cultural landscape. ‘Context matters’ is a phrase I repeat to myself often, as I remember that the work of recuperating institutional moments and minutiae is pivotal if we are to understand the ways in which institutions substantiate (and sometimes entrench) themselves. But I am also interested in how these structures might be responsive to change, and how dissent and activism can be focalized towards that end.

The Writers’ Union of Canada is a productive example of both poles of this particular question, given its beginnings as a grass-roots formation of writer-activist friendship and its now, much larger, institutionalized reality (as of this writing the organization is over 2000 members strong). This dissertation bears out that tension, as I continue to wonder about the operative role that friendship played in the Union’s formation, and how that operative drive might delineate and complicate organizational and institutional development. There is a node, here, of future research, as I imagine a broader work that asks questions about the roots of organizing work in friendships. So

much of activism, organizing, and social justice work relies on central operational collaborations with people who perceive themselves as being aligned. Often, those alliances bear out in personal relationships that bleed over into organizational relationships, and, if that organizing is ‘successful,’ that might then inform and translate into institutionalization. What are the mechanisms by which these shifts occur and what are their parameters, pitfalls, and potentials? The Writers’ Union has given me a microcosm within which to think about these questions – ones inflected with the Union’s and CanLit’s own particular investments – but I continue to wonder how other organizations and institutions have, or can, navigate growth and development. I continue to wonder about the various instantiations of institutions – how they self-sustain and self-mythologize, how they develop and change, how they respond to challenge and dissent. And, moreover, how these processes, often, are integral to the efficacy of the labour and advocacy that the organization supported in the first place.

To my mind, the Writers’ Union is, ultimately, a microcosm of the bigger systems of industry and ideology that surround it. It is a microcosm that focalized and activated collaboration and coalition, one which defined itself by its community, but that often, too, structurally denied certain people access to that community and its protections. It is productive to consider, perhaps, that the Union may, indeed, be a microcosm of the nation itself – where a dominant mythos and ideology of equity and inclusion works, often dangerously, to efface, silence, and invisibilize the experiences and needs of those on its margins. But part of what makes the Writers’ Union’s history so fascinating is that, organizationally, members took these battles on. While in the minority, and whether it be



in service of labour rights or gender equity or anti-racism, members used the contours of the organization as a place where these ruptures could be considered, debated, and addressed – though, admittedly, never entirely resolved. Equity work of any kind is – by necessity – an ongoing process of negotiation and contestation; continued and sustained pressure is the only way that structures and institutions will respond or change. And the Writers’ Union’s members have continued to recognize that – both at the time of the organization’s founding, and now, almost fifty years later. As wages have dropped in recent years; as the programs set up in the 1970s and 80s have not kept pace with inflation; as technology changes and amendments to the Union’s (and the industry’s) structures remain necessary – Writers’ Union members are continuing to engage in applying ongoing pressure on the systems and structures of their industry. So too, as intersectional equity work continues to build on the work of previous generations of gendered and racialized members.

But this also means that the Union needs to remain responsive and malleable as members continue to actively destabilize the mythos of the inclusive nation, and by extension, of inclusive national institutions such as their own. In the last four years, since the “Appropriation Prize” editorial and its ensuing criticism, the Union has hired an equity consultant, Charles C. Smith, who reviewed their operative dynamics (“Equity Now For Today and Tomorrow [2017]”); BIPOC authors have begun to take on prominent advocacy roles in the organization – once again – as they instituted the recent BIPOC Writers Connect events, where emerging authors can connect with more experienced writers in the membership. The event’s tagline “facilitating mentorship, creating

community” would, I imagine, please the original members of the RMWC, as these kinds of connective collaborative care were precisely what *Appropriate Voice* envisioned. More broadly, the Union’s recent support of authors through the Canadian Writers’ Emergency Relief Fund, a partnership with Access Copyright and The Writers’ Trust in response to Covid-19, speaks to the ongoing valuation of literary labour and support of economically marginalized authors. Margaret Laurence’s original Emergency Committee echoes through this work, as the material support of literary labour, and the recognition of its precarity, remains central to the Writers’ Union’s mandate and efficacy.

These are the types of responsive, attuned, structural interventions that certain members of the organization’s collective have been calling for for many years. And there is a lot of hope in that – in the potential for what the Writers’ Union may continue to do in service of its membership in the future. For it is, undeniably, a collective with incredible clout, power, and sway, that has used its position to materially support the work of practicing professional writers for almost fifty years. What the shape and structure of CanLit would look like without the Writers’ Union’s members’ interventions is something I often think about, and in some sense, it is unimaginable. Still though, as the history in these pages makes clear, the Union was not always a safe and comfortable space for all writers in Canada, though it claimed to be. In its ruptures, the Union acted as a kind of prism for foundational debates about the nature and industry of literature in Canada, as the power dynamics of Canadian publishing – and indeed, the Canadian nation – were, in many ways, reproduced in the structure of the Union itself.

And so it may also be reasonable that, given its history and its nationalisms, many authors might never find a comfortable home in the community of the Writers' Union. When I wonder about this, though, I always return to something Alicia Elliott wrote in "CanLit is a Raging Dumpster Fire" – that at some point, we have to pick up the tools and fight the fire. I'm reminded, too, of what Audrey Thomas and Sandy Duncan wrote in their report about the status of women writers – that "discrimination against anyone discriminates against everyone" (47). I think, too, of a letter Graeme Gibson wrote to Timothy Findley in 1977, about being "worried about worrying about institutionality" (1).<sup>1</sup> The Union had been experiencing challenges as it grew, and Gibson urged Findley to remember the labour and intention at the heart of their collective. He wrote: "so long as there are things to be done and people willing to try to do them, then the Union will probably be alright (less and less innocent, it's true)" (1), but "when we don't see what has to be done, or there aren't people willing to try to and do them, then, it seems to me, the hardness is arrived at..." (1). Returning to Alicia Elliott: "we can't just stand around and complain about the dumpster fire in front of us forever. Eventually we have to grab some fucking fire extinguishers and put that fire out. In other words, we have to sit down, assess the criticism and do the work to fix the problems" (97). Elliott – a mentor for the Union's 2019 BIPOC Connect events – asserts that:

we don't need to wait for stubborn, lagging institutions to change.

We never have. We can make change ourselves, now. In fact, we are. So many amazing people are stepping forward and speaking out, or quietly writing revolutions. Take that momentum and build

on it. Write the books you've always wanted to read. Encourage others to write the books you've always wanted to read. Celebrate those books. Mentor young writers. Become the support you wish you'd had. Put your ego aside and listen to the constructive criticism you need to hear. Learn from that criticism. Give both CanLit and Canada no choice but to become better (97 – 8).

Separated by forty years and by markedly different contexts, the thrust of both Gibson's and Elliott's statements remains in the same direction – of collective work. Of the collective work of making better and more equitable spaces in the Canadian literary field. While the definition of what this looked like began in financial equity for the Writers' Union, various people in its membership have since pushed the discussion – and the Writers' Union's work – into addressing other forms of intersecting inequities. And it seems that, for the Writers' Union, there likely are still people willing to do the work. Willing to see the problems, willing to face those problems, and willing – as so many literary innovators in the Union did before them – to work to make change. It may be that it is the next generation of writers – those who are more critical of CanLit and 'Canada' as formations – who will carry the important labour of collective advocacy forward as they continue to positively inflect the opportunities available for this organization, for this community, for this industry, and for this field.

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> TF Fonds, Box 210, File 47.

### Works Cited

- Adams, Howard. *Prison of Grass: Canada From the Native Point of View*. New Press, 1975.
- “Alterations to a Heritage Property, Designation of a Heritage Property and Authority to Enter into a Heritage Easement Agreement - 4 Avenue Road (Park Plaza Hotel).” Toronto, City Planning Division. April 3, 2017. [www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2017/te/bgrd/backgroundfile-102730.pdf](http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2017/te/bgrd/backgroundfile-102730.pdf). Accessed 15 June 2018.
- “Annual Report 2019-20: Public Lending Right.” Public Lending Right Commission, Ottawa. June 4, 2020. [www.publiclendingright.ca/about/governance/annual-reports](http://www.publiclendingright.ca/about/governance/annual-reports). Accessed 17 January 2021.
- Atwood, Margaret. *The Burgess Shale: The Canadian Writing Landscape of the 1960s*. U of Alberta P, 2017.
- . *The Edible Woman*. McClelland & Stewart, 1969.
- . Letter to Austin Clarke. January 3, 1973. Box 35, File 3, Austin Clarke Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 12 May 2017.
- . Letter to Austin Clarke. February 2, 1973. Box 35, File 3, Austin Clarke Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 12 May 2017.
- . *Surfacing*. McClelland & Stewart, 1972.
- . *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. House of Anansi Press, 1972.
- . “The Writers’ Union of Canada.” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Hurtig, 1985.

- . "Writers' Union Wasn't Secretive." *Toronto Star*, 12 February 1973, p. 7.
- "Authors Want Slice of Library Action." *The Globe and Mail*, 16 September 1983, p. E9.
- Awe, Emma N. "Sister Vision Press: 2SLGBTQIA+ Black Indigenous People of Colour, Voices in History." The Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity, 2020. [www.ccgds-ccdgs.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CCGSD-Sister-Vision-Press-Booklet.pdf](http://www.ccgds-ccdgs.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CCGSD-Sister-Vision-Press-Booklet.pdf). Accessed 7 November 2020.
- Bacque, James. "News Story for the Newsletter." Undated [Fall 1975?]. Box 18, File 3, The Writers' Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 2 February 2021.
- Barnes, LaVern. *The Plastic Orgasm*. McClelland & Stewart, 1971.
- Berton, Pierre. Letter to Naim Kattan, Canada Council. August 14, 1987. Box 136, File 6. The Writers' Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 16 June 2017.
- Beverly, Andrea. "The Feminist Caucus of the League of Canadian Poets: Chapbooks, Archives, and Sara Ahmed's Feminist Affects." *Canadian Literature*, 223 (Winter 2014), pp. 86 – 100, 192.
- Blaise, Clark. *A North American Education*. Doubleday, 1973.
- . Letter to John Metcalf. February 7, 1973. Box 13, File 32, John Metcalf Fonds, University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections, Calgary, Alberta. 27 August 2018.
- . Letter to John Metcalf. February 13, 1973. Box 13, File 32, John Metcalf Fonds,

University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections, Calgary, Alberta. 27

August 2018.

Bobb Smith, Yvonne. “There Is No Place Like Home: Caribbean Women's Feminism in Canada.” *Émigré Feminism: Transnational Perspectives*. Ed. Alena Heitlinger. U of Toronto P, 1999, pp. 149 – 172.

---. *I Know Who I Am: A Caribbean Woman's Identity in Canada*. Women's Press, 2003.

Bodsworth, Fred. Letter to John Metcalf. January 16, 1973. Box 13, File 32, John Metcalf Fonds, University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections, Calgary, Alberta. 28 August 2018.

Bourdieu, Pierre. “The Forms of Capital.” Richardson, J (ed.). *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. Greenwood, 1986, pp. 241-58.

Bourne, Paula. “Introduction.” *Women's Paid and Unpaid Work*, New Hogtown Press, 1985, pp. 9-16.

Bradley-St-Cyr, Ruth. *The Downfall of the Ryerson Press*. 2014. University of Ottawa, PhD Dissertation.

Briskin, Linda. “Women and Unions in Canada: A Statistical Overview.” *Union Sisters: Women in the Labour Movement*, edited by Linda Briskin and Lynda Yanz, Charters, 1983, pp. 28-43.

Brown, James and Seymour Mayne. “Press Release, Ottawa, November 3, 1973.” Rudy Wiebe Fonds, 329/83.26, Box 34, File 1. University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections. 28 August 2018.

Brown, James. Letter to Alden Nowlan. 14 May 1974. Box 5, File 41, Alden Nowlan

Fonds, University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections. 28 August 2018.

Bucknor, Michael. "Canada in Black Transnational Studies: Austin Clarke, Affective Affiliations, and the Cross-Border Poetics of Caribbean Canadian Writing." In *Beyond "Understanding Canada": Transnational Perspectives on Canadian Literature*. Eds. Melissa Tanti, Jeremy Haynes, Daniel Coleman and Lorraine York. U of Alberta P, 2017, pp. 51-77.

Buss, Helen M. *Working in Women's Archives: Researching Women's Private Literature and Archival Documents*. Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2001.

Callwood, June. "Chairman's Report 1979-1980." May 1980. Box 9, File 6, June Callwood Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. 13 October 2018.

---. "Euphoric Meeting Finds 'Tribe' Looking Good After 14 Years." *Globe and Mail*, 4 June 1986, p. A2.

---. Letter to Austin Clarke. September 24 1979. Box 68, File 14, Austin Clarke Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 19 May 2017.

---. Memo to Members of the Political Committee of the Writers' Union. Undated. [1979?]. Box 9, File 6, June Callwood Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. 13 October 2018.

Campbell, Maria. *Halfbreed*. McClelland & Stewart, 1973.

Canada Council for the Arts. *PLR Annual Report, 2016-17*, 9 June 2017,



publiclendingright.ca/-/media/Files/Plr/AnnualReports/AnnualReport2016-2017.pdf. Accessed 16 June 2018.

---. *Recommendations of the Advisory Committee to the Canada Council for Racial Equality in the Arts and The Response of the Canada Council*. The Council, 1992.

Canadian Library Association. Letter to Graeme Gibson [cc'd to Austin Clarke]. June 11, 1973. Box 44, File 1, Austin Clarke Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 17 May 2017.

*CanLit Guides*. Canadian Literature, 2018. canlitguides.ca. Accessed 2 September 2018.

Clarke, Austin. “[Handwritten Notes] Annual Meetings... [etc].” Undated [1973?]. Box 44, File 1, Austin Clarke Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 17 May 2017.

---. Letter to Marian Engel. March 3 1968. *Marian Engel: Life in Letters*. Eds. Christl Verduyn and Kathleen Garay. U of Toronto P, 2004, pp. 69-70.

---. *Membering*. Dundurn, 2015.

---. *When He Was Free and Young and He Used to Wear Silks*. Anansi, 1971.

Clarke, George Elliott. “Africana Canadiana: A Primary Bibliography of Literature by African-Canadian Authors, 1785 – 1997.” *Canadian Ethnic Studies*. 1996, Vol. 28, No. 3, pp. 107 – 210.

---. *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature*. U of Toronto P, 2002.

Clarkson, Adrienne. *Hunger Trace*. McClelland & Stewart, 1970.

---. *A Lover More Condoling*. McClelland & Stewart, 1968.

- . *True to You in My Fashion: A Woman Talks to Men About Marriage*. New Press, 1971.
- Cohen, Matt. *Columbus and the Fat Lady*. Anansi Press, 1972.
- . *Johnny Crackle Sings*. McClelland & Stewart, 1971.
- . *Korsoniloff*. Anansi Press, 1969.
- . Letter to Graeme Gibson. Undated [Fall 1971?]. Box 20, File 11, Graeme Gibson Papers, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto. 10 May 2019.
- . *Typing: A Life in 26 Keys*. Random House Canada, 2000.
- Coleman, Daniel and Donald Goellnicht. "Introduction: 'Race' into the Twenty-First Century." *Essays on Canadian Writing*, Winter 2002, Issue 75, pp. 1-29.
- Cultural Human Resources Council. *Labour Market Information for Canada's Cultural Sector 2019*. Cultural Human Resources Council, 2019.
- [www.culturalhrc.ca/LMI2019](http://www.culturalhrc.ca/LMI2019). Accessed 8 April 2021.
- Cvetkovich, Ann. "In the Archive of Lesbian Feelings." *An Archive of Lesbian Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Duke UP, 2003, pp. 239 – 271.
- CWILA. Canadian Women in the Literary Arts, 2018. [cwila.com](http://cwila.com). Accessed 5 May 2018.
- Internet Archive*. [web.archive.org/web/20180506092010/http://cwila.com/](http://web.archive.org/web/20180506092010/http://cwila.com/). Accessed 27 August 2021.
- Dagg, Anne Innis. "Are Canadian Women Writers Fairly Treated: Final Report on Sexual Discrimination." July 1984. Box 136, File 4, The Writers' Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 16 June 2017.

---. “Small Presses.” July 1984. Box 136, File 4, The Writers’ Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 16 June 2017.

Davey, Frank. “Economics and the Writer.” *History of the Book in Canada, Vol. 3, 1918-1980*. Carole Gerson and Jacques Michon, editors. U of Toronto P, 2007, pp.103 – 113.

Davis, Laura K. and Linda Morra, editors. *Margaret Laurence and Jack McClelland, Letters*. University of Alberta Press, 2018.

Derrida, Jacques. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Trans. Eric Prenowitz. U of Chicago P, 1996.

Dewalt, Bryan. *Technology and Canadian Printing: From Lead Type to Lasers*. National Museum of Science and Technology, 1995.

Dobbs, Kildaire. “Birth Pangs of a Union.” *Toronto Star*, 30 January 1973, p. 28.

---. “Writers Make Fools of Themselves.” *Toronto Star*, December 10, 1971, p. 15.

Dobson, Kit, and Smaro Kamboureli. *Producing Canadian Literature: Authors Speak on the Literary Marketplace*. Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2013.

Doody, Christopher. *A Union of the Inkpot: The Canadian Authors Association, 1921-1960*. 2016. Carleton University, PhD dissertation.

Downey, Donn. “Margaret Laurence: Writer’s Women Among Most Memorable in Canadian Fiction.” *The Globe and Mail*, 6 January 1987, p. A11.

Drainie, Bronwyn. “Minorities Go Toe to Toe with Majority.” *The Globe and Mail*, 30 September 1989, p. C1.

- Duncan, Sandy, and Audrey Thomas. "Preliminary Report [On the Sex-Based Discrimination Questionnaire]." 1984. Box 136, File 4, The Writers' Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 16 June 2017.
- Elliott, Alicia. "CanLit is a Raging Dumpster Fire." September 7, 2017. *Open Book*. [www.open-book.ca/Columnists/CanLit-is-a-Raging-Dumpster-Fire](http://www.open-book.ca/Columnists/CanLit-is-a-Raging-Dumpster-Fire). Accessed May 10 2021.
- . "CanLit is a Raging Dumpster Fire." *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins*. Hannah McGregor, Julie Rak, and Erin Wunker, editors, Book\*hug, 2017, pp. 93-98.
- Engel, Marian. "Canadian Writing Today." Box 26, File 4, Marian Engel Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 30 May 2017.
- . "Chairman's Letter." Undated. [Nov/Dec 1973?]. Box 44, File 1, Austin Clarke Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 17 May 2017.
- . Letter to Alma Lee. July 22, 1976. Box 20, File 1, Judith Merrill Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. 24 October 2018.
- . Letter to Alma Lee. Undated. [May/June 1976?]. Box 27, File 1, The Writers' Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 5 June 2017.
- . Letter to Clark Blaise. 9 June 1974. Box 17, File 46, Clark Blaise Fonds, University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections, Calgary, Alberta. 27 August 2018.

- . Letter to Robert Weaver. 8 March 1974. *Marian Engel: Life in Letters*. Christl Verduyn and Kathleen Garay, editors, U of Toronto P, 2004, p.127.
- . Letter to Timothy Findley. October 18 1973. Box 210, File 26, Timothy Findley and William Whitehead Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. 15 May 2015.
- . “Libraries Forget Why They Exist, Says Writer Protesting Ripoffs.” *The Globe and Mail*, 6 October 1973, p. 7.
- . “Short Speech for Trent.” Fall 1974. Box 26, File 38, Marian Engel Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 31 May 2017.
- . “Solutions: Public Lending Right.” [First Draft]. Box 26, File 31. Marian Engel Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 31 May 2017.
- . “Solutions: Public Lending Right.” [Second Draft.] Box 26, File 31, Marian Engel Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 31 May 2017.
- . “Writers of Canada Unite: The Guest Word.” *New York Times Book Review*, 17 March 1974, p. 46.
- Findley, Timothy. “1992: Timothy Findley.” *A Writer’s Life: The Margaret Laurence Lectures*. McClelland & Stewart, 2011, pp. 86-102.
- . *The Butterfly Plague*. Viking Press, 1969.
- . *The Last of the Crazy People*. Harmondsworth, 1967.

---. “Payment for Public Use.” September 1983. Box 108, File 10, Timothy Findley and William Whitehead Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. 29 October 2018.

---. “Re The Chairmanship and Executive Directorship of The Writers’ Union of Canada.” Undated [November/December 1977?]. Box 210, File 39, Timothy Findley and William Whitehead Fonds. Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. 30 October 2018.

---. “The Tea Party or How I was Nailed by Marian Engel, General Booth and Minn Williams Burge.” *Room of One’s Own*, 9.2, June 1984, pp. 35-40.

“First Draft Constitution League of Canadian Writers.” Box 8, File 8, June Callwood Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. 10 Oct 2018.

“foster, v.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2021, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/73857](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/73857). Accessed 1 April 2021

Franklin, Steven. Letter to Timothy Findley [Form letter to Union Members]. Undated [1977?]. Box 108, File 11, Timothy Findley and William Whitehead Fonds. Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. 29 October 2018.

French, William. “Authors’ Library Dues Are Long Overdue.” *The Globe and Mail*, November 18, 1986, p. D7.

---. “Paying Pennies for Their Thoughts.” *The Globe and Mail*, 15 October 1983, p. A1.

Fung, Richard. “Working Through Appropriation.” *Fuse Magazine*, Summer 1993, Vol. 16, No. 5/6, pp. 16 – 24.

- Gerson, Carole. "The Canon Between the Wars: Field-notes of a Feminist Literary Archaeologist." *Canadian Canons: Essays in Literary Value*. Ed. Robert Lecker. U of Toronto P, 1991, pp. 46-56.
- . "Locating Female Subjects in the Archives." *Working in Women's Archives: Researching Women's Private Literature and Archival Documents*. Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2001, pp. 7 – 22.
- Gerson, Carole and Jacques Michon, editors. *History of the Book in Canada, Vol. 3, 1918-1980*. U of Toronto P, 2007.
- Gibson, Douglas. "Letter to the Editor." *The Globe and Mail*. 27 September 1989, p. A6.
- Gibson, Graeme. "2010 – Graeme Gibson." *A Writer's Life: The Margaret Laurence Lectures*. McClelland & Stewart, 2011, pp. 375-390.
- . *Eleven Canadian Novelists*. Anansi, 1973.
- . Letter to Clark Blaise. December 6, 1972. Box 17, File 46, Clark Blaise Fonds, University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections, Calgary, Alberta. 27 August 2018.
- . Letter to Clark Blaise. December 14, 1974. Box 17, File 46, Clark Blaise Fonds, University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections, Calgary, Alberta. 27 August 2018.
- . Letter to John Metcalf. April 17, 1976. Box 13, File 32, John Metcalf Fonds, University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections, Calgary, Alberta. 28 August 2018.
- . Letter to Timothy Findley. October 25, 1971. Timothy Findley and William

Whitehead Fonds, Box 98, File 20, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. 15 May 2015.

---. Letter to Timothy Findley. April 1977. Timothy Findley and William Whitehead Fonds, Box 98, File 20, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. 17 October 2017.

---. “Report From New Chairman.” 1974. Box 32, File 34. Alden Nowlan Fonds, University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections. 28 August 2018.

Grace, Sherrill. *Tiff: A Life of Timothy Findley*. Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2020.

Green, Truman. *A Credit to Your Race*. Self-Published, 1973. [Reissued by Anvil, 2011].

Harrington, Lyn. *Syllables of Recorded Time: The Story of the Canadian Authors Association, 1921-1981*. Simon & Pierre, 1981.

Hebb, Marian. Letter to The National Council of The Writers’ Union of Canada. April 28, 1978. Box 210, File 47, Timothy Findley and William Whitehead Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. 31 October 2018.

“Hélène Papachristidis Holden.” Order of Canada, March 1, 1995. *The Governor General of Canada*. [www.gg.ca/en/honours/recipients/146-3840](http://www.gg.ca/en/honours/recipients/146-3840). Accessed 8 April 2021.

Huges, Nym. “LeGuin: From the Deepest, Most Secret Cave.” *Kinesis*. December/January 1989, p. 23.

Hutcheon, Linda. *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction*. Oxford UP, 1988.

Indigenous Action Media. “Accomplices not Allies: Abolishing the Ally Industrial



Complex, An Indigenous Perspective.” Version 2, May 2, 2014.

[www.indigenoussaction.org/wp-content/uploads/accomplices-not-allies-print-friendly.pdf](http://www.indigenoussaction.org/wp-content/uploads/accomplices-not-allies-print-friendly.pdf). Accessed 4 June 2018.

Kadar, Marlene. “Afterword.” *Working in Women’s Archives: Researching Women’s Private Literature and Archival Documents*. Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2001, pp. 115 – 117.

Kelly, Peggy Lynn and Josée Vincent. “Writers’ Networks and Associations.” *History of the Book in Canada, Vol. 3, 1918-1980*. Carole Gerson and Jacques Michon, editors. U of Toronto P, 2007, pp. 122 – 129.

Keeshig-Tobias, Lenore. “Stop Stealing Native Stories.” *The Globe and Mail*, 26 January 1990, p. A7.

---. “Stop Stealing Native Stories.” *Introduction to Indigenous Literary Criticism in Canada*. Eds. Heather Macfarlane and Armand Garnet Ruffo. Broadview Press, 2016, pp. 33 – 36.

Khanna, Sanjay. “The Writers’ Union of Canada and Cultural Appropriation.” *Rungh*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1993, pp. 33 – 34.

Kirchhoff, H.J. “Charges of Racism Spark Protest at Writers' Congress.” *The Globe and Mail*, 26 September 1989, p. A19.

---. “Writers Reject Bid to Study Plight of Minorities in Publishing.” *The Globe and Mail*, 30 May 1989, p. A19.

Lacey, Liam. “Writers Revive Censorship-Pornography Debate.” *The Globe and Mail*, 1 June 1987, p. C9.

Lai, Larissa. *Slanting I, Imagining We: Asian Canadian Literary Production in the 1980s and 1990s*. Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2014.

Laurence, Margaret. "Canadian Writers' Union." Undated [1973?]. Box 34, File 1, Rudy Wiebe Fonds, University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections. 28 August 2018.

---. *Dance on the Earth: A Memoir*. McClelland & Stewart, 1989.

---. *The Diviners*. McClelland & Stewart, 1974.

---. Letter to Alma Lee. 9 October 1973. Box 42, File 8, The Writers' Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 6 June 2017.

---. Letter to John Metcalf. November 29, 1973. Box 6, File 27, Item #13, John Metcalf Fonds, University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections. 28 August 2018.

---. Letter to Marian Engel. 23 November 1973. Box 42, File 8, The Writers' Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 6 June 2017.

---. Letter to Timothy Findley [with draft Emergency Committee statement]. November 23, 1973. Box 210, File 25, Timothy Findley and William Whitehead Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. 16 May 2015.

---. Letter to Writers' Union Membership [Introducing Draft Constitution]. Undated [Fall

1973?]. Box 42, File 8, The Writers' Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 6 June 2017.

---. "Open Letter." April 14, 1979. Box 8, File 10, June Callwood Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. 11 October 2018.

Laurence, Margaret and Rudy Wiebe. Letter to Alberta Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Recreation. October 26, 1973. Box 34, File 1, Rudy Wiebe Fonds, University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections. 28 August 2018.

Laxer, Robert. *Canada's Unions*. James Lorimer & Co, 1976.

Lecker, Robert. "Introduction." *Canadian Canons: Essays in Literary Value*. Ed. Robert Lecker, U of Toronto P, 1991. pp. 3 – 16.

Lee, Alma. Letter to Writers' Union Membership, May 11, 1973. Box 44, File 1, Austin Clarke Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 17 May 2017.

---. Letter to Members, September 24, 1973. Box 34, File 2, Rudy Wiebe Fonds, University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections, Calgary, Alberta. 28 August 2018.

---. Letter to John Metcalf. July 22 1976. Box 27, File 1, The Writers' Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Special Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 31 May 2017.

---. Letter to Marian Engel. June 1976. Box 27, File 1, The Writers' Union of Canada

Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Special Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 5 June 2017.

Lind, Loren. “Two Year Project Completed: Authors, Teachers, Produce Guide to Canadian Literature” *The Globe and Mail*, May 7 1977, p. 3.

Linde, Charlotte. *Working in the Past: Narrative and Institutional Memory*. Oxford UP, 2009.

“Local Authors Voice Opinions on Writers’ Union.” *The Ottawa Journal*, 13 November 1973, p. 34.

Macfarlane, Heather and Armand Garnet Ruffo. *Introduction to Indigenous Literary Criticism in Canada*. Broadview Press, 2016.

MacSkimming, Roy. “History of Modern Canadian Book Publishing, Interview #3, Margaret Atwood and Graeme Gibson, Transcript.” May 19, 1999. Box 1, File 6, Roy MacSkimming Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 15 January 2020.

---. *The Perilous Trade: Book Publishing in Canada 1946 – 2006*. McClelland & Stewart, 2007.

---. *Public Lending Right in Canada: Policy Foundations*. Canada Council for the Arts, 2011, [canadacouncil.ca/research/research-library/2011/12/the-policy-foundations-of-public-lending-right-in-canada](http://canadacouncil.ca/research/research-library/2011/12/the-policy-foundations-of-public-lending-right-in-canada). Accessed 15 June 2018.

---. “Writers’ Union Meeting Shows Signs of Enduring Solidarity.” *The Toronto Star*, October 28 1974, p. D6.

Maracle, Lee. *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel*. Liberation Support Movement, 1975. [Reissued

by Women's Press, 1990].

Marchand, Philip. "Getting the Right Chaps In, Keeping the Wrong Chaps Out." *Saturday Night*. August 1973, pp. 19 – 22.

McGregor, Hannah, Julie Rak and Erin Wunker, editors. *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins*. Book\*hug, 2018.

Menzies, Heather. Letter to Anne Innis Dagg. January 4, 1985. Box 136, File 4, The Writers' Union of Canada Fonds, Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 16 June 2017.

Metcalf, John. Letter to Clark Blaise. January 30, 1973. Box 17, File 46, Clark Blaise Fonds, University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections, Calgary, Alberta. 27 August 2018.

---. Letter to Clark Blaise. February 8, 1973. Box 17, File 46, Clark Blaise Fonds, University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections, Calgary, Alberta. 27 August 2018.

---. Letter to Clark Blaise. February 19, 1973. Box 17, File 46, Clark Blaise Fonds, University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections, Calgary, Alberta. 27 August 2018.

---. Letter of Invitation to The Writers' Union of Canada, March 6th, 1973. Box 13, File 32, John Metcalf Fonds, University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections, Calgary, Alberta. 27 August 2018.

---. Letter to Membership, April 3, 1973. Box 44, File 1, Austin Clarke Fonds,

William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 17 May 2017.

---. Letter to Timothy Findley. August 26, 1977. Box 13, File 33, John Metcalf Fonds, University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections, Calgary, Alberta. 28 August 2018.

“Misappropriate, v.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2021, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/119198](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/119198). Accessed 28 May 2021.

Moller, Philip V. “Eclectic Typewriter Revue – Letter to the Editor.” *The Globe and Mail*, 14 May 1977, p. 7.

Moore, Christopher. *Founding The Writers’ Union of Canada: An Oral History*. The Writers’ Union of Canada, 2015.

---. “The Writers’ Union of Canada 1973 – 2007.” *The Writers’ Union of Canada*. [www.writersunion.ca/content/history](http://www.writersunion.ca/content/history). Accessed 13 September 2015.

Morra, Linda M. *Unarrested Archives: Case Studies in Twentieth-Century Canadian Women’s Authorship*. U of Toronto P, 2014.

Moses, Daniel David. “The Trickster’s Laugh: My Meeting with Tomson and Lenore.” *American Indian Quarterly*, Winter-Spring 2004, Vol. 28, No. 1/2, pp. 107 – 111.

Mount, Nick. *Arrival: The Story of CanLit*. Anansi, 2017.

Mowat, Farley. Letter to John Metcalf. January 23, 1973. Box 13, File 32, John Metcalf Fonds, University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections, Calgary, Alberta. 28 August 2018.

Mukherjee, Bharati. “An Invisible Woman.” *Saturday Night*, March 1981, pp. 36 – 40.

---. *The Tiger's Daughter*. Houghton Mifflin, 1971.

Munro, Alice. Letter to John Metcalf. January 15, 1973. Box 13, File 32, John Metcalf Fonds, University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections, Calgary, Alberta. 28 August 2018.

Nelson, Sharon. "Bemused, Branded, and Belittled: Women and Writing in Canada." *Fireweed*, No. 15, 1982, pp. 65 – 102.

New, Bill. *A History of Canadian Literature*. McGill-Queen's UP, 2003.

Niedzviecki, Hal. "Winning the Appropriation Prize." *Write Magazine*, 45.1, Spring 2017, p. 8.

Niedzwiecki, Thaba. *Print Politics: Conflict and Community Building at Toronto's Women's Press*. U of Guelph, MA Thesis. 1997. [www.atrium.lib.uoguelph.ca/xmlui/handle/10214/22413](http://www.atrium.lib.uoguelph.ca/xmlui/handle/10214/22413). Accessed 17 March 2021.

"No PEN Pals." *The Globe and Mail*, September 27 1989, p. A6.

Nowlan, Alden. Letter to Leo Simpson [TWUC Chairman]. 1 July 1979. Box 32, File 31, Alden Nowlan Fonds, University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections. 28 August 2018.

O'Neill, Michael. "The Paradox of Women and Power in the Nonprofit Sector." *Women and Power in the Nonprofit Sector*, edited by Teresa Odendahl and Michael O'Neill, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994, pp. 1-16.

O'Toole, Lawrence. "Writers' Revue Offers Fun, Used Typewriter Ribbons." *The Globe and Mail*, 10 May 1977, p. 21.

Philip, M. NourbeSe. *Blank: Essays & Interviews*. Book\*hug Press, 2017.

- . “The Disappearing Debate.” *This Magazine*, 23.2, July/August 1989, pp. 20 – 24.
- . *Frontiers: Selected Essays and Writings on Racism and Culture, 1984 – 1992*.  
Mercury Press, 1992.
- . “Gut Issues in Babylon: Racism and Anti-Racism in the Arts.” *Fuse Magazine*, 12.5,  
April/May 1989, pp. 13 – 26.
- . “Incident at Congress.” *The Globe and Mail*, 29 September 1989, p. A6.
- . Letter to Penny Dickens [Writers’ Union, with article fragment]. February 26, 1988.  
Box 225, File 22, The Writers’ Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division  
of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario.  
20 June 2017.
- . “The Multicultural Whitewash: Racism in Ontario’s Arts Funding System.” *Fuse  
Magazine*, Vol. 11, No. 3, Fall 1987.
- . “Racism in the Book Business? [Letter to the Editor].” *The Globe and Mail*, 17 June  
1989, p. D7.
- “Poets Protest.” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 5 November 1973, n.p.
- Powers, Ellen. “Untitled [Executive Director’s Report Draft].” Undated [Spring 1978?].  
Box 211, File 1, Timothy Findley and William Whitehead Fonds, Library and  
Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. 31 October 2018.
- Prince, Althea. *Being Black: Essays*. Insomniac Press, 2001.
- “Questionnaire on Racism in Writing and Publishing.” Ad Hoc Committee on Racism in



Writing and Publishing. [Fall?] 1989. Box 133, File 1, The Writers' Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 12 June 2017.

Rochon, Lisa. "Stories by White Writers Rejected: Race Issue Splits Women's Press." *The Globe and Mail*, 9 August 1988, p. C5.

Ross, Val. "Shouting Match Mars Forum on Writers [sic] Union Conference." *The Globe and Mail*, 14 May 1994, p. C15.

Rule, Jane. Letter to John Metcalf. March 24, 1973. Box 13, File 32, Item 53, John Metcalf Fonds, University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections, Calgary, Alberta. 27 August 2018.

Schroeder, Andreas. "Canada's PLR Program: The Untold Story." *Apschroeder.com*, [www.apschroeder.com/About/PLR-Talk.html](http://www.apschroeder.com/About/PLR-Talk.html). Accessed 2 February 2021.

---. "Interview #3: Writers' Union of Canada, Founding the Union Oral History [Andreas Schroeder, interviewed by Christopher Moore, March 21, 2013]." *Apschroeder.com*, [www.apschroeder.com/About/TWUC-Oral-History.html](http://www.apschroeder.com/About/TWUC-Oral-History.html). Accessed 15 September 2016.

Schwartz, Joan M. and Terry Cook. "Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory." *Archival Science*, 2.1, 2002, pp. 1-19.

Skelton, Robin. "Book Reviews in the Times Colonist, Victoria." 1985. Box 104, File 12. The Writers' Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 5 June 2017.

smith, charles c. [sic]. "Equity Now For Today and Tomorrow: Transforming The

Writers' Union of Canada." 27 September 2017. *writersunion.ca*.

[www.writersunion.ca/sites/all/files/attachments/equity-now-charles-c-smith\\_0.pdf](http://www.writersunion.ca/sites/all/files/attachments/equity-now-charles-c-smith_0.pdf). Accessed June 5 2018.

Sneath, David. "Tribe." *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology Online*. doi.org/10.29164/16tribe. Accessed 6 March 2020.

Socken, Paul G., editor. *Intimate Strangers: The Letters of Margaret Laurence and Gabrielle Roy*. U of Manitoba P, 2004.

Statistics Canada. "Number and Proportion of Visible Minority Population in Canada, 1981 – 2036." *Statistics Canada*, 2016, [www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/dai/btd/othervisuals/other010](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/dai/btd/othervisuals/other010). Accessed 21 May 2021.

---. "Preliminary Data on the Survey of Writers, 1980." Box 32, File 3, Marian Engel Fonds. William ready Division of Archives and Special Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 5 June 2017.

"Stewardship." *Merriam-Webster Online*. [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stewardship](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stewardship). Accessed 2 September 2020.

Struthers, Tim. "Some Highly Subversive Activities: A Brief Polemic and a Checklist of Works on Alice Munro." *Studies in Canadian Literature*, Volume 6, Number 1, Winter 1981, pp. 140 – 149.

Taylor, Len. Letter to Pierre Berton. June 11, 1987. Box 104, File 13, The Writers' Union of Canada Fonds, William ready Division of Archives and Special Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 5 June 2017.

Tener, Jean. "Problems of Literary Archives: A Commentary." *Archivaria*, 18, Summer

1984, pp. 228 – 231.

Thacker, Robert. *Alice Munro: Writing Her Lives*. McClelland & Stewart, 2011.

“The Writers’ Union Meets the Royal Commission.” *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada*, 56/1-2, 2018, pp. 141-178.

Thompson, Kent. Letter to Alden Nowlan. March 16, 1974. Box 32, File 31.

Alden Nowlan Fonds, University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections, Calgary, Alberta. 28 August 2018.

Tolan, Fiona. *Margaret Atwood: Feminism and Fiction*. Costerus New Series, Volume 170. Rodopi, 2007.

Twigg, Alan. *Strong Voices: Conversations with 50 Canadian Authors*. Harbour Publishing, 1988.

Verduyn, Christl. “Cavewomen Div(in)ing for Pearls: Margaret Laurence and Marian Engel.” *Margaret Laurence: Critical Reflections*, edited by David Staines, U of Ottawa P, 2001, pp. 23-37.

Verduyn, Christl and Kathleen Garay, editors. *Marian Engel: Life in Letters*. U of Toronto P, 2004.

Vincent, Isabel. “The Fight for a Truly National Literature.” *The Globe and Mail*, 23 August 1990, p. C1.

Vision 21. Letter to The Writers’ Union of Canada [Form Letter to Cultural Institutions Supporting PEN]. November 1989. Box 133, File 1, The Writers’ Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 12 June 2017.

- . "PEN Canada Locks Out Writers of Colour [Pamphlet]." Box 133, File 1, The Writers' Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 12 June 2017.
- Wainwright, J.A., editor. *A Very Large Soul: Selected Letters from Margaret Laurence to Canadian Writers*. Cormorant Books, 1995.
- Ward, Frederick. *Riverslip: Black Memories*. Tundra, 1974.
- Weinzweig, Helen. Letter to June Callwood. August 18 1973. Box 8, File 8, June Callwood Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa Ontario. 10 Oct 2018.
- . "Writers' Union Organising [sic] Meeting [Journal Fragment]." Undated [June 1973?]. Box 34, File 105. Helen Weinzweig Papers. Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario. 7 May 2019.
- White, Julie. "Looking Back: A Brief History of Everything." *Equity, Diversity, and Canadian Labour*, Gerald Hunt and David Rayside, editors, U of Toronto P, 2015, pp. 25 – 48.
- Whitehead, Joshua. "On Indigenegativity: Rejection and Reconciliation in a Pool of Liberal Tears." *Write Magazine*, 45.1, Spring 2017, pp. 10 - 11.
- Wiebe, Rudy. Letter to Alma Lee. 20 November 1974. Box 42, File 11, The Writers' Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 20 June 2017.
- . Letter to Creative Writing Department Chairs [Draft]. April 21, 1987. Box 136, File 6, The Writers' Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 16 June 2017.

- Williams, Gershom Antonio. *The Native Strength*. Century Press, 1968.
- Wolters, Benita. *The Early Years of the Canadian League of Composers*. University of British Columbia, MA Thesis, 1999.
- Woodcock, George. "The Liberation of Canada's Writers: The Mermaid Inn." *The Globe and Mail*, March 10 1979, p. 6.
- Worthington, Peter. "Writers' Union of Canada." *The Toronto Sun*, November 27 1973, p. 9.
- Writers' Development Trust. *Introductory Handbook: Resource Guides for the Teaching of Canadian Literature*. Coach House Press, 1976.
- . *Resource Guides for the Teaching of Canadian Literature: [v.1] North / Native Peoples*. Coach House Press, 1976.
- . *Resource Guides for the Teaching of Canadian Literature: [v.2] Coming of Age in Canada*. Coach House Press, 1976.
- . *Resource Guides for the Teaching of Canadian Literature: [v.3] Immigrant Experience*. Coach House Press, 1976.
- . *Resource Guides for the Teaching of Canadian Literature: [v.4] New Land / New Language*. Coach House Press, 1976.
- . *Resource Guides for the Teaching of Canadian Literature: [v.5] Family Relationships*. Coach House Press, 1976.
- . *Resource Guides for the Teaching of Canadian Literature: [v.6] Action / Adventure*. Coach House Press, 1976.
- . *Resource Guides for the Teaching of Canadian Literature: [v.7] Quebec Literature in*

*Translation*. Coach House Press, 1976.

---. *Resource Guides for the Teaching of Canadian Literature: [v.8] Images of Biculturalism*. Coach House Press, 1976.

---. *Resource Guides for the Teaching of Canadian Literature: [v.9] Social Realism*. Coach House Press, 1976.

---. *Resource Guides for the Teaching of Canadian Literature: [v.10] Women in Canadian Literature*. Coach House Press, 1976.

Writers' Trust of Canada. *A Writer's Life: The Margaret Laurence Memorial Lectures*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2011.

Writers' Union of Canada. "All Star Eclectic Typewriter Review – Advertisement." *The Globe and Mail*, 30 April 1977, p. 61.

---. "Archives Questionnaire to Writers, 1979." Box 64, File 2, The Writers' Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Special Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 3 December 2015.

---. "Authors and Archives: A Short Guide." The Writers' Union of Canada, 1979. Box 15, File 56. Mordecai Richler Fonds. University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections. Calgary, Alberta. 13 November 2015.

---. *Book Pages Survey: 1987 – 88*. The Writers' Union of Canada, 1988.

---. "Canada Council Reading Tours Report: 1978-79." Box 9, File 5. June Callwood Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. 13 October 2018.

---. *Canada Writes! The Writers' Union of Canada Members' Book*, K.A Hamilton editor, Writers' Union of Canada, 1977.

- . “Canadian Writers’ Union Conference Agenda” Box 71, File 17 Reel #H1264, Image #1508, FR Scott Fonds, Library and Archives Canada. 25 October 2018.
- . *C\*ns\*rsh\*p: Stopping the Book Banners*. The Book and Periodical Development Council, 1978.
- . “Compensation for Authors [Press Release].” Undated [late 1970s]. Box 27, File 1, The Writers’ Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 16 June 2017.
- . “Constitution [1973 - Draft].” FR Scott Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Box 71, File 17, Reel #H1264, Images #1407 to 1414. 25 Oct 2018.
- . “Constitution [1973 - Final].” Box 44, File 1, Austin Clarke Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 17 May 2017.
- . “Constitution [1983].” Box 32, File 8, Marian Engel Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 5 June 2017.
- . “Demonstration [Payment for Public Use Flyer].” September 15, 1983. Box 108, File 10. Timothy Findley and William Whitehead Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. 29 October 2018.
- . “Education Project.” January 1976. Box 20, File 2, Judith Merril Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. 24 October 2018.
- . “The Experience of Authors with Regards to the Disposal of Their Archival

- Materials.” [1977?]. Box 104, File 5, The Writers’ Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Special Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 23 April 2017.
- . “Final Report on Sexual Discrimination.” 1984. Box 136, File 4, The Writers’ Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 16 June 2017.
- . “For Your Urgent Attention [Catalogue of Members Memo].” [January?] 1977. Box 32, File 31, Alden Nowlan Fonds, University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections, Calgary, Alberta. 28 August 2018.
- . “Guidelines to The Writers’ Union of Canada Publishing Agreement.” Undated [Fall 1976?]. Box 32, File 6, Marian Engel Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 5 June 2017.
- . “Guidelines to The Writers’ Union of Canada Agreement [Draft].” July 1976. Box 20, File 1, Judith Merrill Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. 24 October 2018.
- . “History of the Writers’ Union of Canada.” Undated [1980s?]. Box 32, File 6, Marian Engel Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 5 June 2017.
- . “Improvement and Expansion of Existing Council Support for Authors Tours.” 1975.



Box 18, File 3, The Writers' Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 12 February 2021.

- . "Membership Brochure." [1973?]. Box 8, File 8, June Callwood Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. 10 October 2018.
- . "Minutes, Annual General Meeting of the Writers' Union of Canada. 4, 5, 6 May 1978, National Arts Centre, Ottawa." Box 119, File 5, The Writers' Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 5 June 2017.
- . "Minutes, Annual General Meeting of the Writers' Union of Canada, 1985." Box 119, File 12. The Writers' Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 5 June 2017.
- . "Motion on Misappropriation." June 7, 1992. Box 225, File 22, The Writers' Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 20 June 2017.
- . "Newsletter [#1 June 1973]." Box 210, File 25. Timothy Findley and William Whitehead Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. 19 May 2015.
- . "Newsletter #2." Undated. [August 1973?]. Box 29, File 3, George Ryga Fonds, University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections, Calgary, Alberta. 13 November 2015.
- . "Newsletter #3." Austin Clarke Fonds, Box 44, File 1. William Ready Division of

Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 19 May 2017.

---. “Newsletter #7 – April 1974.” Timothy Findley and William Whitehead Fonds, Box 210, File 28. Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. 19 May 2015.

---. “Newsletter #31 – March 10, 1978.” Austin Clarke Fonds, Box 44, File 1. William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 19 May 2017.

---. *Our Books in the Curriculum [v. 1], Pre-school. Kindergarten, Grades 1-8*. The Writers’ Union of Canada, 1985.

---. *Our Books in the Curriculum [v.2], Grades 9-13*. The Writers’ Union of Canada, 1986.

---. *Our Books in the Curriculum [v.3], Undergraduate, Adult*. The Writers’ Union of Canada, 1986.

---. “Press Release. November 4, 1973.” Box 44, File 1, Austin Clarke Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 17 May 2017.

---. “Program - All Star Eclectic Typewriter Revue.” Box 9, File 61, Christie Harris Fonds, University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections, Calgary, Alberta. 29 August 2018.

---. “Public Lending Right in Canada: Brief From the Writers’ Union of Canada.” 1974. Box 26, File 32, Marian Engel Fonds. William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 21 May 2017.

- . “Questionnaire [Income].” August 5 1974. Box 32, File 31, Item 14, Alden Nowlan Fonds, University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections, Calgary, Alberta. 28 August 2018.
- . “The Racial Minority Writers Committee [Questionnaire].” Box 133, File 11, The Writers’ Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Special Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 12 June 2017.
- . “Report on High School-Elementary School Reading Tours, Sept-Dec 1975.” Box 27, File 1, The Writers’ Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 31 May 2017.
- . “Report on the Racial Minority Writers’ Planning Session.” Box 133, File 12, The Writers’ Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 14 June 2017.
- . “Sex-Based Discrimination in the Writing World [Questionnaire.]” November 1983. Box 136, File 4, The Writers’ Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 16 June 2017.
- . “Statement from the TWUC Equity Task Force in Response to WRITE MAGAZINE editorial ‘Winning the Appropriation Prize’.” 15 May 2017.  
[www.writersunion.ca/news/statement-twuc-equity-task-force-response-write-magazine-editorial-winning-appropriation-prize](http://www.writersunion.ca/news/statement-twuc-equity-task-force-response-write-magazine-editorial-winning-appropriation-prize). 20 May 2017.
- . “Statement [Press Release #1 Draft].” Undated [Fall 1973?]. Box 42, File 10, The

- Writers' Union of Canada Fonds, William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. 9 June 2017.
- . "Statistics Regarding Canada Council Readings." 1984. Box 108, File 11, Timothy Findley and William Whitehead Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. 29 October 2018.
- . "Ten Years of Union Accomplishments." Rudy Wiebe Fonds, Box 34, File 1. University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections, Calgary, Alberta. 28 August 2018.
- . "Update." 21 February 1976. Box 32, File 31, Alden Nowlan Fonds, University of Calgary Archives and Special Collections. 28 August 2018.
- . *Who's Who in The Writers' Union of Canada: A Directory of Members*. The Writers' Union of Canada, 1988.
- . *Who's Who in The Writers' Union of Canada: A Directory of Members, Twentieth Anniversary Issue*. The Writers' Union of Canada, 1993.
- . *The Writers' Union of Canada: A Directory of Members*. Ted Whittaker, editor. The Writers' Union of Canada, 1981.
- . "Writers' Union Expands Its Membership Criteria." Press release, 8 January 2020. [www.writersunion.ca/news/writers-union-expands-its-membership-criteria](http://www.writersunion.ca/news/writers-union-expands-its-membership-criteria). 4 February 2020.
- York, Lorraine. *Margaret Atwood and the Labour of Literary Celebrity*. U of Toronto P., 2013.
- Zerker, Sally. *The Rise and Fall of the Toronto Typographical Union, 1832 - 1972: A Case Study of Foreign Domination*. U of Toronto P, 1982.