“CANLIT” AND CAPITALISM

“CANLIT” AND CAPITALISM: *CANADA READS* AND THE CIRCULATION OF CLASS POLITICS THROUGH CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN FICTION

By ANDREW MCWHINNEY, B.A. (HONS.)

A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts

McMaster University MASTER OF ARTS (2021) Hamilton, Ontario (English)

TITLE: “CanLit” and Capitalism: *Canada Reads* and the Circulation of Class Politics Through Contemporary Canadian Fiction

AUTHOR: Andrew McWhinney, B.A. (Hons.) (University of Alberta)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Lorraine York

NUMBER OF PAGES: x, 133

Lay Abstract

This thesis examines how messages of class conflict in three pieces of Canadian fiction — Megan Gail Coles' *Small Game Hunting at the Local Coward Gun Club,* Tracey Lindberg's *Birdie,* and André Alexis's *Fifteen Dogs* — are suppressed in broader public discussions of each piece, particularly on the CBC Radio program *Canada Reads.* Reading both the books and the *Canada Reads* seasons each book appeared on through a neo-Marxist lens that places class in relation to other systems of oppression, such as gender, race, sexuality, and settler-colonialism, I argue that *Canada Reads* serves as a cultural arm of the neoliberal Canadian state's project of erasing the political saliency of class conflict — something that it requires in order to reproduce itself. Based on this finding, I turn at the end to alternative models of shared reading that could serve as spaces that recognize class messages in literature.

Abstract

This thesis explores, through a neo-Marxist/cultural materialist lens, how discourses of class conflict in three pieces of contemporary Canadian fiction — Megan Gail Coles' *Small Game Hunting at the Local Coward Gun Club* (2019), Tracey Lindberg's *Birdie* (2015), and André Alexis's *Fifteen Dogs* (2015) — are suppressed in broader public discussions of the texts, particularly on the CBC Radio program *Canada Reads.* Through close-reading the texts and their respective *Canada Reads* seasons for how class is operating "equiprimordially" (Ashley Bohrer) — an intersectional conceptualization of class that views class and its relations to other systems of oppression such as race, gender, sexuality, and settler-colonialism as co-constitutive, not separate — I argue that *Canada Reads* serves as a cultural arm of the neoliberal Canadian state's project of erasing the political saliency of class conflict so that it may continue to reproduce its conditions of existence. To demonstrate this, I first outline the history of Canadian state cultural policy in relation to class, as well my theoretical framework. I then close read the thesis's three pieces of fiction to determine how they mobilize class in relation to Canadian state narratives of class. Following this, I close read each book's respective *Canada Reads* broadcast to see if class is taken up at all in the discussions. I then examine *Canada Reads* as a "mass reading event" (MRE) [Danielle Fuller and DeNel Rehberg Sedo] and explore alternative modes of shared reading that escape the nationalist logic of *Canada Reads* and thus have potential for bringing class discourses forward. Ultimately, the thesis demonstrates that *Canada Reads* as a model of shared reading is too deeply tied to the liberal humanist values of the Canadian state for any

radical class discourse to emerge from it. Radical class discourses in literature that could spur collective, transformative action must come from elsewhere.

Acknowledgements

Writing a thesis during the COVID-19 lockdown has been an experience, to say the least. Finishing one at the beginning of the lockdown was not an easy task, but I can certainly say it was much easier the second time around, not just because of practice, but because of the amazing people who supported me along the way. I want to take the time to thank some of those people (these acknowledgements are not exhaustive; if they were, we'd never get to the thesis).

Firstly, I want to thank my supervisor Lorraine York, who has been so insanely supportive throughout not just the writing of this project, but in my other endeavors beyond the thesis. Thank you for your mentorship. Thank you to my first reader Daniel Coleman, who not only gave amazing feedback on this thesis, but has facilitated amazing space for me to grow as a student and writer with him and my fellow students in the Department of English and Cultural Studies in two of his classes this year. I also want to thank Katrina Vogan for facilitating summer working groups for the MA students in English and Cultural Studies; it was great having a supportive and relaxing space to work and talk with my fellow students like we were on-campus. Thank you to my fellow graduate students in the department with whom I had classes; learning with you folks felt effortless and nourishing even in our digital circumstances. I hope I get to meet all of you in person some day soon.

Thank you to my family; thank you to my mom and dad for supporting me in my graduate studies and my move across the country in the middle of the pandemic. Thank you to my grandparents for being supportive even from far away; thanks especially to my

grandfather, who helped me move to Hamilton and set up my apartment. I would have spent weeks getting everything together without you!

Thank you to my friends back home in Alberta and my friends who returned from to their home provinces from Alberta; remaining connected with you folks has kept me sane and not alone amidst everything. Thank you to my colleagues at *Negation Magazine*, whom my work with has helped me reflect on the interrelation between my academic and non-academic work and made me a better think and writer.

Finally, I want to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), who generously funded my research via a grant, without which this project would not have been possible.

Table of Contents

Introduction: Class, Literature, and Criticism

In a previous research project of mine, "Fighting the Absence: Class and Contemporary Canadian Fiction," I sought to understand why, in the contemporary Canadian moment, class politics seemed to be nearly invisible in mainstream political discourse yet so present in works of Canadian fiction. Through close readings of three examples of widely-circulated and consecrated contemporary Canadian fiction, I demonstrated that there was indeed strong class awareness and class criticism of the Canadian state present in Canadian fiction, even as the Canadian state promotes a neoliberal understanding of the subject that undermines the political efficacy of questions of class struggle in the political sphere. In the conclusion of the project, I briefly examined the conditions of circulation of these texts — how their appearance on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's (CBC) program *Canada Reads* or their consecration through receiving literary awards affected the reception of their class messaging. Based on my findings — which showed that the conditions of circulation for the texts in question more likely than not served to undercut their more radical messaging — I called for future research to: a) centre understandings of class and capitalism in its analysis of Canadian fiction, as it was clear that Canadian fiction was "an essential site for examining the dynamics of class politics in Canada, given class's relative invisibility in mainstream political discussion" (McWhinney 62); b) consider questions of circulation in its examination of radical texts, as "the social and economic forces around a text affect its reach and the ways in which it is both read and discussed by readers" (62), and thus their material political effects; and c) consider "what kinds of alternative circulatory

models could or may exist that could help push for greater social change, including class consciousness, through the use of cultural production" (62). It is in the spirit of all these calls that I embark on this research project.

In this thesis, I will interrogate the effects that the CBC program *Canada Reads* has on the circulation of class discourse in pieces of contemporary Anglo-Canadian fiction that have appeared on the program. I have selected three pieces of fiction for examination — *Small Game Hunting at the Local Coward Gun Club* by Megan Gail Coles, *Fifteen Dogs* by André Alexis, and *Birdie* by Tracie Lindberg — for several reasons: they have all appeared on *Canada Reads*, and they are drawn from what I conceive of as several essential but not homogenous sectors of the literatures and cultures produced in what is called Canada: English-Canadian writing, migrant writing, and Indigenous writing, respectively[1].

The goals of this project are three-fold. First, this project will confirm, in resistance to the mythologies perpetuated by the Canadian state, that there is a not-insignificant presence of anti-capitalist class discourse present in contemporary Canadian fiction, whether that discourse occurs more explicitly or implicitly in the text. Second, this project endeavors to show how popular forms of circulation for contemporary Canadian fiction — in particular the mass reading event of *Canada Reads* — work alongside the mythologizing apparatus of the Canadian state to quash or bracket discussions of radical class discourse present in Canadian fiction. Third and finally, this

[1] The other essential field that is missing from this project is Québécois writing, as well as French-Canadian writing more broadly. Due to a combination of achievable scope within the constraints of the MA thesis form and my lack of fluency in French, I will not be examining any French-Canadian literature in this thesis, nor will I be examining *Canada Reads'* Radio-Canada counterpart *Le Combat des Livres.*

project will propose, in the stead of mass reading events like Canada Reads, new social formations of literary consumption that could allow for discussion and action relating to radical class discourse in Canadian fiction, holding that said action should ultimately point towards the dismantling and replacement of capitalism — alongside the interlinked systems of settler colonialism, racism, and hetero-patriarchy.

The thesis will proceed as follows: this introductory chapter will consist of both a brief, relevant history of what has been called the Canadian literary field and its relation to class politics, as well as an outline of the materialist theoretical framework of the project. My second chapter will consist of close readings of each piece of fiction to examine how each engages with class and whether they suggest radical departures from dominant Canadian state narratives of class. My third chapter will then examine how each piece of fiction "performed" on *Canada Reads*, incorporating discursive analysis of the discussions of each text on the program. My final chapter, based on my findings, will diagnose issues with the transmission of radical class messages through mass reading events like *Canada Reads*, looking to suggest ways such reading practices and institutions can be reformed, revolutionized, or circumvented in order for these messages to spread.

History of the Canadian Literary Field

Since the early 20th century, culture has played a significant role as a tool of Canadian state reproduction[2]. While the particular nature of this reproduction has changed

[2] I use "reproduction" as Étienne Balibar uses it in his essay "On The Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism." In his reading of Karl Marx's theory of reproduction, Balibar argues that "each mode of production continually reproduces the social relations of production presupposed by its functioning" (437).

over time — from securing a unique national identity in the imagination of Canadian citizens to securing a unique space in the realm of economic cultural exchange — it has always served in some sense to justify and perpetuate a liberal state hegemony. Borrowing from Ian McKay's reading of Canada through a "liberal order framework," this thesis imagines Canada "simultaneously as an extensive projection of liberal rule across a large territory and an intensive process of subjectification, whereby liberal assumptions are internalized and normalized within the dominion's subjects" (3). A liberal order, McKay argues, "encourages and seeks to extend across time and space a belief in the epistemological and ontological primacy of the category 'individual'" (3) — performed through both material violence and ideological coercion, as well as compromise with competing imaginaries antithetical to liberalism (i.e. socialism, conservative movements, Indigenous nationhood, etc.). This liberal order appears in multiple historical forms and in different guises; as McKay notes, "within the overall framework of the Canadian project of liberal order, a multitude of liberalisms share a definitional family resemblance, but not an essential identity" (5). In this understanding, liberalism is analytically separate from capitalism, though they have been deeply interlinked since the mid-19th Century. Through an examination of the historical machinations of capital and shifts in the Canadian state, one can begin to analyze the complex ways in which the Canadian state has attempted to constitute itself as a liberal order in various forms; of particular salience for this project, one can see how Canadian

In this formulation, there is no stark division between the "base" and "superstructure" — economy and ideology — as in orthodox Marxism; instead these two levels are co-constituting, with the economy as determinant-in-the-last-instance.

state policy on cultural production plays into its ideological project — an ideological project motivated by a particular class politics. This class politics is one built on a bourgeois discourse that seeks to erase the presence of class conflict to continue the reproduction of capitalism.

In order to situate the values and guise of the contemporary Canadian liberal order and its relations to cultural production, I will first lay out a map of what has been called the Canadian literary field. Against what the figure of a map might convey — static, unchanging locations — the map I wish to draw is a historical one, demonstrating how shifts in policy and the machinations of capital have affected the field to the present day. Following Diana Brydon, it can be said that there are three central types of literary institutions in the Canadian literary field: "government departments, agencies, and arms-length institutions that depend for their funding on the state; the market sector; and civil society non-profit organizations" ("Metamorphoses" 5-6). Given my focus on the Canadian state's investments in promoting literature as a site of Canadian national culture-building, I will be limiting my scope of analysis to that area.

In the mid-twentieth century, Canadian state cultural policy placed a secondary importance on the book. The 1951 report from the Massey Royal Commission — established in 1949 out of concern for the perceived encroachment of American culture within Canadian borders — stated, for example, that although literature was certainly important, "[it] had 'taken a second place, and indeed fallen far behind painting' as a medium of national expression in Canada" (qtd. in Litt 39). While the report led to the establishment of important cultural institutions such as the National Library in 1953 and

the Canada Council for the Arts (CCFA) in 1957, direct government support for the book industry in particular would not come until the late 1960s/early 1970s, as seen through the government-commissioned 1969 report *The Book Publishing and Manufacturing Industry in Canada*, as well as the establishment of the Ontario Royal Commission of Books in 1970 in response to the buying-out and financial failure of multiple major Canadian publishers. Additional direct supports came later in the 70s, with the CCFA in 1972 establishing “a cultural industries policy of block grants to publishers who were actively producing and marketing Canadian books" (Litt 42); the establishment of the Canadian Book Publishing Industry Development Program in 1979, which "provided annual subsidies for Canadian-owned publishers at levels calculated according to their size and budgets" (Litt 43); and the Public Lending Right (PLR) program[3], which while not established until 1986, came to be the subject of a Canada Council study committee in 1977 (MacSkimming 8), in great deal because of the labour activism of The Writers’ Union of Canada (TWUC) (Schroeder 54). As Paul Litt points out, “the Massey Commission's observation that literature was overshadowed by painting no longer held: writing was undisputedly the standard bearer of Canadian cultural nationalism, a success story that filled nationalists with hope for Canada's future” (44).

Government support for the book industry, however, began to get cut in the 1990s with the onset of Canadian neoliberal policy due to growing pressures from globalization and its evolving capitalist logics; specific policy measures included funding cuts to the

[3] The Canadian PLR program, like other PLR programs, pays compensation to authors for the use of their books in libraries.

CCFA and the enfolding of the 1987 Free Trade Agreement into NAFTA in 1992, liberalizing trade and putting Canadian booksellers at risk of global takeover. Since this time, neoliberalism has grown and continues to be the dominant framework of Canadian state cultural policy. I would seek to define neoliberalism, as Janine Brodie has, based on two central features: that it "[envisions] a state that both elevates the market over all else and adopts market logics to guide its own conduct" and "strives to embed market logics into the everyday calculations of who we are and how we should live our lives" (Brodie 100). According to this definition, neoliberalism is simply the result of the commodification of everyday life. With the neoliberal turn, Barbara Godard argues that from the viewpoint of the Canadian state, "literature no longer 'expresses' and so binds territory, nor does it retain its utopian dimensions as an ideal human realm of value. Instead, culture is caught up in struggles for economic domination through cultural exchange in a different economy of value that turns not on the mediating power of labour but on speculation on the market itself" (222). The Canadian state's conception of nationalism shifted from securing a symbolic space for Canadian culture to the deployment of Canadian culture as international commodity. The goal of this new Canadian cultural project is not primarily to attempt to speak to a strong, essential Canadian "essence" that legitimates and coheres the nation materially and symbolically, but to use this "essence" to emphasize a more subtle Canadian cultural flavour with a profitable sign exchange value that stands out on the global stage: one marked by a sense of good liberal progressivism, multiculturalism and politeness. There is thus a

subsumption of the symbolic value of Canadian culture into a primarily economic logic in the Canadian state's treatment of culture, whereby

> Canada's protectionist cultural policy approach is now part of the discourse of Canadian neoliberalism, of the latter's attempt to profitably incorporate the ideological and aesthetic potential of culture and cultural production into its economic potential, while simultaneously decreeing as "common, public interest" the commercialization and privatization of cultural goods, policies, and public functions (Milz, "A Materialist Study" 66).

With this shift, Godard claims that "Canadian culture has become synonymous with the culture of capital" (225) — a bold claim, but one that flattens the Canadian book industry to a single, homogenous neoliberal logic. Sabine Milz's conception of the contemporary book industry under neoliberalism, based on interviews with independent publishers and booksellers in the Canadian Prairies, offers a more nuanced framework for understanding the effects of neoliberalism on the book industry:

> As cultural businesses not primarily driven by the profit motive, the independent publishers and booksellers I interviewed give evidence that contemporary cultural markets are made up of diverse economic forms rather than constituting one singular neo-liberal-capitalist economy. They do so, however, in their embeddedness in specific multi-scalar networks of capitalist, neo-liberal market activity and in a market-reach and reputation-based stratification of literary power descending from international to national, regional, provincial, and local. (Milz, "Canadian Literature" 32)

As Milz puts it, contemporary Canada's national literary space is both "simultaneously centralized and decentralized (rather than eroded)" (34); literary power is strongly concentrated in Toronto — housing the headquarters of large bookstore chains, domestic and foreign publishers, and national media outlets that allow for easy mass distribution and circulation — but technological developments have allowed for a greater number of independent writers, publishers, and booksellers to enter the market at the local level. Thus, what is deemed "CanLit" is still up for contestation, even as "the very real

asymmetries of power that underlie the current conditions and spatializations of literary production, distribution, and promotion in Canada" and the role "[they] play a role in the creation of a shared sense of national literature" (Milz 33) continue to affect the state of the field.

What does this shift in the Canadian state's treatment of domestic cultural production entail for the type of class politics it is trying to enforce? I argue that the neoliberal turn has brought with it a state conception of class politics, closely linked to the liberal conception of liberty, equality, and property, that attempts to erase class contradictions through the assertion of a universal Canadian "middle class." The most blatant signal of this project was the creation of the Ministry of Middle Class Prosperity in November 2019, whose minister, Mona Fortier, was not able to give a cohesive definition of what the middle class was when interviewed by the CBC:

> Well, I define the middle class where people feel that they can afford their way of life. They have quality of life. And they can... send their kids to play hockey or even have different activities. It's having the cost of living where you can do what you want with your family. So I think that it's really important that we look at, how do we make our lives more affordable now? And that's, for me, something that we will be putting measures, and really putting efforts, with my colleagues, to have a strong economy. (CBC Radio 2019)

The nebulousness of this definition hinges on a strong emphasis on a liberal focus on *choice*: families are supposed to be able to freely consume comfortably no matter the cost of living, which can vary depending on what individuals and their families want to consume, where they want to live, and so on. In a February 2020 press release, Fortier stated that "increasing the prosperity and quality of life of the middle class and *those working hard to join it* is central to our government's policy-making, so that we can build

on our progress and focus on building a stronger, healthier, more prosperous life for Canadians" (qtd. in Department of Finance Canada 2020, emphasis mine). In this public communication, class relations are simultaneously flattened and disappeared; upper classes and owners of the means of production are completely absent, and the middle class is seen as a central mass to be joined by all others who are outside of it. The logic is aspirational and teleological: the middle class is the end-point for all non-upper-class Canadian citizen-subjects, who are *a priori* working towards it. Considered alongside the policy changes from the 90s onwards, it is clear that the Canadian state, in its contemporary neoliberal form, pushes a particular narrative of a middle-class subject. The Canadian state's neoliberal cultural policy entails, as Jeff Derksen explains,

> a cultural project (massive, perhaps, as the previous national-cultural program) where national-subjects are asked to reimagine themselves along the matrix of neoliberal values and common sense: property rights trump human rights, state programs interfere with daily life rather than ameliorate conditions; forms of collectivity are repressive; competition between spaces and places characterize the world; and in general that one must live one's life through negotiating the market rather than negotiating or contesting the state. (13)

This is the cultural project of the neoliberal order: the ongoing subjectification of citizen-subjects to the logic of the commodity, which has begun to encroach even on the three central tenets of liberalism itself. The effects of this encroachment can be seen in the output of one of the key promoters of "CanLit:" the CBC.

The Role of the CBC and Canada Reads

Established under similar cultural protectionist pretexts as other Canadian state cultural institutions, the CBC came to be 1936. A state-sponsored media outlet, its mandate is "to inform, enlighten and entertain; to contribute to the development of a

shared national consciousness and identity; to reflect the regional and cultural diversity of Canada; and to contribute to the development of Canadian talent and culture" ("Organization Profile - Canadian Broadcasting Corporation" 2020). In terms of its relation to the book trade, the CBC played and continues to play a large role in the promotion, distribution, and production of Canadian literary products; it has run various programs dedicated to the promotion of Canadian literature, including the influential *Anthology* (1954-85) produced by Robert Weaver[4], which included on-air book reviews and readings from the work of Canadian writers. Currently there are three CBC programs that centre on literature: *Writers & Company* (1990-current), *The Next Chapter* (2008-present), and *Canada Reads* (2002-present). While *Writers and Company* interviews writers from around the world, and *The Next Chapter* focus on interviews and discussions with Canadian and Indigenous writers, the most explicitly nationalist of these three programs is *Canada Reads.* First aired in 2002, *Canada Reads* is an annual radio program that operates in a "battle of the books" format, with Canadian celebrities "defending" a chosen Canadian work in a series of debates regarding which of the competing books Canadians should read. It can be best characterized as a sort of "infotainment" program, symptomatic and emblematic of neoliberal forms of culture. Beyond its radio program form, *Canada Reads* is also what Danielle Fuller and DeNel Rehberg Sedo call a mass reading event (MRE): a multimedia project that "actively encourage citizens of one town, city, state, or nation to read or discuss a selected work [or works] of literary fiction…

[4] Weaver also established the still-active CBC Literary Awards (now known as the CBC Literary Prize) in 1979, attracting and promoting the work of Canadian writers in three main fields: fiction, creative non-fiction, and poetry.

[using] mass media to promote and enable reader participation" ("Reading Spectacle" 9). As an MRE, *Canada Reads* actively attempts to get Canadians to participate in the debate through social media and other media — and probably most importantly, by purchasing and reading the selected books for each year. MREs serve multiple functions, but for the purposes of this thesis, two are key: an ideological function promoting national identity and the "implied idea that shared reading makes people better, more outward-looking and socially responsible citizens" (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, "Beyond the Book" 127), as well as a market function, where certain Canadian books are granted symbolic capital through their selection for the MRE, "rendering [them] worthy of being selected by a reader and offering a recommendation from a source that does not appear to be directly involved in the production and selling of the product" (141).

Canada Reads has received significant attention from literary critics. Laura Moss and Smaro Kamboureli argue that *Canada Reads,* while important to study for its massive economic and cultural impact, is a watered-down and ideologically conservative program that fails to discuss important political and social questions evoked by the competing texts (Moss 10) and is symptomatic of a cultural politics of (post)modernity which "reconstructs the nation in the political unconscious of the citizens by eliding certain parts of its history while foregrounding others" (Kamboureli 47). Emily Burns reads *Canada Reads* as a liberal-humanist project that works to "posit white, middle-class, heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied Canadian identities as the norm while glossing over the identities and social categories that diverge from this norm" (37). While critical of *Canada Reads'*s conservativism at the level of its form, Danielle Fuller and DeNel Rehberg Sedo, as well

as Anouk Lang, argue that scholars should examine *Canada Reads* "both as a structure that mediates literary value and as a dynamic cultural artifact in its own right" (Lang 133), recognizing how its form as an MRE allows for readers to make use of its ideological content in multiple and sometimes oppositional ways (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo "Reading Spectacle" 30; Lang 122). Daniella Zanchi, in a more glowing assessment that is opposed to the arguments of Moss, Kamboureli, and Fuller/Rehberg Sedo, argues that *Canada Reads* has great potential "to serve as a public sphere that facilitates public mindedness and nurtures a social consciousness by cultivating public spirit through book-talk" (565).

My understanding of *Canada Reads* combines the polemic criticisms of *Canada Reads* ideology of Kamboureli and Burns with the attention to the role of consumer agency of Fuller and Rehberg Sedo and Lang. *Canada Reads* is clearly a mixed project with split material and ideological commitments, severely hampering the capacity for politically radical and resistance discussions of topics such as class and nationality to have an impact in the public sphere; it is emblematic of what Hannah McGregor, Julie Rak, and Erin Wunker see as

> a contradiction between a CanLit that profits from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission by turning it into a publishing trend and justifies diversity through sales numbers, literary awards, and celebrity — and an emergent literary culture that builds strength through resistance, refusing to let its diversity be incorporated back into the status quo. (23)

In my critiques and assessments of *Canada Reads*, I do not wish to uphold a "new Canadian imaginary" that serves to reconstruct the nation in a liberal order untainted by commodification. Rather, I wish to demonstrate how liberal-humanist ideologies like the

ones underpinning *Canada Reads* already fail to live up to their own standards. I aim, instead, to push for new ways of reading and consuming literature en masse that do not capitulate to a liberal order. As I have demonstrated in previous research, and as I will demonstrate in this thesis, critiques of the Canadian imaginary — particularly those involving class and its intersections with race, gender, sexuality, and settler-colonialism — are already happening in Canadian cultural production. It is in their transmission through liberal modes of circulation like *Canada Reads* that their radical critiques are defanged.

Theoretical framework

This project employs a neo-Marxist, materialist framework that engages in literary and institutional analysis. By invoking a materialist framework, I am following Imre Szeman's definition in "A Manifesto for Materialism" that

> to undertake materialist criticism is to try and understand the process of literary and cultural transubstantiation: the processes by which an *object* composed of glue, paper, and ink, the product of printing presses, literary circles, and social machines of influence and reputation, all organized in particular ways given the social, historical, and political weightiness of every epoch, is mystically transformed from a state of material solidity into the *spirit* of the text with which criticism has alone typically wanted to commune" (3).

Materialist criticism is "organized around socioeconomic determination and characterized by oscillation — a permanent, productive critical vacillation" (Szeman 6), avoiding the economic reductionism and determinism found in some forms of orthodox Marxist thought through self-reflexive engagement with its own theoretical lenses. Thinking primarily alongside two theorists — Pierre Bourdieu and his "socioanalytic" work on the

genesis and structure of literary fields, and Fredric Jameson and his allegorical close-reading of codes in cultural texts — my materialist framework will speak to specifics of the class discourse in each literary text through close-reading. I draw my definition of class from Ashley J. Bohrer, who, drawing on the work of Black feminist thinkers and Marxist theorists, posits an intersectional notion of class known as "equiprimordial class," which says that to understand capitalism is to recognize the co-constitutive relations of exploitation and oppression formed not just through class, but through race, gender, sexuality, settler-colonialism, and other forms of structural violence. Following Bourdieu/Baudrillard, Jameson, and Bohrer, the framework will attend to how each text manifests a particular class discourse based on its interaction with its particular codes of region, race, gender, and colonialism, and how/if these discourses track in popular discussions of these texts, looking more broadly at the influence of literary institutions and questions of symbolic, cultural, and economic capital in the production and circulation of texts in Canada. The framework employed in this thesis will primarily employ Bourdieu's thinking for questions of the circulation and sociology of texts, and Jameson's to inform the close-reading and formal conceptions of texts. This does not mean they will be kept separate from each other in different moments of analysis; as will be shown in the following paragraphs, there is room for Jameson and Bourdieu to speak together at certain levels of analysis. To demonstrate how this framework allows for specific critical insights into the interactions between "CanLit" texts and *Canada Reads*, I will be using *Lullabies for Little Criminals* by Heather O'Neill, which won *Canada Reads 2007*, as a brief case study at each stage of the framework.

First, I want to touch on Bohrer's notion of equiprimordial class. In her book *Marxism and Intersectionality,* Bohrer notes that in her own experience in the academy, the engagements between Marxism and intersectionality have been "rife with derision… grounded more in caricature than in close reading, often discounting in advance that anything useful could come from one or the other framework" (14). She finds, as well as I do, that this derision is unfortunate, as Kimberlé Crenshaw first used the term "intersectionality" in relation to a labour issue: that of Black women being excluded from employment at General Motors due to compounding factors of race and patriarchy; factors that could not be understood as separate, but needed to be taken together to understand the particular nature of discrimination Black women in the United States face[5]. Desiring to bring the two diverse bodies of thought into conversation as a way to strengthen the "project of uprooting systems of domination that structure our world" (14), Bohrer dialectically reads various theories and heuristics of Marxism and intersectionality together and in order to produce what she calls an "equiprimordial" understanding of class and capitalism. What it means to view capitalism equiprimordially is to see that "relations of exploitation and oppression feed off and play into one another as mutually reinforcing and co-constituting aspects of the organization of capitalist society" (201). This means that one cannot understand other social structures of oppression such as racism, hetero-patriarchy, and settler-colonialism as offshoots or inflections of a primary capitalist relation of exploitation. Instead, one must recognize two points: that capitalism

[5] See "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* no. 1, 1989, pp. 139-67.

is shaped by both exploitation and oppression in equal terms, *and* that the class relation, while a central part of understanding relations of gender, sexuality, race, and colonialism, does not give us a full and complete picture of capitalist dynamics on its own. As Bohrer states:

> Thinking of race, gender, sexuality, and class as equiprimordial does not mean that we should think about them separately; rather, the refusal to name one of these relations as more foundational than the other, in insisting on their shared foundation is the logical consequence of thinking about oppression and exploitation as different, unranked, mutually constituting, and part of the same system. To say that exploitation and oppression are not reducible to one another is not the same as to say that capitalism, racism, and heterosexism are part of different systems. Quite the opposite: capitalism is a structure in which both exploitation and oppression are necessary. (200)

Thus, my analyses of class discourses throughout this project will be equiprimordial, focusing on the co-constitutions of exploitation and oppression and how different historical and socio-political contexts affect how capitalism is structured. For example, looking at *Lullabies for Little Criminals*, it is not enough to simply attend to the main character Baby's class position in order to read the novel's critique of capitalism; a massive determining factor of her particular experience is also how her gender interacts with her class position, as she later is exploited by a neighborhood pimp, forced into prostitution and heroin addiction. Understanding the dynamics of such a relation, as well as the critiques the novel makes of such a relation, would be impossible without investigating how patriarchy and capitalism are operating together to produce this particular experience of exploitation and oppression.

The reason why I focus on the notion of class in this project is that this equiprimordial understanding is not considered in contemporary neoliberal political

discourse, as well as Canadian state discourse. Class in this discursive realm is reduced purely to identity, a vector of oppression missing co-constituting relations of exploitation. Discussions of the middle-class, like the ones Mona Fortier offered in her capacity as Minister of Middle Class Prosperity, see class identity primarily through a vector of a *supposed* oppression: the middle class is identified solely through their consumptive habits and the *ability* to freely consume, and those who are not a part of the middle-class are "oppressed" in that they cannot freely consume. Such conceptions of class focus on the stratification and distribution of wealth, and completely ignore the exploitative relation of class related to wage-labour and surplus-value extraction, which is equally important as the consumptive habits of classes. These same conceptions also ignore the co-constitution of class with race, gender, sexuality, and settler-colonialism by proposing a universal subject whose only meaningful difference is ability to consume; other structural barriers are rendered absent. Political discourse and organizing around such a conception of identity, as Himani Bannerji states, "can become merely a mental phenomenon and highly individualistic when considered only culturally" (38). Bohrer articulates this individualist and culturalist deployment of identity as a structural feature of contemporary capitalism:

> While capitalism certainly contributes to the production of difference, it recognizes only an anemic form of difference, which systematically militates against the recognition of any real, creative particularities between individuals. In order to function, capitalism must both produce and reproduce differences (in the character of the labor performed, the commodities produced, and in the subject-positions who perform it) *and* it must continually produce sameness. To be more precise, capitalism thus relies on intergroup differentiation and intragroup homogenization at one and the same time. (245)

This is fundamental contradiction at the heart of capitalism, where subjects are pushed to be flattened into homogenous market demographics through which consumption can be more highly targeted, thus papering over exploitation as a fundamental structuring relation of society. As Bohrer states, "it is in this sense that both liberal erasures of difference and neoliberal appeals to reductive understandings of identity maintain rather than contest capitalism" (226). Literature, then, is in a unique position, given its typical aim of creating a sense of complex interiority, to combat such flattening tendencies, and this is perhaps why radical discourses show themselves in literature more readily than in mainstream Canadian political discourse[6]. It is this neoliberal flattening of the realm of political struggle, serving to occlude the co-constituting nature of co-constituting exploitations and oppressions under capitalism, that I will primarily mobilize against in my critique of *Canada Reads* and the Canadian state in the chapters to come.

To build my contesting framework, I first turn to Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu conceives of the social — and by extension, the mechanisms of social domination — through the interaction between the (structuring-)structures of habitus, field, and capital. For Bourdieu, subjects exist in different social fields, all of which operate on a specific doxa, or set of ideological rules. The field is structured like a game; subjects compete for differing amounts of capital — social, economic, cultural, and symbolic — which dictate their positions within the field. The ability for subjects to accrue different kinds of capital by moving through the field is based on their habitus — a set of unconscious dispositions and practices that reveal themselves in "the most insignificant techniques of the body"

[6] I owe this insight to Daniel Coleman.

(Bourdieu, "Distinction" 466) — things like the subject's aesthetic taste, speech, and physical movement through the world. Not only do those with the most capital sit in the most consecrated positions in the field (and thus are the dominant class in the field), but those who have the most capital in a field also get to dictate what kind of capital is consecrated in that same field. The game is not one of accumulation alone, but accumulation and the power to consecrate. Thus, the world of the socio-political is one of position-taking and position-making, and the struggles between social agents "[tend]" to transform or conserve [the] field" (Bourdieu, "Cultural Production" 30). For Bourdieu, these forms of capital can also be exchanged for one another in concrete ways. Having a certain degree of cultural capital — for example, obtaining university credentials, which consecrates one's possession of a certain set of habits and knowledges in a specific discursive field — allows one to have opportunities to acquire economic capital. Thus, the possession of any kind of symbolic capital — that is, as Bourdieu says, "what every kind of capital [economic, cultural, social] becomes when it is misrecognized as capital" ("Pascalian Meditations" 242) — entails a strong, but not direct, correlation with the ability to accumulate and possess more economic capital. To put this in more classically Marxist terms, those who can accrue and possess a degree of capital and thus consecration are thus valorized culturally — they accrue social profits which can then be reinvested in the reshaping of the doxa of the field.

While Bourdieu and others like to think that the transposition of the concept of capital is a clean one that simply extends the economic model to the realm of the cultural with no conceptual problems, this is simply not the case. As many Marxist critics have

rightfully pointed out[7], Bourdieu's conception of economic capital, while certainly drawing from the labour theory of value Marx drew from, remains one tied to classical political economy. For Bourdieu, capital means wealth, not the process of money-commodity-money prime (M-C-M'). Thus, there is a bit of theoretical dodginess that needs to be wrestled with. How do we deal with this dodginess? Enter Jean Baudrillard. Despite Baudrillard's break with Marxism in the mid-1970s and subsequent foray into the desert of the real, his early work held a promising synthesis of Marxism, semiotics, and psychoanalysis. The most important of his early contributions is the addition of sign value to the Marxist triumvirate of use value, exchange value, and Value (abstract labour). Sign value is the value a commodity (or in Baudrillard's terms, an object) holds in a hierarchical system of signs. This differential system indexes out positions of social signification, and thus constitutes a code that classifies subjects according to how they deploy it. As Baudrillard states:

> Objects, their syntax, and their rhetoric refer to social objectives and to a social logic. They speak to us… of social pretension and resignation, of social mobility and inertia, of accumulation and enculturation, of stratification and of social classification. Through objects, each individual and each group searches out his-her place in an order, all the while trying to jostle this order according to a personal trajectory. (12–13)

There is a very strong resemblance between Baudrillard and Bourdieu in their conception of the social. Individuals and groups in both of their social worlds attempt to find

[7] For a selection of these critiques, see "Bourdieu, Marx, and Capital: A Critique of the Extension Model" by Mathieu Hikaru Desan (*Sociological Theory* vol. 31, no. 4, 2014, pp. 318-342) and "Value and Capital in Bourdieu and Marx" by Jon Beasley-Murray (in *Pierre Bourdieu: Fieldwork in Culture,* edited by Nicholas Brown and Imre Szeman, Rowman and Littlefield, 2000, pp. 100-122).

positions in the code/doxa, while at the same time attempting to bend and shift the code/doxa according to a personal trajectory — a habitus — in a broader social field.

Compared to Bourdieu's conception of capital, sign value is more easily systematized into a Marxist conception of value, making questions of exchangeability between sign value and economic value more clear and less metaphorical. After describing a particular case study of the transformation of economic value into sign exchange value in the art auction, Baudrillard sketches in his "Notes for a General Theory" the relations of exchange between the different forms of value, those being "the functional logic of use value… the economic logic of exchange value… [and] the differential logic of sign value" (119). Alongside the original Marxist formulations of consumption (exchange value into use value) and production (use value into exchange value), Baudrillard formulates the transformation of sign exchange value into both use value and exchange value, as well the vice versa cases. As Baudrillard states:

> UV-SgEV: The field of the production of signs originating in the destruction of utility… here, the advertising process of conferring value transmutes use goods into sign values. Here technique and knowledge are divorced from their objective practice and recovered by the 'cultural' system of differentiation…
>
> EcEV-SgEV: The process of consumption according to its redefinition in the political economy of the sign. It includes the act of spending as production of sign value… but here more accurately we have the ascension of the commodity form into the sign form, the transformation of the economic into sign systems and the transmutation of economic power into domination and social caste privilege…
>
> SgEV-UV: Signs, like commodities, are at once use value and exchange value. The social hierarchies, the invidious differences, the privileges of caste and culture which they support, are accounted as profit, as personal satisfaction, and lived as 'need' (need of social value-generation to which correspond the 'utility' of different signs and their 'consumption')…

> SgEV-EcEV: This involves the reconversion of cultural privilege, of the monopoly of sign, etc., into economic privilege. Coupled with [EcEV-SgEV], this reconversion describes the total cycle of a political economy in which economic exploitation based on the monopoly of capital and 'cultural' domination based on the monopoly of the code engender one another ceaselessly. (121-122)

These formulations clear a path forward for the transit and transformation of various forms of value in a clearer, more systemic, and grounded way than Bourdieu's description of the transformations of his different capitals. Synthesizing Bourdieu's habitus and field framework with Baudrillard's concept of sign value, then, allows one to reinforce the strengths of both thinkers through compensating for each other's weaknesses. Baudrillard's conception of sign value is superior to Bourdieu's forms of capital in the sense of clearer linkages to commodity production, circulation, and the accumulation of capital, while Bourdieu's framework of the social world is more material and grounded than Baudrillard's playground of objects. For the purposes of my analysis, this synthesized framework allows for a more careful attention to how the book is both something with a use and exchange value *and* something that carries symbolic or sign value, and that both elements are co-constituting elements of the book as commodity — something that often gets lost in the spectacle of *Canada Reads*. As Fuller and Rehberg Sedo note, "many readers… would certainly regard books as 'special' commodities, and many… would like to disavow the economics involved in the making of a cultural artifact that to them variously denotes pleasure, learning, entertainment, and the possession of cultural capital" ("Reading Beyond the Book" 138). My framework works to dispel this idea of books as "special" commodities exempt from the machinations of capitalism and its intersections. In the case of reading something like *Lullabies for Little Criminals,* we

would want to understand what effect the text's circulation has on *Canada Reads* beyond promoting a certain symbolic message; for example, what economic process influence the selection of certain texts? Why would HarperCollins and/or O'Neill be motivated to have their book on *Canada Reads* beyond having the text symbolically consecrated in-itself? These questions cannot be answered fully with recourse to symbolic thinking alone.

When comparing the literary analytical frameworks of Fredric Jameson and Pierre Bourdieu, we can begin to see some interesting parallels that suggest their compatibility. As John R. W. Speller articulates in *Bourdieu and Literature,* Bourdieu's model of literary analysis consists of two areas of focus: the macro-social and the micro-textual. The macro-social sphere consists of three concentric levels of analysis. The first and smallest level is that of the class habiti of various authors within a specific literary field; examining how certain authors come to occupy certain positions in the literary field. The second level is the structure of the literary field itself; examining what sort of positions can be held in the field based on its given doxa and institutions. Finally, the third and largest level is the literary field's location in the field of power[8]; examining how much autonomy the literary field in a particular place has in relation to other fields. The micro-textual sphere consists of the "space of works" — a space of dialogue where different texts speak to each other from different positions in the literary field. The space of works

[8] The field of power is "the space of relations of force between agents or between institutions having in common the possession of the capital necessary to occupy the dominant positions in different fields" (Bourdieu, "Rules of Art" 216) — that is, a space where the relative value of different forms of capital are fought over. Structured by an opposition between a dominated fraction of cultural capital and a dominant end of economic capital, the field of power is a sort of meta-field that has varying degrees of influence over the structures of other fields based on their relative autonomy to the field of power. The field of power is the place where sign exchange value and economic exchange value meet and interact, and where ideological domination through the (re)production of sign systems originates.

allows the critic to analyze the differences between texts "as expressions of the relations of force, struggle, and competition between authors" (Speller 64). Macro-social and micro-textual analyses operate in a dialectical relationship to reveal details about each other — the "part" of the text increasing one's understanding of the "whole" or "totality" of the social, and the whole increasing one's understanding of the part. Examining texts on their own terms as well as their circulation in this way allows for an understanding of the complexity of discursive positions that *Canada Reads* facilitates beyond simple consecration of texts that fit its ideology. *Lullabies for Little Criminals* demonstrates this nicely; it is rife with critical class discourse, exploring the life of Baby as she grows up in abject poverty in Montreal. Despite its critical discourses, the book won *Canada Reads 2007*, making Heather O'Neill a household name in "CanLit." While I do not have the room to examine the specific reasons why *Lullabies for Little Criminals* won, I believe the text's victory illustrates that the discursive operations of *Canada Reads* are more complex than simply picking books that align with its message; it may pick more radical texts in order to demonstrate their "weaknesses" against texts that better align with its ideology, or it even may reward a radical book, in a backhanded way, by foreclosing its radical discourse in order to make it more palatable to the dominant ideology. A concentric model of analysis allows for the recognition of such complexities.

Fredric Jameson's model of literary analysis, as formulated most clearly in *The Political Unconscious*, also operates using concentric levels of analysis. Jameson conceptualizes three spheres of analysis: the political, the social, and the historical. The political sphere of analysis conceives of the text as a symbolic act that attempts to invent

imaginary or formal “solutions” to social contradictions (Jameson 64). The task of the critic at this stage is to “rewrite” the text as an allegory of the political subtext that it is trying to paper over, thus revealing the text’s political unconscious. The text, of course, cannot fully resolve the social contradiction it is trying to resolve, given that the aesthetic act of the text does not address the contradiction in the form of praxis — leaving an aporia or antinomy in its wake. The aporia then “generate[s] a whole more properly narrative apparatus — the text itself — to square its circles and to dispel, through narrative movement, its intolerable closure" (Jameson 68). The text thus serves as an ideological fantasy that attempts to justify its underlying ur-narrative of resolution of the social contradiction. In the second stage of Jamesonian analysis, the social, the re-written text is examined as a symbolic utterance in a broader class discourse — a discourse that is antagonistically dialogic, where different class positions articulate class conflict using the same sign system and code (Jameson 70). The smallest units of analysis of this class discourse are ideologemes: “amphibious formation[s], whose essential characteristic[s] may be described as [their] possibility to manifest either as pseudoidea — a conceptual or belief system, an abstract value, an opinion or prejudice — or as protonarrative[s], a kind of ultimate class fantasy about the ‘collective characters’ which are the classes in opposition” (Jameson 73). The third and final stage of Jamesonian analysis brings the text into an analysis of the system of signs, code, or system of production of signs and codes in a historical moment, which is tied to the mode of production in a given society (Jameson 74). At this level, “the individual text or cultural artifact… is here restructured as a field of force in which the dynamics of sign systems of several distinct modes of

production can be registered and apprehended" (Jameson 84). This field is the ideology of form — "the determinate contradiction of the specific messages emitted by the varied sign systems which coexist in a given artistic process as well as in its general social formation" (Jameson 84).

Bourdieu's space of works and Jameson's levels of the social and political line up nicely; both conceive of texts as expressions of social positions, and that these expressions are in struggle with each other. All of these struggles take place within a space where the texts share a system of signs; for Jameson, it is a horizontal class discourse, for Bourdieu it is the doxa of the literary field; for myself, however, it is a space of signs which are equiprimordially overdetermined by a complex unity of systems such as class, race, gender, sexuality, colonialism, and so on. When Bourdieu's conception of capital is replaced by Baudrillard's relationships between sign value, exchange value, and use value, the field of power becomes a very useful tool in examining how sign systems and capital are interrelated, including in the literary field. This allows critics to answer questions about the circulation of texts as commodities and how texts are valued in this manner, something Jameson does not address in any comprehensive manner. Jameson is stronger than Bourdieu, however, in explaining the particular nature of cultural texts and how they come to be expressions of class positions. Through conceiving of texts as symbolic acts that articulate as the subtext of different political unconsciousnesses, Jameson draws clearer links to how texts operate as expressions of class and sign systems, and how texts do not simply reflect the class background of their authors.

With this theoretical framework at hand, I turn in the next chapter to close readings to my selected texts, in order to see what positions they occupy and discourses they utter in terms of equiprimordial class.

Chapter 1: Class Struggle in the "Canadian" Space of Works

In this chapter, I will close-read my three main texts — *Small Game Hunting at The Local Coward Gun Club* by Megan Gail Coles, *Birdie* by Tracey Lindberg, and *Fifteen Dogs* by André Alexis — in order to glean how they represent the equiprimordial class politics of Canada. In doing so, I will demonstrate that there is a strong degree of class saliency to these texts; readings that are not easily taken up in *Canada Reads*, as Chapter 2 will demonstrate. In the case of *Small Game Hunting* and *Birdie*, it is clear that through their aesthetic choices and sociological content, they stand in stark contrast to the Canadian state's imposition of a neoliberal politics of the universalized middle class. As such, these texts not only can serve as sources of radical class messaging in their own right, but also have the potential to disrupt what I identified in the Introduction as the typical sign economy of CanLit as outlined by McGregor, Rak, and Wunker: one that turns suffering into a trend and subordinates diversity to the profit motive. Both of these texts contest the state by actively turning away from it as the solution to questions of exploitation and oppression. In place of the state, they turn inward and practice a politics of resurgence, refusing to engage with the state and instead focusing on the development of new forms of social relations that do not reproduce the neoliberal state. Such actions are in direct contrast to the profitable sign exchange value that the Canadian state has tried to tacitly promote in Canadian cultural production. In Jamesonian terms, then, I am looking at these texts primarily, but not exclusively, through a positive Marxist hermeneutic, which looks towards what Jameson calls Utopian impulses in texts: those moments which provide "symbolic affirmation of a specific historical and class form of

collective unity" (281-2). Harkening back to McGregor, Rak, and Wunker, these texts can be read as part of that "emergent literary culture that builds strength through resistance" (23).

Alongside these two books of resistance, I will examine a text that more neatly fits into the realm of the "CanLit sign-commodity": *Fifteen Dogs.* In contrast to *Small Game Hunting* and *Birdie, Fifteen Dogs* does not ostensibly appear to tackle questions of class or the state; according to Diana Brydon's assessment of the text, any answers to questions regarding the problematic of the Canadian state that arise in this novel "are not to be found in politics or economics. They reside in the human needs for creativity, art, and connection" ("Risk" 99). Indeed, the nation-state seems to be "irrelevant" to Alexis (110). Despite this seeming lack of direct engagement with class or the state, it is clear that the text is still very much engaged in questions of *power* — something I read as a symptomatic displacement of class politics that resides in the text's political unconscious; a concern that bubbles up from under the surface but is rendered as symptom in the dogs' ruminations on the role of hierarchy in their society. Alexis's vision of a just society is liberal utopian, lining up much more neatly with the politics that the Canadian state likes to appear to embody. I will critique this vision in Alexis's text to show how its powerful insights into power — ones that I argue are applicable to class — are hampered by the text's unconscious desire to resolve issues of domination in a way that, rather nihilistically, sees all forms of domination as naturally ingrained. In this manner, I will analyze *Fifteen Dogs* in a way that moves closer, but not wholly over, to the negative end of the Marxist hermeneutic, which looks to "unmask and to demonstrate the ways in

which a cultural artifact fulfills a specific ideological mission, in legitimating a given power structure, in perpetuating and reproducing the latter, and in generating specific forms of [ideology]" (Jameson 281).

Small Game Hunting **and Shattering the Folk**

Small Game Hunting was published in 2019 by Anansi Press. The novel takes place over a single day in a restaurant called The Hazel in St. John's, Newfoundland. The kitchen manager, John, is cheating on his wife, the restaurant owner George, in an abusive relationship with one of the servers, Iris. Olive, another server, cannot afford snow boots as she walks to work in ballet flats in the middle of a blizzard. Over the course of the day, more details arise from each character's backstory, and as everything begins to unravel as it is revealed that Olive was raped by several men one night and no one did anything to stop it. Using this event, the novel demonstrates the co-constitutive effects of capitalism, patriarchy, and settler-colonialism. To discuss in full detail the nuances of the critiques this novel offers would in itself require an entire thesis. Consequently, my analysis of this novel is necessarily limited to what I consider to be key scenes that highlight where its counter-class discourses figure most prominently. In order to highlight these key scenes, I will draw from Herb Wyile's study of Atlantic-Canadian literature and neoliberalism *Anne of Time Hortons*, particularly his discussion of the image of the Folk.

Wyile argues that with the onset of neoliberal policies and the continuing decline of resource sectors in Atlantic Canada, the four Atlantic provinces have undergone a great

deal of economic restructuring in order to prevent severe economic collapse. One of the central industries in this restructuring is tourism, which has relied on the four provinces producing an image of themselves as idyllic and out-of-time, full of natural beauty and dominated by what Wyile, drawing from the work of Ian McKay, calls Folk culture: "a refreshing throwback from the competitive, individualistic modernity of Canada's urban centres" (4). For Wyile, this Folk image of the Atlantic is doubly ironic, in that it both "celebrates a way of life whose waning has intensified the need for tourism to provide compensatory revenue" and "masks the degree to which the region was and is industrialized and how thoroughly it is bound up in an increasingly global, modern, capitalist economy" (22-23). Folk imagery has also served as a way to ideologically naturalize uneven capitalist economic development in Atlantic Canada; Canadian "national" economic policy, going back to the 19th century, was centred on the prosperity of Central Canada over other regions, leading to an "exodus of capital" from the Maritimes that has had persistent detrimental effects on the region (11). The image of a pre-modern Folk culture lagging behind capitalist modernity works to locate the Atlantic's lack of economic prosperity in the quality of Atlantic people themselves instead of the machinations of Canadian state policy, and as such, "has had a profound influence reinforcing the image of Atlantic Canada as politically, culturally, and economically parochial" (21). Wyile says that much of recent literature in Atlantic Canada has attempted to grapple with these Folk representations of the region, with the goal of resisting their ossifying nature and instead inserting the region back into a history of national and global capitalist development that never truly disappeared. Wyile calls

their work "a kind of collective recharacterization of the region in a fashion that highlights rather than obscures the very contemporary challenges it faces" (6).

One of these re-characterizing methods has been to shift focus from portrayals of Folk labour — "farmers, lumberjacks, or fishermen, insulated from the ravages of modernity and engaged in timeless, solitary toil to sustain their close knit families and communities" (97) — to portrayals of the contemporary nature of labour in the Atlantic, which, like many other regions in Canada, has proportionally shifted away from such Folk occupations to the service sector due to "the diminishing role of the independent petty producer, through declining participation and or increasing mechanization and corporatization" (30). This first form of recharacterization works at the level of setting in *Small Game Hunting;* by using The Hazel as a location where all of the characters in the text interact and bring with them their particular social narratives of their lives under capitalism, the novel is able to demonstrate in vivid and powerful detail and form the violences of capitalism, settler-colonialism, and patriarchy that the Canadian state would rather paper over, while positing a tentative form of resurgent praxis based on care and solidarity.

The text directly attacks the Folk image of Newfoundland at several points, demonstrating the tensions between the image of the Folk and capitalist drives. This is most clearly demonstrated through the character of George: the owner of The Hazel, John's wife, and the daughter of the richest man in St. John's. Damian describes her as wanting "the same access as any world city, like London or New York" (Coles 57). She is obsessed with efficiency and improvement to a point that Damian considers "impossible"

(57); “she [wants] St. John's to be a different city, The Hazel to be a different restaurant and John to be a different man. She [sees] opportunities for improvement everywhere… she [is] solution-driven and goal-oriented” (57). In one particularly telling moment, she laments the inefficiencies of her staff at The Hazel, vowing that “she would replace them with robots if it were up to her. Tidy, polite, moderate Japanese robots” (31). But she cannot replace her human workers with transnational robot commodities, as

> customers want sweet undergrads with large chests and a hint of accent. Not too much, not straight from the Southern Shore or, heaven forbid, another one from the Northern Peninsula. Iris corrects George each time she forgets to say Great but George is pretty sure there is nothing Great about it. She would not have hired Iris… But the customers love her.
>
> She’s… *authentic*. (32, emphasis mine)

Here, the image of the Folk rears its ugly head as part of the service industry, in a particularly gendered manner. Capitalist desire for efficiency runs up against competing consumer desires for sign exchange value, reminding us that indeed, “[the] simplest component, [the] nuclear element — that which precisely the commodity was for Marx — is no longer today properly either commodity or sign, but indissolubly both” (Baudrillard 13). The image of the baygirl — what we might consider a Newfoundland subset of Folk — is tied up with the neoliberal shift in Newfoundland, where “the manufacturing and promotion of such an image, it can be argued, amounts to making a virtue of necessity. Indeed, it can be seen as commodifying and retailing the region’s underdevelopment” (Wyile 22).

Later, when Iris is serving the mayor of St. John's, Major David, and his cohort — one of whom works for Heritage NL[9] — she overhears them discussing theories of rural Newfoundlanders, ranging from whether "they've no place of pride" to their lack of knowledge of "fauna's proper taxonomy [suggesting]… [they] take everything for granted" (Coles 205). Iris begins to crack under the weight of this discourse, refuting these ascriptions of Folk pre-modernity with her own knowledge:

> Perhaps Iris could have had some happiness if she hadn't read all those books while her mom is at work. All those books opened her up, and now here she stands, opened.
>
> Why is the rural Newfoundlander [insert anything here]?
>
> The answer is poverty.
>
> Why is the rural Newfoundlander [insert anything here]?
>
> Still poverty.
>
> Why is the rural Newfoundlander [insert anything here]?
>
> POVERTY. POVERTY. POVERTY. FUCK.
>
> And Iris will not discuss the shit her people buy. Buying lots of shit is not an argument against the kind of poverty they face but proof positive that they face it. (206)

In her head, Iris rails against the cohort, shutting down their repetitive, bourgeois metaphysical speculation of the essence of the bayperson through the continued assertion of the historical, systemic facts of capitalism: uneven capitalist development leading to poverty. From her position as a bayperson, this answer is brutally obvious, and she "is baffled that these people, with their great passionate joy for all things Newfoundland, have such a measly understanding of her stock" (208). But she cannot speak this knowledge; she must "nod and pretend ignorance, baygirl. Smile. Smile for your money.

[9] Heritage NL is a real-life entity, which describes itself as "an ambitious, non-commercial, public history project that aims to provide school students and the general public with a wide range of authoritative information on the province's history, culture, and geography. It is based at the Memorial University of Newfoundland" ('Mission Statement").

Or starve" (207). This exchange highlights class struggle not only at the level of Newfoundland's economic history, but also at the level of ideology; she cannot actively engage in ideological struggle for fear of the loss of her material sustenance.

Equiprimordial Class

Beyond simply critiquing the Folk at the level of economic exploitation, the novel also examines the Folk in a deeply equiprimordial way; something that is both necessary for a comprehensive critique of the form of capitalism existing in Canada today, as well as combating other repressive aspects of the Folk image. As Wyile states, not only does the concept of the Folk paint the Maritimes as a pre-modern haven lagging behind the rest of Canadian capitalist development, but it also makes the Maritimes appear culturally homogeneous in two ways: by relegating the experiences of women and Indigenous and racialized peoples to the margins[10] (Wylie 105-6). The intersections of gender, race, and settler-colonialism with class emerge as central considerations of power in the text, especially in its representations of gendered violence.

John, George's husband and the manager of The Hazel, serves as the novel's paradigmatic #MeToo era male chauvinist. His sexual relationship with Iris is abusive; he ignores her requests to be less physically violent during sex (Coles 154) and emotionally manipulates her in order to continue to have control over her (100-101). As a character, John represents a specific intersection of class and patriarchy. He comes from an impoverished bay family, something that

[10] To put it in more concrete terms, the Folk operates as an indigenizing move by settlers in order for them to attempt to establish a legitimacy to the land that they do not possess. As Wyile states, "the construction of the Folk as timeless, rooted to the land, and so on, evokes a sense of original belonging that is, of course, historically spurious. Although the Folk seem like they have been here forever, they have not been here forever. In that sense, the Folk paradigm is complicit in the colonial tactic of constructing the land as unoccupied territory, because it cultivates the impression that the Folk have always belonged there. However, as the work of Native historians and writers has helped to underscore, that is simply not the case" (107).

haunts him — he recalls how "the best of everything was saved for distant cousins visiting from the mainland, to prove they weren't poor" (22). He feels a deep resentment for this upbringing and also for the well-to-do, "privately-schooled, near grown, pseudo-adults" (21) who frequent The Hazel — "he secretly [delights] in charging them great sums from their trust funds for a fish taco… the cost of their privilege" (21). John's resentment is really *ressentiment* in the Nietzschean sense: he cultivates self-hatred, thinking of his life as a set of "barely believable misdeeds dismissed and forgiven" (98). The text even seems to cheekily point at this element of John's nature, stating that "John is a reactionary sort. His whole life is a kind of chronic whiplash" (50). Based on these characteristics, John falls closely in line with what Marx called the lumpenproletariat: the reactionary, conservative sect of the working-class who, out of egoistic self-interest, forms an alliance with the petite-bourgeoisie and the finance aristocracy in moments of capitalist crisis[11]. John gets access to economic power and, with it intersecting with patriarchal power, uses it to enact a sense of revenge and control he feels he lacks:

> Iris had held out her heartstrings to him… she had trusted that he would not haul on them. But instead, like an angry rival fisher from a long depleted bay, John started reeling in that trap line, hand over fist over hand over fist over hand over fist. *It was only what he was owed. Others get what they want and so should John*. (100, emphases mine)

The repetition of "hand over fist" implies a selfish ravenousness, bereft of solidarity and understanding. In a similar manner, Olive characterizes John as a shark, one that is "not even hateful for hunger. But murderous for pleasure" (106). The systemic nature of this ravenousness

[11] This alliance comes about due to the lumpenproletariat and the finance aristocracy lacking "any direct economic relation to production" as well as lacking any part in the "extended reproduction of capitalism" (Barrow 69). While they are still both byproducts of the capitalist mode of production, both classes operate in a parasitic way in order to sustain themselves.

is confirmed when it is revealed that John had been in a relationship with the previous hostess, Sarah. In the end, the only woman whom John protects is the one who can guarantee his own access to capital and sign exchange value: George, the petite-bourgeois small business owner whose father, Big George, provides her with a link to the capital needed to maintain her lifestyle.

George too, still aligns herself to capital and to John, refusing to acknowledge his systematic abuse of the women workers under him. While she suspects that John is sleeping with Iris, she refuses to acknowledge it; she also refuses to accept or dig into John's role in the sudden disappearance of Sarah, as "acknowledging for a second that John could have played a role in a woman running for her life was more than George could get a handle on. It was better to sacrifice the next round of young servers. And so George left him to it so that she could pursue George stuff. She deserved that" (402). Even though she has long suspected John of cheating on her, George refuses solidarity with Iris, Sarah, or the other women whom John is purported to have slept with because it would "[invite] the truth in" (402) and ruin the vision of her perfect, petite-bourgeois life: that of a successful small-business owner striving for economic and social capital. In a culmination of her classist and patriarchal violence, George smashes Iris's face into the glass front doors of The Hazel, cutting both herself and Iris:

> It was not Iris specifically George wanted to slice apart but the conditions that brought them so low. All of them. George wanted to smash that knowing intangible thing up… incinerate it. But the ways of being cannot be scorched as easily as a French door held fast closed by your husband's girlfriend can be smashed in her face. (413)

In this moment, George recognizes the intersections of the violent systems that have produced their situation: class oppression and patriarchy. But again, she falls into a *ressentiment* of her own, finding it easier to lash out in violence against a woman who

ruined her illusion of a perfect, petite-bourgeois life — someone George callously describes as "a woman without the sense to wear socks in the winter" (413). While she might hate that intangible thing, that knot of social antagonisms and violences, she still clings to patriarchal capital, through her father and through maintaining a relationship with John despite his horrific behavior.

Olive, a young half-Indigenous woman working at The Hazel, also faces particular intersecting violences under capitalism: that of class, gender, and settler-colonialism. Originally growing up with her grandfather and grandmother in one of the bays, she is forced to live in foster care in St. John's after her grandfather dies and her grandmother, grief-stricken, can no longer take care of her. It is later revealed that her grandfather committed suicide, drowning himself in the ocean due to his TAGS[12] — "welfare for fisherman" (323) — running out. Like Iris, Olive is the victim of sexual violence, first by the son of her foster mother, and later that of a horrific gang assault perpetrated by the character Roger — a violently traumatic event that causes "everything [to] come loose. After, she had burned through her savings so quickly that it felt retroactively humiliating to have felt such pride over five hundred and fifty-three dollars" (107). This burning-through of her money speaks to the linkages between patriarchal violence and poverty, and a colonial system filled with educational and medical

[12] The Atlantic Groundfish Strategy (TAGS) was the second of two federal relief programs meant to support laid-off fishers in Newfoundland after the Canadian government placed a moratorium on Northern cod fishing on the east coast. It provided weekly welfare payments of around $200-$300 per week and also was meant to provide re-training for out-of-work fishers so they could re-enter the economy (Higgins). The program ran out of federal funding in 1998 — a year before it was supposed to conclude.

professionals who want “Olive to play pretend all white, play pretend all happy, play pretend they had all fixed her” (385).

At one point, after visiting the doctor wearing her sealskin boots, the doctor warns her that “sensitive people would become angry and yell and throw paint and [buys] her a pair of real Canadian premium leather boots made in China” (250). The irony of this moment is deeply palpable, especially as Olive attempts to defend her boots to the doctor by saying that “they were made by someone she knew. She had seen the skins stretched on a frame by Aunt Jessie’s house knowing they would make her own boots” (250). In the global capitalism of contemporary Newfoundland, made possible by ongoing settler-colonialism, Indigenous modes of production — ones premised on reciprocal, non-exploitative relations with the human and non-human — are erased and their products demonized on the grounds of a Western liberal understanding of animal rights. Olive also refuses to wear her mother’s sealskin coat because of these fears. She eventually loses the coat, which makes her feel “overwhelming grief” (251), and upon searching her flat for the coat, she finds “worse than her coat. She found a different woman’s coat. A mistake. Another one” (251). The replacement of her coat with another coat, a mistake, signals how the poverty caused by class oppression and the violences of settler-colonialism have driven Olive further from her relations and the sense of belonging and love she felt with them. Further irony hits when wealthy people later decide that sealskin is “popular and fashionable” (251), thus making it acceptable to wear in public. The original cultural-historical context of sealskin attire becomes co-opted, commodified, and brought into the exploitative capitalist mode of production.

Resurgent Atlantic Resistance

Near the end of the novel, it is revealed that The Hazel has been run into the ground by John, and that the business has not properly filed its tax forms. Big George, using his mass capital, colludes with Major David to demolish heritage housing in the city and build a new casino-restaurant that George will own and John will be the head chef at — something that comes at the expense of a private library that George had been planning to build (357). While it has materially failed, it will soon be just as quickly replaced with a casino-restaurant: a site of parasitic finance capital that will allow George to recoup the losses of The Hazel through an influx of "new money," which, as Major David points out, "old money is always in need of" (181).

Alongside The Hazel unraveling at the economic level, the social relations that had come together in The Hazel also begin to unravel. The artifice of The Hazel — the spatial microcosm of the social relations of Newfoundland capitalism with its "authentic" Folk hostess, chauvinist head chef, and trendy cuisine — bursts apart at the seams; John and Iris's relationship is finally revealed, and Calv and Damian recognize each other from the night that Olive was assaulted. After George and John leave The Hazel after George smashes Iris's face, Iris, in an act of defiance, destroys her cellphone, upon which she had been taking pictures of John's infidelity "so that she might have evidence later when accused of some great sin" (416). She does this because she realizes that "those who could pretend it all away could pretend away anything… they cared not a speck for her" (417). Realizing that she will not receive recognition from those in power, she turns inward, resolving to improve herself and fix her broken relationships with her former best

friend Jo and with sister Olive; in a Nietzschean move of self-affirmation, Iris declares that she "wants to live" (418).

The text does not end on this note of individual resistance, however. Walking away from The Hazel, Iris is struck by a car and Olive finds her and comes to Iris's aid, "[taking] Iris's hand in her smaller hand and [blowing] warm air into Iris like her grandmother did when she was a girl" (419). In this moment, the two women find needed solidarity in their shared struggles against patriarchal, colonial capitalism; they reconcile as half-sisters — a fact that Olive had attempted to impart to Iris when they were both young but to which Iris reacted negatively (420) — and "Olive holds Iris's pale hand between her small but darker hands and she doesn't let go and she doesn't leave. Olive stays" (422). This communal sense of turning away from the state and turning towards reciprocal responsibility — to caring sisterhood under-girded by "a true longing to be somewhere else" (421) — is proffered as the model of resistance against the patriarchal, capitalist mode of life that alienates and drives people away from each other and away from solidarity.

Against the dominant Folk image of the Maritimes, and what we might call the "bay" subset of the Folk image, *Small Game Hunting* demonstrates in stark, violent detail the contemporary challenges that Newfoundland faces in contemporary capitalism. Refusing an easy narrative of national belonging or "fitting into" the neoliberal picture of class proffered by the Canadian state, the novel shows the destructive callousness of such

a system; it refuses to see the state as a way out, and instead yearns for something more, something Utopian in the Jamesonian sense[13].

***Birdie*: Relations of Care Against Colonialism**

Akin to *Small Game Hunting,* the next text of the thesis — Tracy Lindberg's *Birdie,* published in 2015 by HarperCollins — also has a critical view of the neoliberal Canadian state. The book is about a Cree woman named Bernice who travels from Alberta to Gibsons, British Columbia to meet Pat John, an Indigenous actor who starred in the CBC program *The Beachcombers.* While there, Bernice enters a mediative state, exploring her memories in a non-linear fashion in order to heal from her traumatic past. While she is "under," Bernice is taken care of by her employer/landlord Lola, as well as her cousin Freda and her aunt Val, who arrive later at Lola's behest. The text explores the violences of the settler-colonial Canadian state, pushing for a resurgent politics that not only challenges the colonial relation, but also the capital relation, through a rejection of settler time and the material formation of alternative forms of care. To demonstrate the linkage between these two critiques, I will draw from the work of Yellowknives Dene political theorist Glen Sean Coulthard in order to articulate the equiprimordial relationality between settler-colonialism and capitalism, as well as ensure that my

[13] This sense of "Utopia" is not in the pejorative sense that Marx and Engels use the term in *The Communist Manifesto.* As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, for Jameson, Utopia is the "symbolic affirmation of a specific historical and class form of collective unity" (281-2). This unity is not necessarily illusory or naïve, though it can be; more centrally, it speaks to a real and meaningful desire to imagine and build a world organized beyond the repressive mechanisms of capital. Iris and Olive's grasping of hands is thus both a material declaration of solidarity and address of alienation under capitalism, and a symbolic act that points towards a new world free from capitalist alienation.

scholarly work is not subsuming Indigenous frameworks of knowledge and resistance into a neo-Marxist model. My goal, in avoiding such subsumption, is to substantially engage with Indigenous cultural production and frameworks of resistance on their own terms. As Métis scholar Aubrey Hanson notes, "how critics and educators read Indigenous texts is consequently not only a methodological or disciplinary question but, rather, a question of responsibility" (76). As a settler scholar, I acknowledge that I must take this question of responsibility seriously in my work, and I set out to do so as I read this text.

Capitalism, Settler-Colonialism, and the Politics of Recognition

In his text *Red Skin White Masks,* Coulthard argues that in Canada today, settler-colonialism operates as a

> form of *domination;* that is, it is a relationship where power — in this case, interrelated discursive and nondiscursive facets of economic, gendered, racial, and state power — has been structured into a relatively secure or sedimented set of hierarchal social relations that continue to facilitate the *dispossession* of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority. (6-7)

The dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands by both violent and non-violent coercive means — part of the process which Karl Marx called primitive accumulation — is enacted in order for the settler-colonial state to have access to territory upon which it can establish and reproduce both the state and its economic mode of production — in this case, capitalism and white supremacy. While primitive accumulation in the European context was primarily experienced in the form of proletarianization — that is, the creation of a class of people forced to enter into the exploitative system of capitalist wage labour in order to survive — Coulthard says that the primary experience of primitive

accumulation for Indigenous peoples has been and continues to be that of dispossession from land, both materially and as a site of knowledge, relations, and practices. This means that

> the theory and practice of Indigenous anticolonialism, including Indigenous anticapitalism, is best understood as a struggle primarily inspired by and oriented around *the question of land* — a struggle not only *for* land in the material sense, but also deeply *informed* by what the land *as a system of reciprocal relations and obligations* can teach us about living in relation to one another and the natural world in nondominating and nonexploitative terms. (13)

This system of reciprocal relations and obligations is referred to by Coulthard as "grounded normativity."

A central part of settler-colonialism's non-violent coercive acts, for Coulthard, is the politics of recognition, which he defines, following Richard F. Day, as "the now expansive range of recognition-based models of liberal pluralism that seek to 'reconcile' Indigenous assertions of nationhood with settler-state sovereignty via the accommodation of Indigenous identity claims in some form of renewed legal and political relationship with the Canadian state" (3). Channeling the work of Frantz Fanon, Coulthard points out that such models, far from working on an even plane of power where actors can mutually recognize each other, operate asymmetrically on the settler-state's terms. This asymmetry reproduces the settler-colonial relation two ways: through ensuring structurally that "the terms of accommodation… end up being determined by and in the interests of the hegemonic partner in the relationship" (17) and through creating, for the colonized, "ideological attachments" to these foreclosed, limited forms of recognition (18). One can see Coulthard's models operating in the Canadian state's framing of the process of reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state, for it "takes on a

temporal character as the individual and collective process of overcoming the subsequent *legacy* of past abuse, not the abusive colonial structure itself" (109). Such a process allows the Canadian state to recognize, in a limited way, the violences it inflicts on Indigenous peoples, while attempting simultaneously to free itself of any obligation for addressing its deeper constituting structures; ones that have been and continue in many cases to be constituted through material violence[14].

Against this form of liberal recognition, Coulthard argues — drawing primarily on the work of Leanne Simpson and Taiaiake Alfred — that Indigenous peoples should engage in a "*resurgent politics of recognition* premised on self-actualization, direct action, and the resurgence of cultural practices that are attentive to the subjective and structural composition of settler-colonial power" (24). Instead of looking outward for approval from the hegemonic settler-state, Indigenous peoples should engage in self-affirming cultural practices based in grounded normativity — a resurgent practice that does not merely reproduce an empty identity politics bereft of any material change, like the Canadian state would like to have it, but a *mode of life*, an "interconnected social totality… encompassing the economic, political, spiritual, and social" (65). It is this assertion of a mode of life founded in grounded normativity that I argue *Birdie* embodies in its class politics.

Depictions of Settler-Capitalism

[14] In this way, we can think of the liberal politics of recognition, in Althusserian terms, as an Ideological State Apparatus (ISA): a mechanism of state control that "[functions] massively and predominantly *by ideology*, but… also function secondarily by repression, even if ultimately, but only ultimately, this is very attenuated and concealed, even symbolic" (Althusser 19). This is contrast to the Repressive State Apparatus that it works alongside, which "functions massively and predominantly by *repression* (including physical repression), while functioning secondarily by ideology" (19).

Throughout *Birdie,* the ongoing violences of dispossession are clearly foregrounded, but so are the struggles against this violence. The character Val notes that her *Kohkom* Rose's family comes from Kelly Lake, "where the women hid the men and children when the Treaty Commissioner came through looking for a few more Indians to sign their rights away" (Lindberg 125). Val describes this act as both "prescient and the cause of much modern-day distress" as "on the one hand her people… have not been colonized or 'Indian Acted' to death. On the other hand, the Callious and nine other families have no reserve, no treaty rights, no health care. No money. She is third-generation poor" (125). This remark demonstrates the dangerous bind that liberal forms of recognition attempt to put Indigenous peoples in: while being recognized under the Indian Act allows for Indigenous peoples to access treaty rights and thus resources and reservation land to survive off of, it brings Indigenous peoples closer under the control of the Canadian settler-state, creating material and ideological attachments to settler mechanisms of dispossession and "disciplining Indigenous life to the cold rationality of market principles" (Coulthard 13). Val's noting of the women hiding the children and men away also speaks to the everyday violences that settler-colonial patriarchy has wrought; the women Bernice knows carry "some sort of over-responsibility that [weighs] on each one of them, as if carrying the load that men had dropped cost them posture and emotional affluence that could not yet be counted" (Lindberg 30). Indeed, as Coulthard says, the violence Indigenous women face is both structural — the result of

institutionalized oppressive material relations[15] — and symbolic — "the subjectifying form of violence that renders the crushing materiality of systemic violence invisible, appear natural, acceptable" (177).

Beyond explicit descriptions of settler violence, the text evokes the effects of settler-capitalism in more symptomatic moments. During her time in Edmonton living unhoused, Bernice "[walks] down Jasper Avenue, perched between rich and poor, its split personality like a memory or premonition of something unpredictable" (Lindberg 89). This class split, marked in the physical space of the city, is simultaneously but undecidedly past and future, a source of instability that has an origin but no seeming end — a mark of cyclical crisis and violence in the intertwined machinations of capital and racism. This physical space marks not only crisis and class struggle, but also racialized dispossession; this space of class struggle is constructed on Treaty 6 territory, only able to take place due to violent and nonviolent coercive settler mechanisms. Thus, the split personality of Jasper Avenue not only operates as a space of the memory and premonition of class struggle, but the memory and premonition of dispossession, a separate but related form of imposed, violent instability.

The potential stability and health of reciprocal obligations and relations appear in the text through the health of *Pimatisewin* — a tree of life in the novel, but, as Lindberg

[15] Coulthard outlines the sweeping effects of these oppressive material relations as follows: "[they] render Indigenous women more likely than their non-Indigenous counterparts to suffer severe economic and social privation, including disproportionately high rates of poverty and unemployment, incarceration, addiction, homelessness, chronic and/or life-threatening health problems, overcrowded and substandard housing, and lack of access to clean water, as well as face discrimination and sexual violence in their homes, communities, and workplaces" (177). Nearly all of these systemic facts are represented in *Birdie*: in particular economic and social privation, homelessness, unemployment, substandard housing, and sexual violence.

points out in a Q&A included in the paperback edition of the novel, means, loosely translated from Cree, "the good life" (265). A form of what Coulthard might call grounded normativity, *Pimatisewin* emphasizes that "our spirits and bodies have an obligation to our natural environment to behave in reciprocal, healing and positive ways" (265). To achieve *Pimatisewin,* one must not only focus on care for the self, but care for relatives and beyond. In the first *pawatamowin,* or dream, of the novel, Bernice sees the Frugal Gourmet point to *Pimatisewin,* stating that "she needs some tiramisu" (3). The relations of *Pimatisewin* are lacking; the extractive, non-reciprocal productive processes of settler-capitalism have left it in bad shape, in the waking world as well, "dying… from pollution" (24). The tree requires nourishment to survive; it requires care.

Birdie and Resurgence

The core of the novel's critique of settler-capitalism comes in the form of the characters' demonstrations of reciprocal relations of care. Kait Pinder's perceptive reading of *Birdie* focuses on how "the novel participates in the discourse of reconciliation through its critique of the ways in which colonial models of care regularly produce asymmetrical power relationships by emphasizing the compassion of settler Canadians and the suffering of Indigenous peoples" (218). I wish to build on these insights about resurgence to also demonstrate how a certain critique of class politics is equiprimordially linked to this critique of colonial models of care.

Bernice has suffered a great deal of violence and trauma throughout her life; she is sexually assaulted by her uncle, spends a great deal of her life living unhoused in Edmonton, and is committed to a psychiatric institution known colloquially as the San.

Bernice spends most of her time in the novel in a "sunken" state — a state of consciousness in which "she flows through past and present easily… [time] trickles like a stream that Bernice can float down, paddle back in, and start over at a new current" (17-18). In this sunken state, Bernice actively operates outside what Mark Rifkin has called "settler time:" an orientation that "reduces the unfolding and adaptive expressions of Indigenous peoplehood to a set of points — the supposedly shared now of the present, modernity, and national history — within a configuration that is positioned as the commonsensical frame in ways that deny the immanent motion of indigeneity" (Rifkin 26). Instead of having Bernice engage with her past in this linear settler time — a process Rifkin calls "temporal recognition," linked to the liberal politics of recognition that Coulthard critiques — the text has Birdie work through her history on her own terms, "attending to [her] own frames of reference for [her] experiences of time: not just as beliefs set within a supervening or underlying 'natural' timeline but as a basis for understanding the materiality of [her] ways of being and becoming" (Rifkin 31). As Rifkin observes, this

> exertion of temporal sovereignty in the face of a history of settler violence and displacement consists in an ongoing re-creation oriented by an engagement with the historical density... of collective identity and experience. The feeling of belonging… provides a frame of reference and a trajectory for the effort to move forward in ways that are neither equivalent to nor simply disconnected from the past, generating "a new design" that can engender livable forms of stability. (32)

Indeed, while Birdie is "under," she can gently move in the current of time, revisiting events in her life in order to process and heal. However, in this process, she "[feels] anything but free" (Lindberg 18); this process of ongoing recreation is a difficult one to foster solely on her own. This assertion of temporal sovereignty requires material shifts to

forms of interdependence and care that are foreign to settler logics in order to be taken to its full conclusion, and it is this that the text demonstrates most clearly.

While Birdie is in her sunken, shifting state, she is watched over by a makeshift family made up of her Auntie Val, her cousin Freda, and her employer/landlord Lola. They work together to wash, feed, and watch over Bernice as she travels in her own stream of time, providing her not just with material satiation and nourishment, but, as Pinder argues, "a form of physical and emotional insulation, protecting her from destructive outbursts of energy and pain" (225-6). For Pinder, this insulation appears in the text as a sort of closed circuit: "the three women moving around [Bernice] generate some sort of resistance that allows her to travel back and forth (Now and Then, Here and There) without much pain" (Lindberg 157). This reciprocal network of care is what facilitates Bernice's resurgent healing throughout the novel as opposed to settler state institutions of "care" such as the San, a site of disciplinary power that while creating a ritual that "was soothing in its repetition… was no safer than living outside in Edmonton, no more peaceful than the house she had to share with dangerous uncles" (99). The network of care is also opposed to the Canadian foster system and its attempts to assimilate Indigenous children into colonial forms of the family, as seen when Bernice's foster family, the Ingelsons, mis-recognize her stockpiling of food in her room as a sign of past starvation, and not a preparatory move towards independence; they still hold onto essentialist notions of Indigeneity, something that Bernice rails against: "yes, most certainly, the Meetooses had more pinches than the Ingelsons. But that was the result of history and design, not some flaw in her family or her people" (143). Her foster family's

kindness and hospitality, while materially beneficial to Bernice, is not built on reciprocal, mutual recognition, but instead, as Pinder points out, on the fetishization of Indigenous suffering (224); thus, it cannot serve as a liberatory structure from which to heal from settler-colonial violence, as it still re-enacts this violence in a more benign form.

The reciprocal network of care that surrounds Birdie is transformative not simply because it allows Birdie to safely bypass settler time and heal, but because it allows transformation to occur in all those participating in it. The labour of reciprocal care thus has not just the potential to interrupt settler time and reshape circumstances for an individual in need, but to transform relationships of exploitative exchange into ones of care and resurgence. This can be most clearly seen in the transformation of Lola. Initially, Lola, as Bernice's employer and landlord, is fully entrenched in the settler narrative of the "dying savage thing," even as Bernice notes Lola has a "really big heart" (9). While initially in a position of control in labour and housing, Lola slowly comes to show how her care for Bernice "brings out her kindness and love, and in turn reveals a deeper connection to both her tenant and her family" (Pinder 227). She comes to reject the cruelty of her white friends, a "mirror image in herself" (Lindberg 112), coming to find solidarity with Bernice through their shared experience as survivors of sexual violence (113). In the image she sees of herself when Bernice looks as her, Lola sees the potential in herself to be a "different woman… quiet kindness and soft intelligence meets harsh observation and boiling wit" (112). Noting that Lindberg has said that "Lola is metaphorically Canada" (qtd. in Alex), Pinder notes the affective potential of such a reading, arguing that "[Lola's] transformation through her response to Birdie has

important consequences for the perspective settler Canadians take toward Indigenous suffering" (227), breaking away from possessive, exchange-centric colonial modes of care, such as charity and humanitarian aid, to one where care and kindness is "a gift… created through and exists only in relation" (228). On top of this important affective shift, Lola's transformation also points to accompanying material shifts in relations that can enact such affective perspectives. In order to care for Bernice, Lola must interrupt and shift the relations and work in her bakery, calling Val and Freda to help care for Bernice. Instead of being a supervisor, Lola begins to work alongside Freda and Val to keep the bakery running and care for Bernice: they take turns going to the market and picking up ingredients, and "at each meal, the three women cook beside each other" (Lindberg 157). This micro-reformulation of labour, while not necessarily a grand show of direct action, is an important instance of anti-colonial praxis, as it is an "affirmative *enactment* of another modality of being, a different way of relating to and with the world" (Coulthard 169).

The necessarily coupled affective and material shifts in Lola's bakery eventually culminate in the restoration of *Pimatisewin* through the offering of a feast collectively cooked by Bernice, Val, Freda, and Lola. The creation of this feast does not just depend on the collective act of cooking, but on a collective assemblage of ingredients that would not be recovered without the closed circuit of resurgent care. As Bernice floats through time, revisiting and working through her past, she discovers short lists of ingredients and foodstuffs — the components of the healing feast for *Pimatisewin.* It is not only Bernice who gathers these foodstuffs; along with the lists Bernice has been finding and adding to her journal of ingredients, "there is also one from each of the other occupants of the

bakery" (Lindberg 221). Val, Freda, and Lola all contribute to the feast for *Pimatisewin*, even as it is Bernice herself who initiates the resurgent action. But they do so through their own journeys through memory and the past which require critical self-reflection on their relations with others and themselves. The restoration of *Pimatisewin* at the level of figure and relations — a fictional enactment of reciprocal relations informed by an example of grounded normativity — shows settler readers the potential for such relations to exist, as well as the potential to expand their own ideological horizons and to shift their own narratives of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians towards an understanding of the importance of resurgence and Indigenous autonomy (Pinder 236, Hanson 87). *Birdie* decisively refuses the class and reconciliatory narratives of the Canadian state, proposing a vision of a process of resurgence that rejects exploitative and cold, utilitarian modes of exchange and production.

***Fifteen Dogs* and the Symptomatic Critique of Capitalism**

From two realist novels, we turn to a more allegorical narrative. André Alexis's *Fifteen Dogs*, published in 2015 by Coach House Books, tells the tale of fifteen dogs granted human consciousness by the Greek gods Apollo and Hermes as part of a bet — the bet being whether any of the dogs will die happy in their newfound consciousness. While the novel primarily takes place in Toronto, the Canadian nation-state is practically a non-presence in the text, unlike in *Birdie* and *Small Game Hunting.* Earlier work by Alexis has more directly addressed questions of the nation-state and belonging, including his 1998 debut novel C*hildhood.* In his 2003 study of Black Canadian literature, *Black*

Like Who?, Rinaldo Walcott says that *Childhood* is "a text which teaches that one of the requirements of becoming a full citizen in a nation like Canada is to learn to forget" (64); that is, forget one's links to "non-Canadian" culture. Walcott argues that in *Childhood,* Alexis employs a conservative postmodernism that attempts to repress blackness within the text by invoking the "Canadian" as a way "to preempt discussions of [Alexis's] blackness and secure his affiliation with this normative Canada" (61). In this sense, Alexis is simultaneously making and attempting to mask a formal border-crossing between his birthplace of Trinidad and Canada; a masking that fails and thus "[serves] only to highlight the repression of 'real' border crossing moments in the narrative" (60). Some of these masking moves Alexis's inclusion of bilingualism through French-speaking characters and invoking Canadian landscape tropes (61); these masking moves are betrayed, however, by symptomatic evocations of the Caribbean, such as Alexis's representations of Caribbean food and uncritical representation of Black domestic workers in Canadian households (63). Ultimately, for Walcott, *Childhood's* formal conservatism plays into "a narrow definition of the nation and what it might and might not be capable of including" (64), even as its content relies so heavily on "the stories that [Alexis's] immigrant parents and others must have told" (63). For Walcott, though, *Childhood,* despite its conservatism, is still a novel that destabilizes the Canadian nation. Through its formal repressions of the Caribbean and blackness in constructing a Canadian symbolic, the text "forces readers to ask questions concerning identity, nation and belonging which are counterposed to some of [Alexis's] own writerly strategies for submerging those concerns" (64).

While the nation has seemed to drop out of Alexis's work over time — at least on the surface — his attachment to Canada and national belonging has remained present in his work. Alexis has expressed surprise about being nominated for a Trinidadian literary prize given that he "[thinks] of [his] writing as very Canadian" (qtd. in Bethune). This notion has long been a part of Alexis's work; in an assessment of Alexis's early work, critic David Chariandy notes that in many of his essays and commentaries, Alexis has expressed "a longing for works that are concretely and comfortably Canadian" (80). In a 1995 essay called "Borrowed Blackness," Alexis expresses a desire Black Canadian artists to address Blackness in the context of Canada, to "speak *from* Canada. I miss hearing Black Canadian writing… that speaks not just about situation, or about the earth, but *from* the earth" (Alexis "Borrowed Blackness"). Chariandy notes that in this essay, however, "Alexis seems to suggest that speaking 'from the earth' involves not complaining excessively about Canada" (81), referencing here Alexis's past critiques of other Black Canadian writers like Dionne Brand, whose work has extensively critiqued notions of national belonging. There exists a tension, in Alexis's early work, between his attachment to Canadian national belonging and his position as a member of the Black diaspora living in Canada.

Given Alexis's attachment to Canadian national belonging, I argue that political repression is operating in *Fifteen Dogs*, particularly regarding class and nation, similar to that which Walcott describes. Like Walcott, I believe that these absences have a great deal to offer us in terms of reading the text as a counter-novel: in its allegorical confrontations with power, hierarchy, and the formation of ideal societies, it forces the

reader to consider questions in and around these topics, and, when read in the context of "CanLit" or the circulatory discourses of *Canada Reads*, potentially to apply these questions to the Canadian nation-state. The character who mostly clearly prompts these questions is the beagle Benjy — who "[uses] his intelligence almost uniquely to serve his own wants, needs, desires and whims" (Alexis "Fifteen Dogs" 101) — and his interactions with both canine and human society.

I wish to offer one last thought regarding Alexis before I begin my analysis. I do not wish to suggest through my analysis of *Fifteen Dogs* that Alexis's literary corpus is hopelessly reactionary or politically ineffective at its core. I instead mean to trace a political trajectory that Alexis's work has taken over the course of his career and attempted to see how we can read a particular crystallization of that trajectory in relation to class discourse in Canada. And while *Fifteen Dogs* is a book that represses the nation in its critiques of power, Alexis's 2019 novel *Days by Moonlight* is a text that directly and incisively critiques the Canadian state at multiple points, looking at questions of blackness in Canada, Canada's "attempts" at reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, and even class and poverty. While an analysis of the differences between *Fifteen Dogs* and *Day by Moonlight* is beyond the scope of this thesis, what I wish to demonstrate through this quick note is that a text, being a material commodity produced in a specific place and time, can be viewed of as a crystallization of the material-ideological circumstances in which it was produced; not a reflection, but a *refraction* of the mode of production. As Terry Eagleton notes, "literature… does not stand in some reflective, symmetrical, one-to-one relation with its object. The object is deformed, refracted, dissolved… what

characterizes art is the fact that, in transforming its materials into a product, it reveals and distances them" ("Marxism" 48). There is thus no eternal "essence" of Canadian belonging in Alexis's oeuvre; shifts in material and ideological circumstances from political struggle can perhaps be seen to allow space for previously unconscious discourses to speak, or create entirely new shifts in awareness for different cultural producers.

Benjy and the Critique of Power

One of the many philosophical themes the novel explores is power and domination, and the extent to which power and domination are natural elements in societies. This dynamic shows itself most apparently in the novel's allegorical critique of fascism, whose manifestation Erin Chewter has coined "dogism." Near the beginning of the novel, the dogs are split in their response to human consciousness. Half of the dogs wish to reject this new consciousness, as their development of language sets them apart from the other dogs in the city, and from what they see as a natural canine essence. As Atticus, the de-facto leader of this group, puts it, "this new thinking leads away from the pack, but a dog is no dog if he does not belong" (Alexis "Fifteen Dogs" 31); "it keeps us from being dogs and it keeps us from what is right" (32). The natural purity of a lost canine essence becomes the ethical foundation of dogism, and in pursuing it, the dogist camp violently drives out the other dogs that have embraced their new consciousness.

In their pursuit of this canine essence, the dogists are "forced to imitate what they had remembered of their old language. They were, in effect, dogs imitating dogs" (63). Atticus consciously scrutinizes the canine performance of his pack, which, for Benjy,

ends up having the opposite of its intended effect: he becomes "more self-conscious, more thoughtful, more dependent on a language that he kept to himself" (63). At this stage, the dogists are operating at a sort of proto-ideological level of power, where coercive force is required to enact the *doxa* of dogist society. At a later stage in the pack's development, Benjy returns and notes that "their movements and sounds were now unselfconsciously produced but they were even further away from the canine… an imitation of an imitation of dogs. All that had formerly been natural was now strange. *All had been turned to ritual*" (73, emphasis mine). Ideological conditioning has now been secured: à la Louis Althusser,[16] the dogs now unconsciously self-produce what appears to be a naturalized canine essence in and through their material practices. In the dogist social order, material acts like mounting another dog — which was previously based on instinct — become about power: "Atticus and the others mounted [Benjy], it seemed, in order to prove there was order and hierarchy. That is, *to prove it to themselves*" (73, emphasis mine). Benjy — at the very bottom rung of the pack — recognizing the very ideological nature of these acts, comes to a shocking revelation:

> The others needed him, weak and lowly though he was, to maintain their echelon. This thought, which he shared with no one, instilled in him a sense of his own power. He, Benjy, was in his way as necessary as the leader, for if there is a top there must necessarily be a bottom… this revolutionary thought, new as it was to him, was disturbing. It was a paradox that Benjy could neither shake nor resolve, and it set him — unconsciously at first — against his pack mates. (75)

[16] "The existence of the ideas of [a subject's] belief is material in that *[one's] ideas are [one's] material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which derive the ideas of that subject*" (Althusser 43, emphasis in original).

While not directly in the service of class consciousness — at this point, Benjy is the only subject at the bottom of the hierarchy and thus cannot cultivate a shared consciousness with any other dog — Benjy clearly enters a state of acute awareness that drives him to political action. He can see the instability of the pack's power, and out of his own self-interest, Benjy kills and escapes the pack by tricking them into entering what he calls a Garden of Death: a compost-bin or garden laden with poison meant to kill stray animals.[17]

Later, Benjy ends up living in a household with a human couple named Randy and Clare. In his attempts to dissect the hierarchy within the household, Benjy comes to sees humans as confusing creatures, given the confusing role desire plays in their own hierarchies. For example, Benjy is puzzled that Randy allows himself to be dominated sexually by Clare even though he appears to be the clearly dominant one in the household (111). Refusing or perhaps unable to read the complexities of this human desire, Benjy asserts his dominance and refuses to listen to the orders of Randy and Clare, though they still keep him around and feed him, albeit reluctantly. Over time, Benjy grows "feral through an excess of civilization… ignoring his instincts, abandoning his natural caution, confusing self-indulgence for dominance… he [loses] sight of the true indicators of dominance" (112). Benjy's downfall is brought about by his complete turn to human consciousness at the expense of his natural canine instincts. And while these "true indicators of dominance" remain unspoken in the text, one can infer them from the ideals of dogist society: that of "absolute authority" (95), a complete command of respect and

[17] This appears to be a reference to a series of deliberate dog poisonings that have occurred in Toronto (see Freeman and Stancu, Mok).

obedience from those under you, as opposed to Randy and Clare's self-absorbed indifference. Randy and Clare eventually flee their home and leave Benjy behind, essentially leaving him to die. Benjy ironically dies the same death he brought upon the dogists as he eats poisonous mouse pellets out of hungry desperation.

The novel's plot frames Benjy's death as an act of justice — it is enacted by Zeus, the god of justice, on behalf of a dying Atticus, who wishes for revenge upon the one who killed him and his pack (98, 118). One could argue, then, that the text rightfully punishes Benjy for his selfishness — but the text also punishes him for bringing down an allegorical form of fascism through violent means. It thus posits a logic that justifies a liberal human aversion to violence as a politically liberating and sometimes necessary act, equating the selfishness and violence of Benjy's actions with the constituting, regulatory violence of the dogist pack. In their reading of the novel, Chewter follows the novel's humanist logic to its conclusion, framing Benjy as analogous to "a modern-day Stalinist apologist" (71), who, in "[failing] to extend his limited insight regarding the futility of using violence for power to include his own actions" (73) becomes a "misguided totalitarian revolutionary, who only perpetuates the cycle of violence in his quest for security and freedom" (73). This reading, I argue, not only misrecognizes Benjy's actions and underlying motivations, but in its misrecognition allows the text to justify the liberal humanism that the Canadian state operates under; Benjy becomes a scapegoat for any attempt at a revamping of unjust hierarchies. The text, then, while performing a potentially revolutionary examination of power relations and unjust violence — leading

to possible discussions of class violence and exploitation — circumscribes this discursive potential through its punishment of Benjy.

Utopian Immanent Critique

Despite the plot's condemnation of Benjy's potentially revolutionary insights, other strong, incisive, and Utopic moments show themselves in the text — ones that deserve attention and could prompt counter-thinking. One such moment occurs when Benjy is living in the household of another dog, Majnoun. Benjy attempts to ask the human Nira, in English, for money — something Majnoun teaches him means vaguely "'this for that,' a word that was mysterious and yet palpably important, perhaps the most important" (Alexis "Fifteen Dogs" 83). The importance of money in this society is clear, but its truth remains hidden behind a certain shroud: that of the process of capitalist exchange. Benjy's second insight, however, is extremely powerful: he notes that money "was also mixed up, somehow, with the thin, round copper-tangy disks that peppered the streets of the city" (83). Here, the materiality of money, of the commodity, comes to the fore, just for a moment: it evokes Marx's discussion of the historical development of money under capitalism. Under capitalism, precious metals come to evoke a dual use-value: their use-value as a commodity (i.e. nickel/copper as raw material for electrical wiring) and their formal use-value, a social function, which is their ability to "[materially] [embody]… abstract and therefore equal human labor" by virtue of their "every sample [possessing] the same uniform quality" (Marx "Capital" 184) — that is, their ability to operate as a universal commodity for all other commodities. The process of commodity exchange — money for commodity, exchange value for use value — alienates the money

commodity, "[splitting] the nominal content of coins away from their real content, dividing their metallic existence from their functional existence" (223); consequently, money comes to be mistakenly viewed as having an imaginary, purely symbolic quality (185), mysteriously floating around instead of being an expression of the commodity relation. Benjy's insights, drawn from his dog consciousness, reveal this dualistic nature of money, highlighting, perhaps in a more symptomatic way, the abstractions of capitalism at work. The text, of course, still attempts to circumscribe this insight, as "after the 'money' incident, it wasn't so much that Nira disliked Benjy as that she found the dog disingenuous" (Alexis 86); Benjy's insights into the nature of money are displaced by the text's assertion of his conniving nature. Benjy's desires still lie in in libertarian self-interest, even as his dog consciousness points to ideological mystifications that humans under capitalism may be blind to. But this passage demonstrates that Benjy's critical view can be appropriated for a critique of other things, such as capitalism and class exploitation — and that Benjy's critical view points to this content that is repressed in the text.

The most interesting instance of this critique comes at the moment of Benjy's death in Randy and Clare's home. As he lies dying, he has a Utopian vision of hope:

> Benjy had been… a schemer. But like all schemers he held within him the vision of a place or a state beyond schemes, where schemes were unnecessary because he was safe.
>
> Benjy's greatest wish was for a place *where the echelon was clear to all, where the powerful cared for the weak and the weak gave their respect without being coerced. He longed for balance, order, right and pleasure.* It was this place that Benjy glimpsed as he died, and the glimpse brought him solace. (117, emphasis mine)

Against the instability of the dogist society which he has escaped, as well as that of the human society — which is confusing and unpredictable — Benjy wants a world where

hierarchy is not mystified, one where there is no need to abuse the rules of the system in order to get ahead. In contrast to the model of care that *Birdie* builds, Benjy's vision of the powerful caring for the weak evokes colonial models of care such as charity and humanitarian aid, which only address the symptoms of systemic problems rather than the systemic problems themselves. While the machinations of the plot do seem to reinforce a bizarre, reactionary message about the comeuppances of the use of violence, it is clear that Benjy's desire for *clarity* in the social order is not in itself a revolutionary one. In reality, he is much more of a republican[18] driven to violence for his own survival, not for the goal of abolishing any unjust hierarchies; "after all, he believed with all his soul that the social order was the most important thing" (74). In fact, Benjy would have been happy to have stayed with the dogist pack as he "[longs] for their company," but as he notes, after he first flees them, "he [cannot] not see any profit in a return" (67).[19] In fact, Benjy's Utopian vision of "balance, order, right and pleasure" hits on the same liberal humanist values that the Canadian constitutional principles of peace, order, and good government do. The utopian nature of this liberal humanist vision shows that the liberal humanist constitutional principles of the Canadian state themselves are, as per the definition of utopia, not present in the current world. Benjy's vision, even if it yearns for an ultimately liberal society, thus signals the text running up against the ideological,

[18] I am using the term "republican" in the sense of a political system in which elected leaders, those possessing power, represent and fulfill the needs of the majority, who lack power.

[19] Note here the language evoking exchange and economic utility; while Benjy may offer some latent form of a critique of political economy, he is still operating by the rules of political economy.

naturalizing project of the neoliberal Canadian state, critiquing it in its yearning for a world that the Canadian state claims yet fails to uphold — and tragically, never will.

Fifteen Dogs, despite its latent critiques of unjust power and the false purity of fascism, does not follow its moments of revolutionary logic to their conclusions; the text, as Brydon says, "seems to lament the lost purity of a physical way of being in the world uncontaminated by self-consciousness and the awareness of time passing" ("Risk" 108). While the text clearly makes the point that "to attempt to embrace purity instead of recognizing complexity and complicity is to misrecognize the way things are" (108), it also seems to make the point that, at least in terms of the question of power, there is no way out; that the world is so inherently complex that it will stall any meaningful, transformative action. Against these impulses, this text can and should be read for its Utopian gleanings and moments of critique; these moments can be taken in themselves as critiques of the Canadian state by readers who reject the text's "Canadianness."

Conclusion

This chapter has examined three texts that have circulated on *Canada Reads* and examined how and if they take up equiprimordial class discourse. *Small Game Hunting* and *Birdie* both turn away from the Canadian state in order to build and develop new systems of care built on solidarity. *Fifteen Dogs,* on the other hand, has a political unconscious that maps onto liberal humanist values that the Canadian state embodies and wishes to propagate in order to reproduce itself. But it is also a counternovel in the sense that its symptomatic treatment of class allows for it to have moments of critique, even if

they are quickly circumscribed. In these texts, at least, equiprimordial class is a salient issue taken up in various discourses and to different ends. The next chapter will examine if those discourses track into the public sphere.

Chapter 2: *Canada Reads* and The Recourse to "Accessibility"

As seen clearly in Chapter 1, there are strong and compelling equiprimordial class discussions taking in the field called Canadian literature. Both *Birdie* and *Small Game Hunting* demonstrate more explicit critiques of the Canadian state and its equiprimordial class discourses, while *Fifteen Dogs* attaches itself more to the liberal imaginary, in-line with the Canadian state. An equiprimordial class-mindful reading at the micro-level certainly brings these dynamics out, but what happens when these texts move into the public space of *Canada Reads*, becoming subjects of a national culture-making exercise? Understanding if and how these equiprimordial class discourses are taken up in such a space are imperative in understanding if and how said discourses are taken up by Canadian readers. Thus, this chapter moves from textual analysis of novels to *meta*-textual analysis of debates around these novels on *Canada Reads*, in order to see if these discourses emerge in the broader Canadian public. I close-read each book's *Canada Reads* treatment to determine a few key conclusions: a) if and how equiprimordial class is discussed on each broadcast in relation to my chosen texts; b) if and how equiprimordial class is discussed during each *Canada Reads* season at large; and c) what subjects dominate their conversations if equiprimordial class is a minor factor in or mostly absent from the broadcasts. Ultimately, the goal is to determine whether *Canada Reads* ends up stifling the discussion and circulation of the critical class messages of my three selected novels. I will consider some of the generic factors that may contribute to a stifling of broader public circulation — for example, *Canada Reads*'s status as a mass reading event (MRE) — in Chapter 3. Ultimately, I conclude equiprimordial class discourse, while not

entirely absent from the debates, is deeply hampered therein, with discourses of universal humanisms and notions of accessibility — two closely-linked factors — filling the space.

Canada Reads 2016: Transnational Humanism and the Aversion to Indigenous Stories

The contending books on *Canada Reads 2016* were *Birdie* by Tracey Lindberg, defended by entrepreneur Bruce Poon Tip; *Bone and Bread* by Saleema Nawaz, defended by entrepreneur and women's rights activist Farah Mohamed; *The Hero's Walk* by Anita Rau Badami, defended by actor Vinay Virmani; *The Illegal* by Lawrence Hill, defended by Olympic athlete Clara Hughes; and *Minister Without Portfolio* by Michael Winter, defended by WWE wrestler and actor Adam Copeland. The theme of that year's broadcast was "starting over," with the dominant topic of the broadcast being the status, as Jeremy Haynes puts it, of "Canada's obligations to act as a refuge" (30) for both refugees but also a wider immigrant community. Tensions emerge between this criterion and Poon Tip's defense of *Birdie*, which, while not explicitly drawing out issues of class, disrupts the universalist discourses of the other panellists that threaten to treat settler-colonialism as a historical event instead of an ongoing project[20].

Speculative Transnationalism versus The Locality of the Nation

The panellists' defenses of their books in *Canada Reads 2016* mainly rely on a sense of what Haynes calls speculative transnationalism: "a form of nationalism that appeals to the way globalization fosters multiple simultaneous identities that transgress (but also refer to) the geopolitical boundaries of traditional nation-states" (129). Through

[20] As Patrick Wolfe has put it, "settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event" (388).

this imaginary, many of the panellists propose that their texts help Canadians understand an underlying, universal human condition at the core of all humans, as a way to combat prejudice in a country that has shifted away from a supposedly homogenous cultural make-up. Virmani's opening remarks in defense of *The Hero's Walk* illustrate this argument nicely:

> The map of Canada today is the map of the world. That's why reading a book like *The Hero's Walk* is a must for Canadians… it takes us outside of ourselves so we can look deep within… this story teaches us not to see people for what they are, but who they are. It teaches us empathy, about letting go of old prejudices and embracing the new… providing us a deeply sympathetic understanding of the human condition. There is so much about this book and its characters that is similar to us Canadians, and yet so much that is radically different. And Canada must read this book for both reasons. ("2016 Day One" 00:09:14-00:10:11).

Similarly, Hughes suggests that *The Illegal* will "hopefully inspire us to connect to our own humanity" (00:12:14).

During the debate, tensions arise between the speculative transnationalism of Hughes, Virmani, and Mohamed and the more geographically-focused defenses of Copeland and Poon Tip. After the voting-off of *Minister Without Portfolio* on Day 1, Copeland laments, with some degree of frustration,

> Well, I feel like the most Canadian book was eliminated… It doesn't take place in another country the entire book, it deals with real issues… What Henry did was look at himself in the mirror and realize that he was very flawed in a very real way… it's real conversation… It's not sensationalistic. You would meet Henry on the street… He is Canadian. You'd see him in the bar, you'd watch hockey with him. ("2016 Day One" 00:51:01-00:52:28).

As Haynes notes, "Copeland conflates the nation with the geopolitical boundaries of the state, and alludes to — or presumes — performances of nationalism that reflect the dominant population of that conceptual territory" (136). Copeland deploys another type of

universalism: that of the white male Canadian who embodies the stereotypical cultural signifiers of Canada like watching hockey at the bar. By implicitly discounting the other books' concerns, such as *Birdie*'s, as not real issues, Copeland reinforces a colonial framework that does not take into account the fraught nature of Canada as established through settler-colonial violence.

While Poon Tip also references the geographic boundaries of Canada, he does so in a slightly different way:

> I think that this is *Canada Reads*. I think the books should be relevant to Canada. I think that it's a big responsibility to be on *Canada Reads* because the higher purpose is finding a book that every Canadian should read. It should have the power to move the dial, somehow, in Canadian society, and I think [setting is] just relevant. I loved [*The Hero's Walk*] and she is an amazing writer, and I could critique things about the book because we all kind of read books to create defences… it's a good book, but I think [being set in Canada] is a big deal… this isn't 'India Reads'… it's *Canada Reads*. ("2016 Day Two" 00:32:47-00:33:24)

Poon Tip's call for the winning book to be set in Canada is explicitly tied to the imperative for the text to make social change in Canadian society — in this case, raise awareness of the violences of settler-colonialism and the need for reconciliation — rather than simply reflecting a problematic settler-Canadianness in their content. Unfortunately, this call is accompanied by an offensive remark that harkens back to the Canadian state's long and ongoing history of anti-immigrant racism. As Haynes puts it, "Poon Tip is trapped by his strategy to affirm the literal land referenced by the Indigenous text he must defend and the racial logic by which his co-panellists invoke transnationalism to overcome the racial boundaries of traditional Canadian nationalism" (153). The

interlocking relationship between anti-immigrant racism and settler-colonialism in Canada is not mobilized by Poon Tip, and thus does not enter the space of discussion[21].

Poon Tip's defense of *Birdie* also fails to bring up the interlocking relationship between settler-colonialism and capitalism. In his opening remarks, Poon Tip emphasizes that one of *Birdie*'s central messages is *wahkohtowin,* which Nehiyaw scholar Matthew Wildcat defines as follows:

> First, it references the act of being related — to your human and other than human relatives. Second, it is a worldview based on the idea that all of existence is animate and full of spirit. Since everything has spirit it means we are connected to the rest of existence and live in a universe defined by relatedness. Third, there are proper ways to conduct and uphold your relationships with your relatives and other aspects of existence. Thus, *wahkohtowin* also includes the obligations and responsibilities people have to maintain good relationships. (14)

Poon Tip does correctly characterize *wahkohtowin* as the principle "that all human beings treat each other like relatives, that we have a reciprocal obligation to take care of one another as if we were universally bound by family ties" ("2016 Day One" 00:14:14-00:14:22); however, this concept, as wielded by Poon Tip, remains attached to settler-colonial understandings of kinship. For example, Poon Tip says that "we should care as a family of *all the people that make this country great*" (00:30:55, emphasis mine) and he also claims that "*Birdie* is an important book that makes us ask 'what is my responsibility as a relative to Indigenous people?'… history has proven that our relations have been one-sided. *Birdie* allows us the hope of shared responsibility and beauty as family. *One tribe: Canada*" ("2016 Day Two" 00:14:46-00:15:19, emphasis mine). While Poon Tip is

[21] For work on the interrelation between anti-immigrant racism and settler-colonialism in Canada, see Himani Bannerji's "On the Dark Side of the Nation: Politics of Multiculturalism and the State of 'Canada'" in *The Ideological Condition: Selected Essays on History, Race and Gender*, Brill, 2020, pp. 364-93.

rightfully able to acknowledge the violences that Indigenous people, specifically Indigenous women, have faced in their interactions with the Canadian state as a result of settler-colonialism, he does so through a lens that holds compassion and understanding as the tools for solving systemic social issues. He fails to recognize — as does the discourse of the broadcast itself — that Canada cannot be great because its very constitution fundamentally relies on violence; no shift in consciousness alone can change this. To live by *wahkohtowin* would involve, arguably, dismantling Canada.

"Is Birdie *Accessible Enough?": Settler Moves to Innocence*

As Haynes's and my own analyses show, Poon Tip's defense, while not explicitly performing a thoroughly intersectional understanding of the links between settler-colonialism and capitalism, does strongly critique Canadian settler-colonialism in a way that stands starkly apart from the speculative transnationalism on display in the defenses of the other panellists. For instance, while the other panellists are convinced of the topical importance of *Birdie,* some ultimately dismiss the book as being "inaccessible." As Mohamed says,

> I think it's an important book … but ultimately, I think that if you strip away some of the issues in the book like reconciliation… I don't know that most people could relate to this book. I found it very hard to relate to… I think that to be a book that is relatable, it's got to be an issue that's really important, and this book raises a really important issue, there's no doubt about it, but does it represent? Does it capture [the issue]?… I don't think it does, and I think most people would struggle with this book. I had to struggle to get to the end of this book, and that doesn't mean that I'm a bad reader or a good reader, it just says a lot about the book itself. ("2016 Day Two" 00:35:48-00:36:39)

Mohamed projects her own individual criterion of relatability here onto *Birdie,* failing to understand that while some other Canadians may share her position, that does not mean

that the book would be entirely unrelatable to every Canadian. Also, it is interesting to see Mohamed, as a settler, assert what she believes "captures" or "represents" the experience of Indigenous women while not having any epistemic privilege to do so. Virmani, echoing Mohamed's critiques, adds that

> While disorientation can be a very powerful storytelling tool, this book relies on far too many devices. I felt the narrative was messy. I felt it was chaotic… The first hundred pages are very difficult to get through — let's be clear about one thing here: we're talking about books. We're talking about fiction… Let's talk about narrative; talk about characters… Let's talk about accessibility… I believe *Birdie* brings up such an important issue… The plight of Indigenous women is a national disgrace. It is deep rooted in racism, in sexism… [but] we are talking about fiction… and you're relying far too much on this one book… I'm afraid people will not invest in the issue. ("2016 Day Two" 00:36:43-00:38:23).

Virmani sees a clear divide between literary aesthetics and social themes, operating on what Terry Eagleton might call the ideology of the aesthetic. For Eagleton,

> the aesthetic is at once… the very secret prototype of human subjectivity in early capitalist society, and a vision of human energies as radical ends in themselves which is the implacable energy of all dominative and instrumentalist thought… if it offers a generous utopian image of reconciliation between men and women at present divided from one another, it also blocks and mystifies the real political movement towards such historical community ("Aesthetic" 9).

In this framework, the dominant category of the aesthetic puts forth a universality that is *false*; it mystifies the conditions for solidarity by putting forth restrictive conditions for aesthetic appreciation that conform to ideas of liberal human subjectivity. We can see this in Virmani's remarks; for him, there is a good and effective way to write that is clear and easy for the reader to settle into, and this is the only way to make a social issue relevant. This definition of "good writing" seems to be shared by almost all the panellists: when asked about what makes a well-written book, the panellists gesture to a sense of poetic beauty combined with an "engaging" story; in this imaginary, poetics should always be

subservient to the movement of the plot, and not hinder it in any way. While Virmani acknowledges that "disorientation can be a very powerful storytelling tool," he does not allow *Birdie,* whose narrative form breaks with settler time, to have that kind of power. Disorientation is powerful, but once it goes too far beyond Western literary aesthetic conventions, it is "messy," and thus fails to do its job.

In both Mohamed and Virmani's critiques, we see a notion of accessibility that relies on a utilitarian framing that says, "if the text tackling a social issue is able to be consumed by the highest number of people, there is the most potential for a shift in social consciousness." The issue with this paradigm is twofold: it infantilizes the assumed reading public and it reifies the social contexts of reading under late capitalism. Assuming that the everyday reader does not want to engage with "difficult" texts carries its own classist undertones, implying that middle-class or working-class readers do not and cannot have access to the cognitive and material means to read "difficult" texts, now or ever. Accessibility in the way it is being deployed by Mohamed and Virmani is also linked to a sense of comfort, whereby social themes are deemed important acceptable for reading only when they are "relatable." I would argue that a text which is comfortable to read does not require a fundamental shift in consciousness or understanding regarding the social issues being brought into focus; something that a more radical assertion in understanding should do[22]. Comfortable texts can serve to either soothe the reader's

[22] As Slavoj Žižek has put it in the film *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, "we, in a way, enjoy our ideology. To step out of ideology, it hurts…You must force yourself to do it." In making this point, I do not mean that every single piece of cultural production one consumes must be "challenging;" my point moreso is to provide criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of social critiques made in pieces of cultural production.

preconceptions or to accommodate certain critiques within a familiar frame; uncomfortable texts do not let the reader off the hook.

In response to Mohamed and Virmani's critiques, Poon Tip points out how Mohamed and Virmani's attack on the "inaccessibility" of Birdie is perhaps linked to settler tastes in literature that they feel more comfortable with, all the while taking a sneaky little jab at the Canadian neoliberal state's domestic policy:

> The path to reconciliation for us is compassion. You know we're a charitable nation in Canada. We throw money at things when we want to fix them. Compassion is very different. Understanding how other people live is what *Birdie* gives you the opportunity to do: to understand the real life of Aboriginal women… but in defense of how you read it… Indigenous people are descendants of nomads; they don't look at time the same way as we do; the amount of their time based on places; and the way they felt. So for you to read it in a certain way, to expect a linear story as a script, is colonizing the book, trying to make the book respond how you want it to respond. ("2016 Day Two" 00:39:00-00:39:56).

As Haynes says, we may not want to exactly "follow Poon Tip's explanation of Indigenous relationships to time and place" (144), but Poon Tip is nonetheless calling attention to the fact that Mohamed and Virmani's transnational universalism erases the essential political context of settler-colonialism — itself a geographical consideration — in discussions of the Canadian nation-state. This erasure takes place, as Haynes shows, when Virmani's description of "the plight of Indigenous women" as rooted in racism and sexism "[removes] the 'plight of Indigenous women' from the intergenerational effects of colonial violence… [obscuring] the roots of that racism and sexism to focus on the symptoms rather than the disease" (145). It happens again when Mohamed vehemently responds to Poon Tip's comments by asserting that "I'm not colonizing this book in any way shape or form" ("2016 Day Two" 00:40:11); she refuses to engage with the

possibility that she might be erasing the importance and specificity of Indigenous aesthetics, instead making a settler move to innocence[23] by stating that instead of *Birdie*, "[she'd] love to read a book about a positive experience of [Indigenous women]" ("Day Two" 00:40:07).

Shockingly, Copeland comes to *Birdie*'s defense, saying that "if we're talking about accessibility to it… I found Bernice very likeable. So I was able to access her because I liked her. And if it's chaotic, it's because her life was chaotic. That's so important to understand" ("Day Two" 00:40:26-00:40:42). He also does not hold the difficulty of the book against it, stating that having to reread sections "made [him] think more. So I think in the end that's the one [book in the competition] that caused me to reflect the most" ("2016 Day Three" 00:36:35-00:36:43). Copeland seems to easily understand *Birdie*'s aesthetic strategy, and, perhaps because his book is already eliminated, feels comfortable asserting its virtues.

Ultimately, though, *Birdie* is voted off on Day 3, and *The Illegal* wins the competition. The emphasis of *Canada Reads* 2016, according to Haynes, "on social unity and a universal sense of humanity limited the visibility of both whiteness and Indigenous sovereignty" (134). I would argue that it also severely limited the visibility of the equiprimordial notion of class that I have argued in the previous chapter is crucial to a reading of *Birdie.* Not only, as Haynes notes, did *Canada Reads 2016* refuse to look beyond the surface effects of settler-colonialism on Indigenous women, it also refused to

[23] Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang coined the term "settler moves to innocence" in their article "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor." They describe settler moves to innocence as "strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all" (10).

take into consideration the co-constituting role of capitalist drives for accumulation in the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands, and the importance of combatting this dispossession through the creation of Indigenous feminist networks of care.

Canada Reads 2017: Understanding Human Nature to Solve Our Social Ills

Canada Reads 2016's appeal to universal humanism returns with a vengeance one year later in Canada Reads 2017. The theme of the 2017 broadcast was "the book Canadians need now." With this more specific theme came a selection of texts that focused strongly on a wide variety of social issues, such as the climate crisis, settler-colonialism and violences against Indigenous women, and wealth inequality. The contending books on *Canada Reads 2017* were *Fifteen Dogs* by André Alexis, defended by rapper, writer, and spoken-word artist Humble the Poet; *Company Town* by Madeline Ashby, defended by opera singer Measha Brueggergosman; *Nostalgia* by V.M. Vassanji, defended by army veteran turned Ottawa city councillor Jody Mitic; *The Break* by Katherena Vermette, defended by comedian and broadcaster Candy Palmater; and *The Right to Be Cold* by Sheila Watt-Cloutier, defended by musician Chantal Kreviazuk. While the competition featured a greater presence of class discourse than the previous year, it ends up being overshadowed by Humble's recurring appeals to the concept of the human condition in his defense of *Fifteen Dogs.*

Fifteen Dogs *and the Idealism of the "Human Condition"*

Throughout the debate, Humble frames *Fifteen Dogs* as a book whose universal humanism can help us solve a range of issues, from socio-economic inequality to climate

change to racism. This is because *Fifteen Dogs,* according to Humble, is a book that allows for an examination of an underlying "human condition" — something that contains both good and bad traits of all humans — at the root of all social conflict. As he says in his Day One opening remarks, "until we understand the human condition, we will not be able to successfully address any of those issues. Human nature is the cause for the man-made problems that we have. *Fifteen Dogs* hits that on the nose" ("2017 Day One" 00:20:40-00:20:51). Humble's defense of Alexis's novel throughout the broadcast consistently relies on this point; he constantly attempts to sway his fellow panellists towards his cause by relating the social concerns at the root of their books to *Fifteen Dogs*: "the human experience… explains why we have climate change. That explains why we have economic disparaging (sic). That explains why our First Nations people are still going through all the horrific things that they're going through. And it's because we're not understanding ourselves and we're not understanding the world around us" ("2017 Day Two" 00:29:50-00:30:07). Humble here deploys a collective Canadian populace that while on its face appears to be universal, immediately reveals itself to be an exclusionary settler category through its use of the possessive in regard to Indigenous peoples. As Palmater says in response to Humble, "we are not your First Nations people… we are not owned by Canadians" (00:30:17-00:30:26).

Despite its clear exclusionary nature, the universal humanism Humble describes, for him, trumps all external social positions. As Humble notes to his fellow panellists,

> I didn't pick a book that looks like me, sounds like me, represents any type of minority that I might check off on the box. I picked the book that represents me to my core... everybody in this room is struggling with the thoughts in their head… everybody in

> this room struggles with jealousy, irrespective of their race, their gender, their orientation, their economic background. (00:32:55-00:33:21)

Humble conceives of the causal relationship between "thoughts" in one's "head" and social facts as one-way: the human condition, channelled through the individual, creates thoughts that then influence the external social world. Shifting social facts and structures do not seem to shape the human condition; they do not affect the "thoughts" in one's "head" or how affects like "jealousy" come about. Failing to take into account the dialectical relationship between social facts and the human condition allows Humble to frame social conflicts as merely misplaced interest, something that easily occurs because of a lack of understanding of the human condition. Humble says that "when we recognize that [our] priorities are different, we can all sit at a table, [and]… solve these using our words, figure out what [our] priorities are, and find a new middle ground, use our creativity to find a new solution where everyone wins" ("2017 finale" 00:40:08-00:40:23). This metaphor of the table, where individuals come, sit, and calmly reach consensus regarding their differences, fails to take into account the *power* that backs certain interests and the imbalances at that table that make easy consensus often impossible to reach[24]. Brueggergosman, who seems to be more aware of these social facts, interrupts Humble's musings about the use of violence by injecting the subject of power back into the conversation:

> Humble: And I feel that digging deeper and trying to understand why we have these feelings will help us realize why these things continue to occur —

[24] This is not to say that humans do not have any agency in the face of societal structures; it is moreso to say that societal structures put inherent limits on what that agency looks like and how it can be deployed. As Marx famously stated, "men (sic.) make their own history, but not of their own free will; not under circumstances they themselves have chosen but under the given and inherited circumstances with which they are directly confronted" ("Eighteenth Brumaire" 480).

> Brueggergosman: But I think in *Fifteen Dogs*, the violence occurs as a way to maintain control. And in *Company Town*, it's something that is reacted to…
>
> Humble: I completely agree… and the question is why are they going to violence to maintain control? Because they may not have the other devices… I am happy to be in a country where we're using our words to settle differences instead of violence. ("2017 Day Three" 00:32:27-00:33:10)

These "other devices" are words that allow people to express their interests, that grant them that ability to sit around the table, so to speak. While Brueggergosman almost makes an in-road towards breaking down Humble's overmystification of motivations for the use of violence, Humble goes right back to further mystifying and misunderstanding the role of power and structures of power. It is not that those in power who wield violence are solely "acting out" because they lack the words to explain their interests; it is more that their interest cannot be fulfilled except through violence[25]. Humble's defense of *Fifteen Dogs* thus capitulates to a narrative that erases fundamental class differences and the effects of capitalism under the Canadian neoliberal state, even as he tries to sway his fellow panellists on the final day by stating that *Fifteen Dogs* is a book that can facilitate the "[projection of] the voices of the voiceless, the ones the oppressors are hoping to write out of history" ("2017 finale" 00:14:04-00:14:09). It is an argument that one should respond to like Kreviazuk does: "that's a great strategy, [but] I sort of see through it, no offense" (00:20:56). On top of this more general skepticism, both Palmater and Kreviazuk state that *Fifteen Dogs* is too masculinist and misogynistic a book to be a wholly

[25] It is also simply not true that Canada has primarily "solved its differences" through words instead of violence. Large swathes of Canadian history, including moments like the violent state reaction to the Red River and North-West Resistances and the Oka Crisis, prove this point false.

universal reflection of the human experience, given that the text kills off nearly all the female dogs in the first half of the book and is focalized primarily through the male dog characters[26].

Despite several of the panellists seeing through Humble's arguments at key points, *Fifteen Dogs* does indeed win the competition, beating out *Company Town* four votes to one. What seals *Fifteen Dog*s's victory, even when holes are poked in its supposed universality, is its adherence to a criterion of accessibility: the same issue that arose during *Canada Reads 2016*'s discussion of *Birdie.* Humble argues that not only does *Fifteen Dogs* get at the heart of all social ills, but that "it does it in half the pages [of the other books]… and it does it with such accuracy" ("2017 Day Two" 00:29:14-00:29:22). This argument seems to gain traction with the other panellists; when they are asked during the finale which book is the "best-written," their criterion for what makes a book well-written, in a similar manner to *Canada Reads 2016*, comes down to if the prose has "fluidity" or "flow;" as Brueggergosman puts it, "you're looking for something that will advance the plot and also give you a nice turn of phrase along the way" ("2017 finale" 00:31:02). Though "flow" is never defined, it can be assumed from Brueggergosman's remarks that it follows a similar ideology of the aesthetic — a focus on perceived "accessibility," readability, and comfort — that dominated discussions of aesthetic value on *Canada Reads 2016.* Both Palmater and Kreviazuk say that between *Company Town* and *Fifteen Dogs, Fifteen Dogs* is the better-written book. The aesthetic qualities of the

[26] Brueggergosman is initially dismissive of Palmater's critique, saying "that is so rich coming from you" ("2017 Day One" 00:38:21). Brueggergosman does later latch onto Palmater's critique in the finale, causing Palmater to say "are you just trying to get my vote? How do you really feel about misogyny…?" ("2017 finale" 00:37:41).

writing seem then to trump the content of the text, even though the evaluative criteria of these qualities remain mostly mystified on the broadcast.

Class: Fundamental or Intersectional?

While Humble's championing of a universal humanist reading of *Fifteen Dogs* to victory in *Canada Reads 2017* seems to demonstrate that class discourse holds little sway in the show's discursive space, there are moments where class does manage to spring up in the broadcast, as if out of nowhere. In response to Humble's characterization of *Company Town*'s main character, Hwa, as "someone who knows a martial art and kicks butt," ("2017 Day Two" 00:39:22), Brueggergosman dissents, arguing that Hwa's strength comes not from her ability to wield violence, but from her being "somebody who offers comfort and sensuality. Both Hwa and the legalized sex workers in *Company Town* sell their bodies for money, which I think does more to highlight the fact that *capitalism makes victims of us all*" (00:40:03-00:40:17). While Brueggergosman does not elaborate on this remark, it marks a stark and strong shift from the previous language used in the broadcasts.

This remark seems to spark class-minded thinking in Mitic. While responding to a critique from Palmater about *Nostalgia,* Mitic argues:

> I think what M.G. did in this book is that he tried to take out all the things that are used today to separate us and put in the fact that no matter what colour you are, what your sexual orientation, what… side of the tracks you're on. *The biggest thing that seems to divide us as humans is… economic division, right.* There's always going to be the rich and the poor. And I think his main thing was regardless of the advancements and how much you can say that you're a civilized and advanced society, you still have the wrong side of town. (00:46:08-00:46:40, emphasis mine).

Here, Mitic operationalizes a reductionist version of class, framing other forms of social categorization as "divisions" based solely on identity — a conceptualization that does not consider the systemic nature and power relations inherent in those categorizations. Despite this less-than-careful discussion of "divisions," however, one could generously read Mitic's remarks as trying to situate the importance of class alongside other social issues: that Canadian or Western ideas of a civilized or advanced society in truth rely on a perpetuation of class inequality. In response to these remarks, Palmater refuses Mitic's easy dismissal of other social issues:

> Palmater: Not all people would agree that economics are it. I think there's a lot of people who walk through this world that would say… for me, it's the fact that I'm a black man, or it's the fact that I'm wheeling in this wheelchair. And there is also a parallel line that runs with economic disparity and some of those very differences that Jody just referred to. And I don't think they —
>
> Mitic: But even within those groups that you want to mention, there's going to be rich and poor. So I think… the thing I really took from it… is that he tried to take everything else that, that we talk about that makes us different and talk about the fact that, you know, there's rich and poor, and that's the biggest divider… in the future. (00:47:03-00:47:42).

Palmater notes that other social categories are indeed not just more significant for some people, but that there is an intersectional relationship between one's social position in terms of race/gender/disability and one's class position. Mitic seems to agree, but also points out that there is not just inter-category disparity when it comes to economic status — economic disparity between white people and people of colour, for example — but also *intra*-category disparity — that there are structural class differences within such categories, where some members of oppressed social categories may be in advantageous class positions. Once again, Mitic seems to be re-inscribing a primacy of class as the

"biggest divider," more fundamental than other social systems. However, one could also argue that, despite Mitic's totalizing language, that Mitic is trying to draw attention to the role of class as equiprimordial, understanding that class position does not always correlate with one's position in other, co-constituted structural systems (though there are strong correlations with some positions). This more generous reading of Mitic's remarks could be seen as Mitic proposing an intersectional insight that rounds out Palmater's frame, as it pushes readers to consider how class interacts with its co-constituting social systems in more complex ways than full determinism[27].

The host of the broadcast, Ali Hassan, cuts this brief discussion between Palmater and Mitic short, but despite this, it is the richest discussion of class that occurs during the broadcast. There is great potential in such conversations for thinking about the role of class in Canada and how it is fundamentally interlocked with other forms of systemic oppression and exploitation. Unfortunately, this class conversation is short-lived, and, as *Fifteen Dog*'s victory shows, it holds little overall importance during the competition. Once again, a universalist humanism holds sway over the program's discourse.

Canada Reads 2020: "Classism," Systems, and the Individual

While Canada Reads 2017 was a large step in the right direction, *Canada Reads 2020* is perhaps a small step backwards in terms of the maturity of its class discourse. The

[27] This consideration was a central part of the work of the Combahee River Collective. As the Combahee River Collective Statement reads, "we have arrived at the necessity for developing an understanding of class relationships that takes into account the specific class position of Black women who are generally marginal in the labor force, while at this particular time *some of us are temporarily viewed as doubly desirable tokens at white-collar and professional levels*" (20).

theme of this year's competition was "bring Canada into focus," and in a similar vein to the 2017 theme of "one book Canadians need now," it brings together a selection of texts — *Small Game Hunting At The Local Coward Gun Club* by Megan Gail Coles, defended by YouTuber Alayna Fender; *Radicalized* by Cory Doctorow, defended by Toronto Raptors broadcast reporter Akil Augustine; *We Have Always Been Here* by Samra Habib, defended by actress Amanda Brugel; *From the Ashes* by Jesse Thistle, defended by musician George Canyon; and *Son of a Trickster* by Eden Robinson, defended by actress Kaniehtiio Horn — focused heavily on social issues, ranging from the experiences of Indigenous peoples under settler-colonialism to the immigrant experience to the violences of economic inequality. While class is, on the surface, figured explicitly in the defense of *Small Game Hunting*, it is not taken up in detail by the panellists. Instead, as with *Birdie* in 2016, the book is heavily critiqued for its "inaccessibility." This debate over accessibility ends up quashing the potential for more serious and detailed questions about class in Canada to arise and be debated.

"Classism:" Fender's Defense of Small Game Hunting

The most explicit mention of class in the 2020 broadcast comes in Fender's opening remarks about *Small Game Hunting.* Echoing the description that Coles herself gives in a recorded segment that plays on the show[28], Fender says that

> The book shines light on many issues that we like to think we're immune to here in Canada — racism, misogyny, classism — when the truth is that they're all around us, and we blame poverty on the poor. We blame violence on the victims and it needs to stop. Our vision of Canada needs to be one of compassion and empathy. Our vision of Canada needs to include action toward change. ("Day 1" 00:21:38-00:22:00)

[28] Coles: "*Small Game Hunting at The Local Coward Gun Club* is very much an exploration of classism, racism, and misogyny in a contemporary Canadian city" ("Day 1" 00:20:01-00:20:14).

Here, Fender mobilizes class in terms of oppression: "classism," or the prejudice against members of a certain socioeconomic class. This emphasis also appears in her calls for Canada to be more compassionate and empathetic to victims of violence, implying that if Canadians were able to overcome their prejudice, they would be able to move towards positive change. While classism is certainly a dynamic that exists under contemporary neoliberalism, it is also, as Ashley Bohrer says, only one part of the picture. What is missing in Fender's conceptualization is exploitation, which "makes relationships of inequality appear as though an equal exchange has taken place" (Bohrer 195). Understanding exploitation is key "to [understanding] how notions of equality continue to perpetuate unequal relationships, one of the key contradictions of capitalist society" (195). Advocating for change solely from the level of oppression implies a logic of systemic inclusivity: "once we get over our prejudice against impoverished people/racialized people/LGTBQ+ people, we can include them in all the benefits that we receive from the system!" This logic of inclusivity fails to grasp how the systems, and the benefits they produce, are constituted on fundamentally exploitative relations. As I demonstrated in Chapter One, *Small Game Hunting* critiques this very notion of inclusivity when Iris and Olive both actively engage in a politics of refusal instead of demanding recognition of wrongs from the system.

Despite this less-than-complete mobilization of class in the discussion of *Small Game Hunting*, Fender does make the case that the text can be used to understand the intersection of multiple oppressive and exploitative systems in Canada:

> Well, at first glance, this book is about one restaurant in one city, the Hazel in St. John's, Newfoundland. But when you widen that perspective, you see that it addresses issues that are shared across Canada. The divide between the rich and the poor, that's not just seen in St. John's, Newfoundland. I see that divide very clearly here in Vancouver. I see it in Toronto. I saw it when I lived in Winnipeg. Rates of violent crime against women, Indigenous women specifically, that is a Canadian issue. Olive's experience of being an Indigenous woman, a survivor of sexual assault, a victim of racism, classism, capitalism, colonialism… all of these -isms exist here in Canada and they cause real and tangible harm, and *Small Game Hunting* illuminates that. ("Day 1" 00:31:29-00:32:21)

Here, Fender is able to map the space of the Hazel onto the rest of the country, showing how the text can be used to draw out a more abstract understanding of the Canadian social totality that manifests in particular ways in different geographic locations and social circumstances.

Systems versus Individuals

In a way that mirrors *Canada Reads 2016*, debates between transnational and geographically-specific understandings of the nation come to the fore in 2020. While not directly addressing class, Augustine makes the case in his defense of *Radicalized* that the text

> [directly] [addresses] not only individual stories like the other books in this competition, but we're not just individuals. A lot of who we are is built on the systems and the society we exist in. And [Doctorow] talks about how those things can manipulate people… and he picks… lots of different people to tell those stories through. And that's kind of what Canada is. It's diverse. ("Day 1" 00:19:06-00:19:32)

Augustine attempts to position *Radicalized* as a text that can provide a holistic picture of Canadian society because its structure — four short stories — allows it to speak at the systemic level, unlike some of the other texts in the competition that might, through their focus on the individual, fail to give readers a broader view of the forces that shape Canadian society. Augustine is clearly attacking the two memoirs at the table, *We Have*

Always Been Here and *From the Ashes*; his critique seems to follow a popular scholarly position on the memoir, which, as Daniel Worden says, sees memoir as "a barometer of neoliberalism's idealization of entrepreneurial individualism, emphasis on constant production and consumption as markers of a good life, and the erosion of the commons and public discourse" (163). Such a critique is not unfounded[29]; in her defense of *We Have Always Been Here,* for example, Brugel emphasizes the power of the text in terms of individual action, stating that

> in times like this, we all end up talking to a whole lot about healing the world, but we need to heal ourselves first. There's a reason they tell you to put your mask on first on an airplane. *We Have Always Been Here* is my mask, my instruction manual to keep myself safe in order to give others strength and to help heal them. ("Day 2" 00:21:33-00:21:47).

For Brugel, individual action comes before collective political action; not simultaneously or in any other manner. Against this individualist neoliberal argument, Augustine's strategy is bold: he wants to make the case that to bring Canada into focus is to abstract it, to understand the structures of a social totality that get lost through an emphasis on the local. There is a transnational imaginary operating here as there was in *Canada Reads 2016,* but instead of operating in terms of a transnational multiculturalism, Augustine's transnational argument is operating on the terrain of resisting oppressive global systems.

[29] This is not to say that all memoir simply reflects neoliberal values. As Worden argues, some contemporary use of memoir has come to "represent human relations… as impersonal and structural rather than as personal and ethical, and as limited by material realities often thought to be fluid by free-market ideology" (172). While it is beyond the scope of this essay to speak to the specifics of how memoir form is operating in *We Have Always Been Here,* for example, it is clear that Brugel is still arguing about the power of memoir in a way that reflects its role as a barometer of neoliberal values, as seen, for example, when she says "Samra has a really interesting quote about protesting, she says not everyone is equipped for activism, *but dedicating your life to understanding yourself can be its own form of protest*, which I love so much" ("Day 1" 00:47:12-00:47:22, emphasis mine).

But this argument is not without risks. Against this transnational imaginary, Fender takes Augustine to task, telling him

> if anything, the argument that you just made is widening the perspective out of Canada and taking Canada out of focus… this is *Canada Reads* and we're looking to bring Canadian issues into focus. I'm actually a big advocate for Canadian content and I didn't feel like this book showcases that. I think that if it could bring Canada into [focus], like, why didn't we swap out some of the locations for Canadian locations? I agree is a lot of the issues are things that could be across the board, but we're on a show called *Canada Reads*, and I didn't feel like this book brought Canada into focus. ("Day 1" 00:29:09-00:29:27)

Fender is not insisting that the winner of the competition must have its story based in Canada on the grounds of a dogmatic or exclusionary nationalism. Reading this response in the context of her remarks on the national applicability of *Small Game Hunting,* it is clear that Fender, beyond simply trying to score easy points against Augustine, is insisting that locating stories that tackle systemic issues within Canada allows for that all-important balance of the particular and the universal, the concrete and the abstract. Fender's attention to the need for mediation between the universal and harkens back to Poon Tip's comments about the need to attend to geographical context but without reproducing his problematic logic of the show being about "*Canada Reads,* not *India Reads.*" Fender is not facing the same kind of pressures to argue against a speculative transnationalist understanding of Canada, allowing her to more easily assert the relationship between transnational systems and local contexts without feeling the need to entirely reject transnationalist factors. In Fender's view, to bring Canada into focus would be to see how Canada is locally affected by larger transnational systems, something that she can rightfully claim her book does.

"Accessibility" and the Sins of Small Game Hunting

While Fender's defense of *Small Game Hunting* seems to fit well with the theme of bringing Canada into focus, the book is eventually voted off on Day 3. While the panellists agree that *Small Game Hunting* does indeed bring Canada into focus at the level of the social, they argue that it is held back by what they see as a lack of accessibility, something that comes up repeatedly during the broadcast. On Day 1, Canyon states that he struggled to keep up with the author throughout much of his reading of *Small Game Hunting,* something he chocks up to the poetic style of the text: "[Cole's] writing ability is way over my head" ("Day 1" 00:32:36). Horn agrees, stating that the book, while successful in its messaging, also required several read-overs during the first 100 pages for her to get immersed in the story. Later on, Brugel states that the difficulty of the text also comes from its representation of Newfoundland English: "it's not unlike *A Clockwork Orange* in which it takes you a minute to sort of understand some of the vernacular. But when you do you feel like you've been let inside this cool little secret between you and the other people in the book" ("Day Two" 00:34:14-00:34:25). Horn agrees with Brugel, but says that even though *Small Game Hunting*'s poetics do eventually become immersive with effort, "[she] just [doesn't] know that it would be accessible to the rest of the country" ("Day 2" 00:35:01). Canyon concurs, saying that while needing to perhaps reread the text is not a negative, he does believe that it gets in the way of an unstated goal of *Canada Reads,* which is getting more people reading:

> We need to encourage more people to read. So I was really excited to read this book… and when I sat down to read it, I almost was heartbroken. By about page three or four that I was struggling… I couldn't get captured… I mean, it is poetry, Alayna… But I really don't feel… a lot of people are going to give it the chance… writing style is everything, because you have to get that reader on page one, or at least page two, or

> they're going to move on to something else because there's so much in the world right now that's distracting. ("Day 2" 00:36:01-00:37:35).

Both Horn and Canyon evoke a liberal paternalism that holds accessibility at the core of a text's power. Here I would make the same critique against Horn and Canyon's framing of the question of accessibility as I did with Mohamed and Virmani's framing: that they are employing an ideology of the aesthetic that presumes a false, unshifting universality of liberal subjectivity and excludes aesthetic forms that do not conform to a mystified understanding of this subjectivity. While Canyon is correct to point out that the world is a busy and distracting place, and that some folks may not want to use the precious little free time they have under capitalism to read a text that might frustrate them, the ultimate point to draw from Canyon's remarks should not be a defeatist lament over the unescapable limits of a distracting world, but a *critique* of how that world is structured to both disincentivize the production and consumption of culture that is not considered "accessible," and this is exactly what Fender does.

In response to the critiques levied against *Small Game Hunting* for its lack of accessibility, Fender makes the case that the impact of the text is inherently tied to its style and form: "[*Small Game Hunting*] does not speak down to you. This book also doesn't forgive you. It doesn't give you a break. It doesn't give you a happy ending. What it gives you is a reality check" ("Day 2" 00:32:19-00:32:29). In terms of the nonlinearity of the book's plot, Fender argues that "these characters' lives are scattered, their lives are shattered into pieces. And the book I think is written that way on purpose because as a reader, we're meant to go through and pick up the pieces of these characters' lives" ("Day 3" 00:22:57-00:23:14). Here, the style is shown to be difficult not simply for the sake of

being difficult, but as an intentional technique to shift the reader's consciousness, to involve the reader as a more active participant in the construction of the narrative and thus the critiques the narrative makes. As Fender later says after the book is voted off, "this is a work of art and yes, the writing is difficult at first… but it is like that by design. These are difficult subjects. These are not easily digestible issues… that's what I hope that those watching take away" (00:55:36-00:56:14).

Ultimately, *We Have Always Been Here* wins the competition, and, following the trend of other *Canada Reads* winners examined in this chapter, this is due to being mobilized as a cipher for understanding the human condition. Brugal's opening statement about the text argues that

> [Canadians] boast about our national reputation for acceptance and tolerance yet we are embarrassingly out of touch with minorities. We do not know our own country, so how can we know our own people? *We Have Always Been Here* is the only book at this table that will bring Canada into focus right now because it finally acknowledges so many of our own communities that up until now, we have been just too complacent to investigate: LGBTQ lives; refugee lives; Muslim lives. In one fell swoop, it gently educates its reader about the complexities of our differences, all the while guiding us to the triumphant conclusion that at our core, *we are all the same… the human need for acceptance is the only thing that we have in common*… we just need to get to know one another ("Day 1" 00:14:51-00:15:35, emphasis mine).

While Brugel is clear that Canada has a history of bigotry that state ideology likes to brush away, her solution to the issue, like with Humble's defense of *Fifteen Dogs*, is based on a need to understand a fundamental human condition, to fulfill a sense of recognition that has simply not occurred through overcoming bigoted consciousness; this does not seem to consider the role of systems of exploitation and oppression alongside bigoted consciousness in perpetuating inequality. This liberal humanism comes hand-in-hand with, once again, notions of accessibility, as Brugel defends the text's writing as

"lyrical and smart without being too overly written. Every sentence is carefully constructed to be *beautiful* even when describing ugly situations" ("Day 2" 00:21:02-00:21:08). The ideology of the aesthetic returns, and once again equiprimordial class is discounted.

Conclusion

In the discussions of the texts that take place throughout these three *Canada Reads* seasons, class is often a marginal or non-existent factor. The two more radical texts, *Small Game Hunting* and *Birdie* were voted off the program because of their "inaccessibility" even if other panellists agreed the books tackled important social content. *Fifteen Dogs,* on the other hand, is not taken up as the counter-novel that it could be, but as a novel that indeed avoids questions of class through recourse to a universal humanism, and it consequently wins the competition. This pattern, I think, reveals the limits of the form of *Canada Reads* itself: its Survivor-style elimination structure means that panellists must defend their own books at all costs, hampering the potential for more honest, give-and-take discussion of the texts. The tension between discussing the merits of the texts and "playing to win" rise explicitly nearly every year; in *Canada Reads 2020,* for example, Brugel says, upon *Small Game Hunting* being voted off, breaks away from her role as the defender of *We Have Always Been Here,* saying "I think this is really controversial to say, [but] *Small Game Hunting* is my favorite book at this table. I'm defending this book and I love this book so much. It's my, it's my most favorite book I've read in 20 years" ("Day 3" 00:56:15-00:56:23). Brugel explicitly breaks the rules of the

program, risking compromising her own defense of her own text, but is quickly shut down by Ali Hassan as he brings the program back on track.

On top of this, *Canada Reads* consistently reinforces a sense of Canadian nationalism that, while it can be critiqued by the panellists, cannot be critiqued fundamentally, as it will lessen the value of that panellist's critique in the discourse of the program. Even while they have more critical things to say about Canadian society, panellists will still often couch their remarks in terms of their love for Canada. This is clearly seen when Poon Tip speaks of being thankful for Canada "accepting him" ("2016 Day Two" 00:14:20) as an immigrant, when Humble says "I am happy to be in a country where we're using our words to settle differences instead of violence," or when Copeland remarks that "this is fun. I tweeted yesterday that we're in a country where we can nationally debate books and reading. That's not happening in the US" ("Day Three" 00:07:57-00:08:12). This affective nationalism allows *Canada Reads* to recuperate the critiques that are made during the course of the broadcasts and de-fang or discourage more radical systemic critiques: the program mirrors the liberal politics of recognition that Coulthard argues the Canadian state operates on, assuming the Canadian state's ongoing survival and improvement through an asymmetrical recognition of exploitation and oppression.

Canada Reads, then, appears so far to be a poor circulator of class critique, at least in terms of the discussions that take place on the show itself. What then, are the alternatives to such a model of circulation? I turn to the final chapter of this thesis to consider this question.

Chapter 3: Beyond *Canada Reads*, Beyond the Mass Reading Event

As shown in the previous chapter, discussion of equiprimordial class on *Canada Reads* is typically sidelined in favor of a universalist humanism that serves the nation-building project of the Canadian state. This universalist humanism is tied to an ideology of the aesthetic that, in facilitating a mystified notion of "accessibility," works to exclude works that engage in aesthetic representations of social issues that my fundamentally challenge and upset the reader; in turn, it works to erase more structural considerations of systems like settler-colonialism and capitalism (and their co-constitution). As a result, Canada *Reads* severely lacks the potential to be a space for the discussion and circulation of radical class politics found in some contemporary Canadian fiction. This would be no cause for alarm if these restrictions were simply limited to the realm of the broadcast space, as readers would be free from its discursive limitations, able to posit their own readings that do not conform to a nationalist ideal. This, however, is not the case. When we look beyond the space of the broadcast, we can begin to see a considerable relationship between the discourses around the texts on *Canada Reads* and how Canadian readers discuss said texts outside the broadcast, such as on social media sites like Goodreads. What Canadian readers highlight in their discussions indirectly echoes the liberal humanist values of *Canada Reads,* and more generally, the Canadian state. It is clear then that the ideological effects of the Canadian state's neoliberal cultural policy,

then, are widespread, as my examination of Goodreads reviews for each of the texts studied in this thesis demonstrate[30].

One such reproduction is Fender's defense of *Small Game Hunting*'s more "difficult" prose style. Goodreads user David's four-star review addresses the text's critique of patriarchy, praising its "compelling prose" while acknowledging said prose is still difficult: "I found the start disjointed and unfamiliar but it came sharply into focus like a roadside accident you can't come away from." Darryl Suite's five-star review also highlights the critique of toxic masculinity in the text. While they do not mention the quality of the prose at all, they do place a heavy emphasis on their affective reaction to the text: "I wish I could've seen my own facial expression while reading this unnerving piece of fiction. There are two scenes that truly messed me up. One made my skin crawl; I wanted to speed through it, but it was impossible to do so because Coles won't let you." Krista's four-star review is the only review in the top five to highlight the text's attention to multiple social systems, including class, which they call "persistent power struggles (sexism, classism, racism)." They also, however, speak to the difficultly of the "literary devices" of the text, stating that "despite experiencing [the text] as more dense than truly necessary, I did find this read to be ultimately rewarding; Coles can definitely write and

[30] I selected the following Goodreads reviews by going to each text's page and selecting the first five reviews, which are ranked in order of site popularity (the number of "likes" a review gets). While this does not guarantee that a user interacted with the *Canada Reads* discourses around the text, it allows for a peak into whether the same sorts of selective reading practices, such as the ideology of the aesthetic, are being deployed by Canadian readers more generally. I also acknowledge that five reviews for each text on a single social media site cannot hope to stand in for a wider "Canadian opinion" or readerly behaviour; however, I do think that these reviews do speak to the opinions of the Canadian "reading class" in a meaningful but not exhaustive capacity, given the focus of Goodreads on shared reading. I examine these reviews as preliminary sources of information that should be examined in a more dedicated fashion in later research.

the world she reveals here is one that those from away ought to see." In contrast, user Enid Wray's two-star review critiques the text's narration for "[keeping] the reader at a distance;" like George Canyon, Wray says that "the subject matter Coles mines here is important, so critically important, and I laud her for turning her pen to it. But I don't see a wide range of readers sticking with this. It was a chore to read this... and it shouldn't have been." Orla Hegarty's one-star review simply says "I am tossing this at 100 pages. Lots of shallowly developed characters. Alienating (all over the place?) writing style. Not my cup of tea." Across all the reviews, even the positive ones, the "alienating nature" of Coles' prose registers as an obstacle to reading; with the positive reviews, it is something to overcome to get to a rewarding ending, while with the negative reviews, it is something that prevents one from finishing reading the text. Both assessments fail to take into consideration the *aesthetic function* of the style; there is, even in these reviews, a lurking ideology of the aesthetic, like the one on *Canada Reads,* in operation.

This operant ideology, however, is not as strongly present in reviews of *Birdie.* User Matthew Quann is the only top review to complain about the text's poetics; their one-star review, the most liked review on *Birdie's* page, declares that "the first 100 pages were nigh-incomprehensible" and that "*Birdie* has so many ingredients in the pot and such an atypical storyline that I'll freely admit that I may not have appreciated the full nature of the book… All the same, I was so frustrated with the format and structure of this book that I wasn't interested in spending time pouring over every single detail to see if it was laced with meaning." The other top reviews, however, are overwhelmingly positive, and seem to understand the function of *Birdie*'s prose in relation to its conveying of

political content. Krista's five-star review, for example, says that "while many of author Tracey Lindberg's writing choices made this a non-straightforward read, I'm sure that's rather the point – *Birdie* is about the lingering effects of the 'colonization-bomb' and it would be unfair to expect it to strictly follow the grammatical/narrative rules of the coloninizers' (sic.) language." Shannon's four-star review says that while the book is "*a lot* to take in," she also calls the book beautiful; the "fantastical aspect of the book" is not off-putting to them. Allison's four-start review speaks to how "[*Birdie*]… had taught me so much about the experience of women like Birdie [Indigenous women]." In terms of the writing style, which they call "so unique, so artistic," they say to

> throw away your expectations before you open this novel. Timelines and linear thinking, events, customs, mental health… punctuation, even grammar, is handed over to the artistic. Once you grasp on (and it took me awhile) I think what you'll find is powerful, a story that will seep into your bones for a long time.

The last top review, by none other than Leanne Simpson, says the text is "grounded in the sheer beauty of Cree poetics, love, and a benevolence few of us are lucky enough to know;" she praises how the text speaks to "the brilliance of Indigenous women… this story is our story, so carefully woven together into a tapestry that is the spine of our collective beings." So while Matthew Quann's criticisms of *Birdie's* poetics seem to have a great deal of supporters in terms of how many users have liked it — 83, to be exact — there is also a large number of people who seem to consider the aesthetic function of *Birdie's* poetics in speaking to the experience of Indigenous women under settler-colonialism. Though in all these accounts, class and capitalism is absent from the co-constitutive picture.

For *Fifteen Dogs,* most of the reviews, like Humble's defense of the text on *Canada Reads,* centre around how the book explores the "human condition"[31]. Glenn Sumi's four-star review calls the book "equal parts survival story, socio-political parable and Philosophy 200 course on what it means to be human. Think Watership Down or Animal Farm as told by the gods."[32] Jill also gave the text five stars, *also* comparing it to *Animal Farm*. They also praise the text for taking up philosophical questions, such as "what does it mean to be alive… what happens when we become strangers to our own kind… and to our very nature?" The question on being a stranger to one's nature is one that Humble the Poet argued was central to the text's interpretation of and solution to social ills — the text suggests that we simply need to "get back in touch with our human condition" in order to fix things. Matthew Quann gave it 4.5 stars; in contrast to his review of *Birdie,* Quann lauds not just the humanism of the novel, but also its accessibility, stating that it "is not excessively challenging, but highly rewarding. If you're embroiled in a heavy work schedule or a daunting academic semester, Fifteen Dogs would make a fine choice." Only one of the top reviews is negative: user Jennifer (aka EM)'s two-star review attacks Alexis for not "[seeming] to know dogs at all," given his reliance on understanding dogs as operating on a dominance-submissiveness

[31] The exception is the most-liked review of *Fifteen Dogs,* which is a humorous review written mostly in dog barks. Because it is meant to be humorous and does not speak to the text's content or form, I will not be examining it in this chapter.

[32] The comparison of *Fifteen Dogs* to *Animal Farm* is striking; *Animal Farm* is widely-known to be a critique of the rise of Stalinism, but has also been read as making metaphysical points about the human condition and its relation to power and violence — something I argued in Chapter 1 that *Fifteen Dogs* does. These metaphysical speculations often fall into liberal humanist lines of critique such as "absolute power corrupt absolutely," which fail to take into account complex power structures and material circumstances at the heart of conjunctures like the Bolshevik Revolution, for example. I do not defend Stalinism or Stalin as a political figure; I do, however, find it interesting to see *Fifteen Dogs* compared with a text that has been used in popular discourse to discredit class-focused and communist thinking of all forms.

hierarchy, which has been "long discredited in doggie circles as a superficial understanding of the complexity of dogs' emotional, social, and behavioral repertoires."[33] She therefore finds Alexis's exploration of the interaction between human and dog consciousness unconvincing. She also finds the text's voice "monotonous and entirely lacking in humor." All these reviews focus in on the text's focus on the human condition as essence and not any of its more symptomatic, equiprimordial class moments, which is to be expected given the nature of its position as what we might call a "conservative counternovel."

These examinations of discussions by Canadian readers about these texts have shown that their discursive concerns, for the most part, seem to carry an invisibility of class — either as a standalone or co-constituting element — of the novels under study. They very much mirror the selective highlighting of topics that occurred on *Canada Reads.* At minimum, this suggests that *Canada Reads* merely reinforces the tastes of Canadian readers, which seems to be a taste that does not like to address class in a systematic way; more strongly it could be said that these reviews suggest that *Canada Reads* is succeeding in its mandate to promote a discussion of Canadian literature that preserves the neoliberal Canadian state. Regardless, it is clear that the doxa of *Canada Reads* and the examined Goodreads reviews limit the circulation of equiprimordial class

[33] There is much scholarly debate around the role of dominance in dog-dog and human-dog relationships. Bradshaw et al. argue that the dominance model for dog behavior has been the result of imprecise attributing of captive wolf behaviour onto dogs — an attribution that "[refers] to a model of wolf sociality that has now been disputed for over 30 years" (143). In response to Bradshaw et al., Schlider et. al examine several studies that seem to point to dominance as being a useful concept and construct to explain dog-dog and dog-human interaction, but not in the sense of "[legitimating] the application of forced dominance signals like *alpha rolls* in training" (190).

discourse, and as such, an alternative to *Canada Reads* needs to be considered. This is what I set out to do in this chapter. To do this, I will first examine the tensions embedded in the *Canada Reads* and mass reading event (MRE) models more broadly. Then I will examine a few other collective reading models to offer up possible sites and directions for an alternative model, thereby going beyond a negative critique of the *Canada Reads*/MRE model to offer constructive suggestions.

The MRE Model and its Contradictions

Before jumping into the specifics of *Canada Reads*, I want to revisit the definition of "mass reading event" (MRE) that Danielle Fuller and DeNel Rehberg Sedo offer. An MRE is "an event promoting reading and the sharing of reading [which] usually engages with one of more aspects of the mass media, whether in print, broadcast, or digital form" (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo "Beyond the Book" 5). MREs can take many different forms based on what types of mass media they engage with, and according to this model we can classify *Canada Reads* primarily as a broadcast event that has branched out into other media over time (Twitter, YouTube livestreams, websites, etc.). MREs are embedded in what Fuller and Rehberg Sedo call the reading industry: "the organizations, institutions, and businesses that produce a series of cultural artifacts and events" (17). These institutions and actors range from for- to non-profit, as well as state and private, and their primary product is "the artifacts, programming, events, and literary adaptations that represent books" (18) — not books themselves. MREs are thus complex formations that must mediate a wide degree of demands. On one hand, they must mediate their

underlying ideological values, which Fuller and Rehberg Sedo call "historically persistent ideas about the socially transformative and civilizing effects of book reading," along with a third, more contemporary idea: that "the sharing of reading is pleasurable, fun and entertaining" (19)[34]. MREs thus have an ideological imperative built upon liberal ideas of social development, where socially responsible citizens are crafted through the cultivation of cultural tastes — tastes that, in the case of *Canada Reads* in particular, are tied, as previous chapters have shown, to a neoliberal national imaginary. On the other hand, MREs must contend with their embeddedness in neoliberal economic logics: state cultural policy, as well as the interests of publishers, both work to attempt to increase the profitability of their products through increasing their products' sign exchange value. As noted in my introductory chapter, the Canadian state wishes to make Canadian cultural production more profitable by emphasizing a sign exchange value premised on liberal progressivism, multiculturalism, and politeness. Book publishers see MREs as a great way to increase the sign exchange value of their products in "a market that is very competitive, saturated and subject to regular floods of new product" (140); participation of a book in an MRE consecrates it in the literary field, helping it stand out against the bloated market and thus become more profitable for the publisher.

MREs, then, are racked with tensions: between education and entertainment, between cultivation of citizenship and cultivation of profits; though, given the neoliberal project of the Canadian state, cultivation of citizen has begun to look more like

[34] While this point is not exactly brand new — as Horace says in *Ars Poetica*, "he who joins the instructive with the agreeable, carries off every vote, by delighting and at the same time admonishing the reader" (Horace 2009) — Fuller and Rehberg Sedo are speaking more to a 20th-21st century notion of entertainment informed by technological advances in communication and neoliberal forms of culture.

cultivation of producers and consumers who make profit. In *Canada Reads*, there is certainly less emphasis on profit motives and more on a nationalist citizen-building project; however, there are still incentives for Canadian publishers and authors, including independent presses, to have their books participate in *Canada Reads*, given how winning *Canada Reads* texts have had their sales boosted by inordinate amounts. *Canada Reads* still also requires building partnerships with publishers in order to ensure that books selected for the competition are in wide enough circulation that people can participate (124). As Fuller and Rehberg Sedo say, "there can be no large-scale shared reading events without some money on the table" (124).

There are some advantages to the MRE model. One such benefit is that it offers remediation of the texts through multiple media: one's reading of a text can be enhanced through author interviews and readings, visual art adaptations of the text, and visiting real-world landmarks that appear in the text (243). In the case of *Canada Reads*, the main remediating medium is the broadcast itself, where individuals can hear the celebrity panellists debate and discuss the books, allowing readers to compare their own reading experiences. But beyond simply altering or adding to the interpretation of a text, "it is the emotional connections and social intimacies that these multiple mediations make possible that intensifies the pleasures of learning about the world of text" (243). Individuals may, in their interaction with the star-texts of the celebrities on *Canada Reads*, develop new affective connections to the competing books by connecting a celebrity's star-text — which I argue would include the celebrity's interpretation of a book — with the book in question. Thus, if one of the celebrity judges offers a compelling interpretation about how

the book they are defending cuts to the core of a particular social issue or multiple social issues in Canada, readers who may not have read the texts in that particular way could shift their understanding based on the remediation facilitated by that affective link. *Canada Reads* participants can engage with further mediation of the text through discussions on social media of not just the chosen books, but also how the *Canada Reads* broadcasts are going.

And while this is all well and good, remediation, is, I would argue, the only thing *Canada Reads* as an MRE has going for it, in terms of allowing discussions of class in these books to emerge. There are two central negatives that hamper the potential of this remediative element. The first is that *Canada Reads* is a program produced by a state-sponsored media organization whose mandate explicitly calls for it "to contribute to the development of a shared national consciousness and identity" ("Organization Profile - Canadian Broadcasting Corporation" 2020). This shared national consciousness and identity is indeed the dominant neoliberal consciousness and identity that the Canadian state continues to push for. Thus, any shattering of this nationalist understanding is bound to be limited, given the material and ideological underpinnings of the program; the funding given to the CBC to produce *Canada Reads* is tied up with the fulfilment of ideological goals. This is not to say that there has not been any shift in the way that social content is discussed on the program; as Danielle Fuller and Julie Rak have noted, the 2012 edition of *Canada Reads,* with its focus on memoir and the heated debates that emerged due to the closeness of memoir and truth claims, "appears to have sparked a shift in the Canada Reads format toward issue-based reading and the inclusion of non-fiction"

(42). The effects of this shift are apparent in the broadcasts I have examined in this thesis, with memoir and fiction books being present on each broadcast, and many of the chosen texts on the program tackling social issues; however, the way that these issues are discussed are still primarily centred in a liberal discourse that does not pose a larger threat to dominant Canadian state narratives about the nation. This is not to assert a strong, immovable determinism in the content and form of *Canada Reads;* however, it is clear that there are immense material and ideological limits on the kinds of discourse that can appear on the program based on its funding and mandate. The liberal politics of recognition are in full operation in *Canada Reads*: the program will tolerate "critical" engagement so long as this engagement does not displace the narrative of the Canadian state as progressive.

MREs also, given their structure and focus, appeal to what Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, following Wendy Griswold, call the "reading class:" those who "typically have the time, money, and education, not only to buy and acquire books, but also to pursue book-centred activities" ("Beyond the Book" 147). Participating in MREs already requires a certain type of cultural capital, placing restrictions on those who can attend or feel comfortable attending such events. In the case of *Canada Reads,* there are even further limitations. Not only does one require a good amount of Canadian cultural literacy to participate in *Canada Reads* as a listener, but one also needs "familiarity with literary book talk *and* with popular contemporary formats from other media, as well as an open-ness to celebrity culture" (113, emphasis in original). Thus, there is a very specific type of

cultural capital that *Canada Reads* listeners require to engage with the show, and this specificity severely limits who can participate.

Another issue arises with *Canada Reads'*s ephemerality. Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, following the work of Lauren Berlant on the intimate public sphere, note that MREs are able to provide temporary social connection between isolated readers: they "proffer the fantasy of collective belonging" (212) in a neoliberal world where social atomization dominates. This belonging, however, can be obtained with a bare minimum of participation and no requirement for upkeep in terms of keeping that connection alive: "there is no firm requirement to read the book, or to speak about it" (243). This vague sense of collective belonging offered by MREs serves to relieve readers of the tensions of the social antagonisms of the material world, such as class struggle, racism, settler-colonialism, and heteropatriarchy. In the case of *Canada Reads,* its space of belonging is mixed: it is broadcast over the airwaves, livestreamed on YouTube, discussed on Twitter, and CBC has itself facilitated discussion forums either on its website or on Facebook[35]. These opportunities for remediation are particularly ephemeral given their lack of in-person participation; however, there is more potential *Canada Reads* to be less ephemeral, and CBC has done two key things to make this so. First, it distributes free social media materials for book clubs designed to advertise that they are reading *Canada Reads* (CBC Books "Materials" 2021); second, it provides teachers' guides for each season that contain critical discussion questions about the texts ("Canada Reads 2021").

[35] The most recent implementation of CBC-facilitated discussion forum for *Canada Reads* is a Facebook group called "CBC's Canada Reads," which was created in January 2020.

These moves provide incentives for new or already-existing book clubs, as well as classrooms, to join in the *Canada Reads* discussion, to get invested in the national stakes of what the best — or the most important, as the debates often flip-flop between the two — of Canadian culture look like. It should be noted that while MREs offer up this collective fantasy as a sort of salve, this does not mean that all readers take up said collective fantasy uncritically; as Fuller notes in her article "Listening to the Readers of *Canada Reads*," many readers are not "simply imagining a unified Canadian community; they are, in many cases, questioning that nationalist construction" (31). This question of reception is important to consider; however, critical reception can only go so far when spaces for discussion — or simply sitting-in on discussion, as the case may be — remain temporary and do not build more long-term collective institutions where new knowledge can be used to challenge the Canadian state. While CBC certainly does put in some effort in trying to facilitate in-person discussion around *Canada Reads,* it is difficult to say whether such in-person discussion will progress beyond one year of an English class or beyond the bounds of one reading group. This does not mean that there cannot be small shifts in affect or consciousness that emerge from MREs like *Canada Reads.* As Fuller and Rehberg Sedo note,

> MREs provide participants with opportunities… to experience moments of intense recognition in a room of strangers… to be moved emotionally by stories, performances, and new knowledge, *and yet be returned to an everyday self*. Sharing reading in MREs can enable participants to glimpse alternative ways of being… *but the work of social change requires a different kind of collectivity that can directly challenge the ruling relations of power*. ("Beyond the Book" 213, emphases mine)

The affective senses of belonging and transformation that MREs bring are not problematic in themselves, and the pull they have on readers is understandable in the

midst of a social system that continues to atomize and sever connections between people. However, imagining that MREs can perform more radical work on their own would be a misstep. Coordinating moments of intense affect that could lead to political change, I argue, require more long-term collective institutions that can articulate these feelings into longer projects. In the case of the *Canada Reads* version of the MRE model, a strong underlying nationalist mandate combined with a tendency for ephemerality strongly limits its potential to spark equiprimordial class discourse about the books that it chooses.

The One Book, One Community Model: A Better Alternative?

If *Canada Reads*, as a broadcast MRE, does little to raise questions about class and its intersecting relations of power, then perhaps it is possible that another form of MRE — the One Book, One Community (OBOC) Model, which is less explicitly tied to the upkeep of the sign exchange value of Canada — might be able to take critique further. OBOC programs invite a community, ranging from the local to the national level, to all read a single book together. Immediately there is a difference between *Canada Reads* and OBOC: instead of an "infotainment" structure which sets up a "competition" between several different texts, OBOC programs select via committee one book to be read throughout the program's duration that they think address whatever level of mandate they have. Local OBOC programs like One Book, One Vancouver and One Book, One Community Waterloo Region, and my own local Hamilton Reads rely on local libraries, as well as volunteer organizers to put together programming events such as author readings. Infrastructurally, OBOC events do not have the sort of budget that a public broadcaster like CBC does, meaning they must rely not just on grants, but making

partnerships with book publishers, bookstores, and public libraries to ensure that they can host the event by fulfilling material needs (having enough books available for people to purchase, extra money for securing venues, etc.) (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo "Beyond the Book" 144). For example, Hamilton Reads is run by the Hamilton Public Library, whose chief source of funding is the City of Hamilton, providing 94% of their total revenue in the year 2020[36]. It is thus to be expected that this funding is more tied to localized concerns instead of nationalist ones, allowing Hamilton Reads to bypass an immediate pressure to conform to Canadian state directives.

In contrast to *Canada Reads,* OBOC programs often contain more face-to-face events as part of their programming, allowing for more intimate affective discussions to play out: getting a chance to ask an author a question about the book at a Q&A, for example, or joining other event-goers in a discussion about the text at a luncheon of some sort. And while such face-to-face events are indeed less ephemeral than *Canada Reads,* they are still ephemeral in that they do not build towards establishing more long-term collective formations around reading; they are designed to bring people together temporarily for the duration of the program. Fuller and Rehberg Sedo also argue these face-to-face events take place in spaces like libraries that may be uncomfortable for those lacking the cultural literacy or cultural capital associated with the reading class (179). While this may seem intuitive on the surface, there are considerations that Fuller and Rehberg Sedo fail to make that complicate this narrative. For example, the composition of the cultural capital of those who use and attend public libraries is not homogenous; many

[36] See *Financial Statements of the Hamilton Public Library Board.*

library-goers, who may have lower cultural and economic capital — that is, be working-class or impoverished — use public libraries for very different reasons than members of the reading class, such as getting internet access through the public computers. These working-class library-goers would not be uncomfortable with the space of the library in this case; instead, what they might be more uncomfortable with is a potential lack of cultural literacy required to attend some OBOC events. It is hard to say what the crossover potential is given this heterogenous makeup of cultural capital; its potential to shape OBOC programs and events is something needs further research.

While OBOC programs may seem to offer many advantages in contrast to *Canada Reads,* it is clear that, ultimately, "[OBOC] is a good 'fit' with neoliberal notions of cultural value. It is therefore attractive to potential partners, whether the partner is a corporate sponsor with a social responsibility charter to fulfill, or a municipal government with a 'creative community' agenda informed by the regeneration of a postindustrial downtown core" (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo "Beyond the Book" 161). The strong linkage between economic exchange and sign exchange value in terms of cultural production is arguably what birthed OBOC and MRE programs in the first place. Thus, while the OBOC model offers some tangible improvements over the *Canada Reads* model, is still heavily restricted by other ideological norms — an expectation of entertainment, as well as a sense of individual citizen improvement through consumption — which place heavy limits on its ability to bring out equiprimordial class discourses. The next step, then, is to look to models outside of MREs and see what can be pulled from there.

Alternatives to the MRE Model: Get Into Reading (GIR) and People & Stories / Gente y Cuentos (P&S/GyC)

As a neoliberal cultural formation, MREs carry with them many problems that serve to get in the way of class discourse: the tension that exists between their social and economic functions, as well as their ephemerality. In this section, I examine two alternative shared reading models — Get into Reading and People & Stories / Gente y Cuentos — in order to seek a positive alternative to the MRE model. Both programs depart from the MRE focus on catering to an already-existing reading class by going beyond typical MRE and OBOC program spaces, as well as in their selection of texts for shared reading.

Get into Reading (GIR)

Get into Reading (GIR) — now known as Shared Reading[37] — is a shared reading program run by the non-profit group The Reader Organisation in the United Kingdom. Founded in 2004 by Jane Davis, the GIR model deliberately tries to seek out areas where socially and economically marginalized people live and bring reading to those areas, instead of relying on or catering to an already-existing reading class like *Canada Reads* and OBOC programs do. The model works as follows: a group of readers in a community come together with a trained facilitator to read a novel, short story, or poem out loud, and then discuss the reading together. Attendees are encouraged, but are not obligated, to "respond personally, sharing feelings, thoughts and memories provoked by the reading"

[37] To avoid confusion regarding the name of the program and the act of shared/collective reading, I will be referring to this model as the GIR model, not the Shared Reading model.

("Shared Reading" 2021). Instead of hosting their reading groups at traditional reading sites like libraries, GIR facilitators host their reading groups at community centres, homeless shelters, transition houses, and health clinics, among other locations (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo "Beyond the Book" 194). The program runs on a mix of public and private sector funding, but still emphasizes community outreach and grassroots work, with "the program and the Reader Organisation [continuing] to rely heavily on volunteer and underpaid labor… from undergraduate interns" (193).

In terms of choices of texts for the reading groups, GIR, following Davis's own tastes, emphasizes canonical British stories, poems, and novels. Davis's vision is one of increasing the accessibility of consecrated texts to a broader reading public; she states that there are "life lessons in the British canon that shouldn't be locked up in universities" (qtd. in Fuller and Rehberg Sedo "Beyond the Book" 196). Despite this seemingly traditionalist or academic approach to shared reading, Davis sees the primary role of GIR as cultivating the capacity to love books: this entails "a secular devotion to the book that echoes the practices and purposes involved in the shared reading of religious texts," which is set against what Davis sees as the dominant academic reading practice of "'pulling [the text] apart' and reading for themes and 'political, cultural issues'" (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo "Beyond the Book" 200). Cultivating a love for the book is part-and-parcel of GIR's reasoning for shared reading: that it not only makes one a better individual citizen of the nation through equipping one with new knowledge, but also "[has] a more thoroughly holistic effect on the individual: physiological and emotional, cognitive and therapeutic, social, and spiritual" (197).

Unlike MREs, GIR tries to break away from spaces that reproduce established reading classes and their tastes — tastes which, as has been shown in this thesis, often work to undermine the significance of class discourses in the texts they consume. However, it shares a problem with the *Canada Reads* broadcasts: a division between "loving the text" and reading for political themes such as class, gender, race, etc. Such a divide, I argue, is false. One can discuss political and cultural issues in the context of developing a love for the text; in fact, I would argue that one of the key elements of the holistic transformative effects of shared reading that Davis preaches can come about through readers' development of solidarity and mutual recognition of a shared socio-political situation. While I think there is potential in the structure of the GIR model in terms of its areas of focus, I find it has epistemological limitations that may still hamper discussions of political content. Thus, I turn to People and Stories / Gente y Cuentos to see what another alternative model might look like.

People & Stories / Gente y Cuentos (P&S/GyC)

In a similar manner to GIR, People & Stories / Gente y Cuentos focuses on bringing together people who may not consider themselves readers into a shared space of collective reading. Initially founded by the philosopher Sarah Hirschman as a way for Puerto Rican women to have a chance to engage with literature in their first language, the model has expanded to include English language reading groups and, like GIR, targets individuals who may be going through some sort of life transition, such as veterans returning from service, new immigrants working towards citizenship, people living in halfway houses, and more (Gilbert 96). P&S/GyC partners with organizations who focus

on assisting those going through these transitionary periods, with the costs for a typical eight-week series on average being about $3,300 USD per session, less if the coordinator is a volunteer (Gilbert 97). The P&S/GyC model of reading consists of the following:

> Approximately 15-20 adults or young adults gather around a table or sit in a circle for eight, 90-minute sessions to hear and discuss short stories in either English or Spanish. In each program, a trained coordinator reads aloud a literary short story. The oral reading cuts across the various reading levels in the group and creates an atmosphere of shared experience for participants. Following the reading, the coordinator facilitates a vibrant discussion on the poetics, tensions/contrasts, ambiguities, and issues found within the text. Participants draw upon their experiences and acquired knowledge to discuss the stories, and they discover their life experience has prepared them to understand and examine complex short stories. ("Media Kit" 2021).

In her construction of the P&S/GyC model, Hirschman took inspiration from Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed; that is, the reading group coordinators, "instead of imparting knowledge… try to encourage participants to glean ideas and skills from texts that could be applied in real life" (Gilbert 94). Along these same lines, P&S/GyC, like GIR, does not require its attendees to have a strong reading background or a degree of familiarity with literature compared to an OBOC program or an MRE like *Canada Reads,* as the coordinator reads out the short story at the beginning of every session. Like GIR, choice of story is important to the program's goals, but in a slightly different way. In the case of GIR, Jane Davis focused on making canonical literature that carries a high degree of cultural capital accessible to those who cannot afford a post-secondary education, while also decrying academia's reduction of the reading of said texts to analysis of themes. In the case of P&S/GyC, accessibility is still considered key, but as Hirschman herself puts it, "gauging whether a story will be accessible is not an easy task" (43). While the P&S/GyC model does care about accessibility, the key considerations are more

whether "a story seems just too complex, uses too many learned references or perhaps appears too abstract" (43). Against the ideology of the aesthetic that was operant in *Canada Reads,* the P&S/GyC notion of accessibility does not hold a sort of normative stance of poetics as needing to "move the story along while providing a nice turn of phrase along the way," as Measha Brueggergosman put it. In fact, understanding the "poetic landscape" (49) of a text is one of the key categories of discussion and importance for the P&S/GyC model, which is subdivided into reading for "contrasts and confrontations" (55) — the tensions that emerge between images, figures, and so on — and "shadows" (59) — moments of ambiguity and a lack of hermeneutic closure. Poetics in this case are not treated as something that must make reading "comfortable," but as a key site of knowledge and learning. P&S/GyC also explicitly has "themes" (61) as one of its categories for discussion, with Hirschman saying that strong texts for discussion are "multivocal… [and] [do] not hand down unequivocal messages" (63). The multivocal poetics of the literary text, Hirschman argues, "help people shed ready-made notions and lead to fresh discussions of issues that matter to them in their own terms" (64) — this means that dialogue in the group will not

> necessarily converge only on social issues. Love, friendship, mystical communication with the dead, the source of artists' inspiration, food, dancing, all these topics will be taken up just as energetically as questions of racial enmities, problems of unemployment, gender roles, or survival in unfamiliar cities. (65)

In contrast to GIR's epistemological divide between cultivating love for a book and reading for social issues, P&S/GyC's model emphasizes a union between love for the text as literary object and reading a text to bring social issues to light. This model avoids the false dichotomy between the literary and political elements of the text seen in GIR and

MREs like *Canada Reads*, and thus fosters a greater potential for the discussion of relations of power like class its intersections with race and gender.

Conclusion: Towards a New Model of Collective Reading

This chapter has examined the strengths and limitations of Canada Reads and the broader MRE model of shared reading, and has examined alternative models of shared reading in order to find a way to allow for the radical class discourses present in some contemporary Canadian fiction to enter into broader circulation. In contrast to MREs, shared reading programs like GIR and P&S/GyC intentionally go beyond the spaces of dominant cultural capital to create vulnerable and less ephemeral spaces for the development of literacy and solidarity through face-to-face shared reading. While GIR does seem to perpetuate a problematic division between a love for texts and the discussion of political themes, P&S/GyC demonstrates that a collective reading project can unite the love of the text with politics, allowing for the development of solidarity around emergent equiprimordial class discourses in texts. While such models themselves are not immediate antidotes or solutions to the problematic of Canadian neoliberalism in the cultural sphere, they demonstrate that there are indeed successful and growing alternatives to the *Canada Reads* model that, with continued material and ideological support, could pose an alternative to the class-neutralizing discursive power of *Canada Reads*. GIR and P&S/GyC are not necessarily the perfect models for all reading situations, or for the Canadian situation; however, the principles behind them, counter to MREs in nearly every way, could and should inform collective shared reading projects

that can serve as alternatives to *Canada Reads.* Proving that such models are possible and extant is deeply important for moving beyond the dominantly negative critique of *Canada Reads* in the scholarly literature, as well as naively positive responses to these negative critiques that see *Canada Reads* as a force for change unto itself. Beyond these two options, I have pushed for a positive project that seeks to tentatively build new institutions for shared reading in Canada that allow for more open class discourse and thus the possibility for political transformation. I believe that it is only with this type of move that new light can be shed on the *Canada Reads* problematic.

Conclusion: Working Through the Symptom of Canadian Literature

The Canadian state has had and continues to have a deep investment in how cultural commodities are produced and circulated in Canada. While the primary goals of this investment have shifted, along with cultural policy, over time, one of the clear motivations behind the Canadian state's investment in cultural production has been to regulate the multiplicious social antagonisms — especially class, the main focus of this thesis — the state is built upon. In the neoliberal era, the sign and economic exchange values of cultural commodities have become so intertwined that the primary objective of the Canadian state in terms of cultural policy has been to uphold a particular appearance of Canadian culture that allows it to become more profitable on the global stage. This imperative maps onto the state's larger neoliberal project of asking its subjects "to reimagine themselves along the matrix of neoliberal values and common sense" (Derksen 13).

And while the Canadian state has gone out of its way to try to quash class discourse in mainstream political discourse, there is clearly an active class struggle in the field of what is known as "CanLit," despite the state's attempts to flatten it. In Chapter One, I found that two of the pieces of fiction I examined — *Small Game Hunting* and *Birdie* — explicitly take up, in their forms and discourses, an antagonistic relationship to the Canadian state and neoliberal settler-capitalism. Both novels posit a turning-away from the state in order to develop new systems of self-recognition and material projects that focus on building collectives of care and cross-cultural/racial solidarity, pointing the way to alternatives to participation in the social system that is Canada. The third piece of

fiction I took up — *Fifteen Dogs* — does not turn away from liberal understandings of power and class. Instead, it takes them up wholeheartedly, positing a republicanism that lines up neatly with the Canadian state's objectives. But while this discourse is more explicit, the text also symptomatically presents moments of class critique that are either dropped or quickly circumscribed by the form of the text. These symptomatic moments demonstrate that even as it goes unrecognized in broader conversation, equiprimordial class remains deeply salient as a political issue in Canada.

The salience of class discourse on the level of the individual text is certainly encouraging, but as Chapter Two demonstrates, broader programs that circulate these texts to mass audiences — in particular, *Canada Reads* — often quash the salience of such discourse, favoring instead a deceptive liberal universal humanism that papers over social contradictions through an insistence that deep down, past very real, material forces that enact various forms of violence, we are all the same. In their appearances on *Canada Reads, Small Game Hunting* and *Birdie,* which both bring political antagonism to the fore and express the effects of such antagonism through their form and poetics, were criticized for lacking "accessibility" and consequently voted off the show. *Fifteen Dogs,* on the other hand, won *Canada Reads,* not through a mobilization of its counter-textual potential, but through its championing as a cipher for understanding the "human condition." And while class was not entirely absent during these three *Canada Reads* broadcasts, conversations were cut so short and overshadowed often by the argument for the human condition that class essentially played a non-role during the broadcasts.

As Chapter Two and other scholarly work has shown, *Canada Reads* is an institution that will likely never live up to the standards that scholars hold it to, though it will certainly live up to the standards of the Canadian state: that standard being the reproduction of discourses about CanLit that trouble the sign exchange value and doxa of the cultural field as little as possible. This standard is more unspoken than explicit, but the irony is that *Canada Reads* cannot even live up to its own, more explicit standard; as Emily Burns says, the program's goal of creating more socially aware citizens "cannot be fulfilled if airtime is primarily spent silencing the voices of people of colour [and] Indigenous peoples" (99). And it most certainly cannot be fulfilled through silencing the co-constituting role of in the dynamics of race and settler-colonialism as well.

And yet, as I note briefly in Chapter Three, some scholars have either remained resolutely tied to negative critiques of *Canada Reads*, or, in reaction to this negativity, have tried to push for more positive readings of the program that rehabilitate its serious shortcomings[38]. This, to me, points to a serious libidinal investment that academics have in the project of *Canada Reads*, which has understandable origins; as Laura Moss rightfully points out, "although [*Canada Reads*] may be 'just a game'… it is a game played with cultural, social, and economic consequences" (10). For politically-minded critics of Canadian literature, there is much at stake in *Canada Reads*' depoliticization of literature, and that is likely why it has drawn such sustained negative critique. However,

[38] The biggest exception here is Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, whose careful evaluations of *Canada Reads* and the MRE model attempt to honestly examine the potentials of the model for social transformation; even while they conclude themselves that "whereas their goals are laudable, MREs do not create new readers or effect fundamental social change" (250), they do recognize that MREs can effect small change, as "each MRE is a dynamic process that impacts in some manner, positive or negative, the dominant, residual, and emerging culture of reading in the sites where it takes place" (251).

Danielle Fuller notes that Moss's critique also "pinpoints the anxiety that some of us may feel about our own role as so-called 'expert' or 'professional' readers when Canadian literature is conveyed in so many popular cultural formations" (12). Perhaps behind the massive amounts of negative critique, there is also a fixation on how the role of the scholar is at risk or not valued, and so negative critique has been levied at *Canada Reads* as a way to unconsciously justify the role that scholars play in the reading of popular literature.

For me, this fixation on the negative has provoked frustration; as Jeremy Haynes states at the end of his study of *Canada Reads,* "if each year the books gathered around the table and the discussion that takes place point to the ill-fittingness of the nation as a form of imagined community, then why do Canadians insist on its refurbishment and improvement?" (180). While I do not necessarily claim, like Haynes, that Canadians more broadly insist on the refurbishment and improvement of *Canada Reads,* I do think that there are some academics who, in becoming attached to negative or positive assessments of *Canada Reads,* have missed the broader point: that *Canada Reads* does not work like we want it to, and frankly, continued negative critique or flaccid rehabilitation will only offer diminishing returns, if not an impediment to solving the issues that have been clearly identified by scholars.

The repetition compulsion that *Canada Reads* has evoked for scholars is primarily why I turned to both a critique of the mass reading event (MRE) model and an examination of two alternative shared reading models — Get Into Reading (GIR) and People & Stories / Gente y Cuentos (P&S/GyC) in Chapter Three. As I argue in Chapter

One, following Fredric Jameson, effective political critique comes not simply from working in an exclusively negative or positive hermeneutic; both hermeneutics must operate together in a dialectical fashion, pointing out the serious issues or failures with a particular text or form as well as what Utopian positives it gestures towards even in its failures. I thus examined the pros and cons of the MRE model and looked to already-existing grassroots alternative models of shared reading to see if they embodied the same positives while bypassing many of the negatives of the MRE model. I found that in their form and focus, GIR and P&S/GyC do indeed bypass the negatives of the MRE model while also embodying its most positive feature: that it allows for readers to engage in multiple remediations of a text through interactions with others and through other media. If we consider shared reading as a space that operates in a similar manner to a "talking cure" — allowing citizens to discuss, reflect on, and most importantly *voice* the knowledge they have gleaned from texts, from affective reactions to social knowledge, sometimes linked and sometimes not, and so on — then we can imagine a more therapeutic shared reading space that allows for freer discourses that do not place bars between reading for socio-political themes and reading for pleasure. I believe that these already-existing models can provide valuable insight into a way forward for shared reading programs that does not rely on their proximity to the MRE model. While I have not offered, and am still not offering, a blueprint of a brand-new shared reading program, complete with curriculum, number of facilitators, and so on, I do think what I have offered in this thesis is a way to begin to shift the impasse that critiques of *Canada Reads* have been stuck at for some time. A shift towards thinking of collective, long-term

institutions of shared reading that can facilitate freer discussions of class discourse is needed if we, as politically-minded scholars, truly wish to make a difference. Radical shared reading will not overthrow capitalism on its own, but it can, and should, play a large role in the networked struggle against settler-capitalism in Canada through allowing citizens to not only see their own class circumstances represented to them in cultural objects, but also gain new class knowledge through these objects as well.

And this struggle against Canadian settler-capitalism and all its equiprimordial connections with white supremacy and hetero-patriarchy is imperative if we are fighting for a freer, brighter future. As political parties in Canada continue to engage in a flattening of class politics through their appeals to the Canadian middle-class subject and economic inequality and exploitation continues, far-right populist rhetoric grows, and begins to take on the *appearance* of class politics while really pushing for sustaining white supremacy and settler-colonialism; a dynamic that has been a part of Canadian politics since debates around Confederation. In a Labour Day video from 2020 announcing a "Canada First" economic strategy, Conservative Party leader Erin O'Toole speaks of the thousands of workers in the automotive, forestry, and energy sectors who have been laid off in his riding — and while he makes the predictable move of critiquing "big government," he also critiques large corporations for "making deals with China" (@erinotoole). He says that the Canada First strategy "[won't] cater to elites and special interests, but [fight] for working Canadians" (@erinotoole). O'Toole here is catering to an idea of the "white working class" that puts the assumed "Canadian" — read white, settler citizen — at the centre of economic prosperity, all the while fueling an anti-Asian

racism that has had a long history in Canada[39] and been exacerbated in recent times due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is not an emancipatory class message, but a catering to white settler anxieties through the language of class concerns. In order to prevent the monopolization of class discourse by the far right — and thus the death of an equiprimordial understanding of class and liberation — literacy in equiprimordial class discourse needs to be fostered, and shared reading of cultural artefacts is one such way to build the literacy needed to combat such discourses and build emancipatory, communist alternatives to structures of settler-capitalism and white supremacy. *Canada Reads* cannot serve as this site of equiprimordial class literacy; we must instead build our own, new sites for radical shared reading.

[39] The Chinese head tax, active from 1885 to 1923, is a prime example of this history; it was designed to restrict Chinese immigration to Canada after the Canadian state no longer needed to bring in Chinese foreign workers to build the Canadian Pacific Railway (Chan 2020). Again, the intersection between class and race figures strongly here.

Works Cited

Alexis, André. "Borrowing Blackness." *This Magazine,* May 1995, pp. 14-20.

---. *Fifteen Dogs.* Coach House Books, 2015.

Allison. Review of "Birdie by Tracey Lindberg." *Goodreads,* 20 January 2016, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/23590716-birdie.

Althusser, Louis. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)." *On Ideology.* 1971. Verso, 2020, pp. 1-60.

Barrow, Clyde W. *The Dangerous Class: The Concept of the Lumpenproletariat.* University of Michigan Press, 2020.

Balibar, Étienne. "On The Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism." *Reading Capital,* by Louis Althusser et al, translated by Ben Brewster and David Fernbach, 1965. Verso Books, 2015, pp. 357-480.

Bannerji, Himani. "On the Dark Side of the Nation: Politics of Multiculturalism and the State of 'Canada.'" *The Ideological Condition: Selected Essays on History, Race and Gender,* Brill, 2020, pp. 364-93.

---. "The Passion of Naming: Identity, Difference, and the Politics of Class." *Thinking Through: Essays on Feminism, Marxism, and Anti-Racism.* Women's Press, 1995, pp. 17-40.

Baudrillard, Jean. *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign.* Translated by Charles Levin. 1981. Verso Books, 2019.

Beasley-Murray, Jon. "Value and Capital in Bourdieu and Marx." *Pierre Bourdieu: Fieldwork in Culture,* edited by Nicholas Brown and Imre Szeman, Rowman and Littlefield, 2000, pp. 100-122.

Bethune, Brian. "André Alexis: 'Shut up and keep writing'." *Maclean's,* 21 Oct 2015, https://www.macleans.ca/culture/books/andre-alexis-shut-up-and-keep-writing/. Accessed 2 June 2021.

Bohrer, Ashley J. *Marxism and Intersectionality: Race, Gender, Class and Sexuality under Contemporary Capitalism.* Transcript, 2019.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste.* Translated by Richard Nice, Harvard University Press, 1984.

---. *Pascalian Meditations*. Translated by Richard Nice, Polity Press, 2002.

---. "The Field of Cultural Production, Or: The Economic World Reversed." *The Field of Cultural Production*. Translated by Richard Nice, edited by Randal Johnson, Polity Press, 1993, pp. 29-73.

---. *The Rules of Art: The Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field.* Translated by Susan Emanuel, Stanford University Press, 1996.

Bradshaw et al. "Dominance in Domestic Dogs — Useful Construct or Bad Habit?" *Journal of Veterinary Behavior* vol. 4, no. 3, 2009, pp. 135-144. https://doi-org.libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca/10.1016/j.jveb.2008.08.004.

Brodie, Janine. "Reforming Social Justice in Neoliberal Times." *Studies in Social Justice* vol. 1, no. 2, 2007, pp. 93-107.

Brydon, Diana. "Metamorphoses of a Discipline: Rethinking Canadian Literature Within Institutional Contexts." *Trans.Can.Lit: Resituating the Study of Canadian Literature,* edited by Smaro Kamboureli and Roy Miki, Wilfred Laurier Press, 2007, pp. 1-16.

---. "Risk, Mortality, and Memory: The Global Imaginaries of Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves,* M.G. Vassanji's *Nostalgia,* and André Alexis's *Fifteen Dogs.*" *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* no. 78, 2019, pp. 97-112. http://riull.ull.es/xmlui/handle/915/13810.

Burns, Emily. *Unsettling the White Noise: Deconstructing the Nation-Building Project of CBC Radio One's* Canada Reads. 2012. Queen's University, MA dissertation. *QSpace: Queen's Scholarship & Digital Collections.*

"Canada Reads 2016: Day One." *CBC Gem,* https://gem.cbc.ca/media/canada-reads/season-16/episode-1/38e815a-009d05914e5. Accessed 11 June 2021.

"Canada Reads 2016: Day Two." *CBC Gem,* https://gem.cbc.ca/media/canada-reads/season-16/episode-2/38e815a-009d055d569. Accessed 12 June 2021.

"Canada Reads 2016: Day Three." *CBC Gem,* https://gem.cbc.ca/media/canada-reads/season-16/episode-3/38e815a-009d05bff7b. Accessed 13 June 2021.

"Canada Reads 2017: Day One." YouTube, uploaded by CBC, 27 March 2017, https://youtu.be/Qm_b77cOxB4.

"Canada Reads 2017: Day Two." YouTube, uploaded by CBC, 28 March 2017, https://youtu.be/b1f2oVwgf6s.

"Canada Reads 2017: Day Three." YouTube, uploaded by CBC, 29 March 2017, https://youtu.be/85t07zBx89I.

"Canada Reads 2017: finale." YouTube, uploaded by CBC, 29 March 2017, https://youtu.be/TloTajT5it0.

"Canada Reads 2020: Day 1." YouTube, uploaded by CBC, 20 July 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKnq2D-mKyY&t=1330s.

"Canada Reads 2020: Day 2." YouTube, uploaded by CBC, 21 July 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XVY4lijjAYE.

"Canada Reads 2020: Day 3." YouTube, uploaded by CBC, 22 July 2020, https://youtu.be/zb-i0Ko5044.

"Canada Reads 2020: Finale." YouTube, uploaded by CBC, 23 July 2020, https://youtu.be/3GKdLNq5EaA.

"Canada Reads 2021." *Curio,* https://curio.ca/en/collection/canada-reads-2021-2566/. Accessed 7 August 2021.

Chan, Arlene. "Chinese Head Tax in Canada." *Canadian Encyclopedia.* Last updated by Andrew McIntosh, 3 Jun. 2020, https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/chinese-head-tax-in-canada. Accessed 6 August 2021.

Combahee River Collective. "The Combahee River Collective Statement." *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective,* edited by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, Haymarket Books, 2017, pp. 15-27.

CBC Books. "Download a Canada Reads 2021 poster and book club materials." *CBC Books,* 10 Feb. 2021, https://www.cbc.ca/books/canadareads/download-a-canada-reads-2021-poster-and-book-club-materials-1.5908246. Accessed 7 August 2021.

CBC Radio. "What does a minister of middle class prosperity do? Mona Fortier on her new job." *CBC Radio,* 22 Nov. 2019, https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-nov-22-2019-1.5369784/what-does-a-minister-of-middle-class-prosperity-do-mona-fortier-on-her-new-job-1.5369819. Accessed 15 February 2021.

Chariandy, David. "Haunted Diasporas: The Second Generation Stories of André Alexis." *Journal of West Indian Literature* vol. 12, no. ½, 2004, pp. 79-89. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23019736.

Chewter, Erin. "'Dogism': Fascism and the Philosophy of Violence in André Alexis's *Fifteen Dogs*." *The Albatross* vol. 9, 2019, pp. 66-75. https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/albatross/article/view/19078.

Coles, Megan Gail. *Small Game Hunting at the Local Coward Gun Club*. House of Anansi Press, Toronto, 2019.

Coulthard, Glen Sean. *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition.* University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* no. 1, 1989, pp. 139-67.

Darryl Suite. Review of "Small Game Hunting at the Local Coward Gun Club." *Goodreads,* 15 March 2020, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/39293273-small-game-hunting-at-the-local-coward-gun-club.

David. Review of "Small Game Hunting at the Local Coward Gun Club." *Goodreads,* 30 December 2019, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/39293273-small-game-hunting-at-the-local-coward-gun-club.

Department of Finance Canada. "Minister Fortier discusses middle class prosperity and Budget 2020 priorities in Toronto." *Government of Canada,* 13 Feb. 2020, https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/news/2020/02/minister-fortier-discusses-middle-class-prosperity-and-budget-2020-priorities-in-toronto.html. Accessed 15 February 2021.

Derksen, Jeff. "National Literatures in the Shadow of Neoliberalism." *Shifting the Ground of Canadian Literary Studies*, edited by Smaro Kamboureli and Robert Zacharias, Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2012, pp. 37-63.

Desan, Mathieu Hikaru. "Bourdieu, Marx, and Capital: A Critique of the Extension Model." *Sociological Theory* vol. 31, no. 4, 2014, pp. 318-342.

Eagleton, Terry. *Marxism and Literary Criticism.* 2nd ed., Routledge, 2002.

---. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic.* Blackwell, 1990.

Enid Wray. Review of "Small Game Hunting at the Local Coward Gun Club." *Goodreads,* 7 April 2019, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/39293273-small-game-hunting-at-the-local-coward-gun-club.

@erinotoole. “Do you think it's time for economic policy that puts Canadian workers first? ᴄᴀ Happy Labour Day 💪 #LabourDay.” *Twitter,* Sept. 7 2020, 11:26 a.m., https://twitter.com/erinotoole/status/1302991683072798721.

Freeman, Sunny, and Henry Stancu. “Dog owners fear for pets after five poisoned.” *Toronto Star*, 23 Jun 2008, https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2008/06/23/dog_owners_fear_for_pets_after_five_poisoned.html. Accessed 4 June 2021.

Fuller, Danielle. “Listening to the Readers of *Canada Reads.*” *Canadian Literature* no. 193, 2007, pp. 11-34.

Fuller, Danielle and DeNel Rehberg Sedo. “A Reading Spectacle for the Nation: The CBC and ‘Canada Reads.’” *Journal of Canadian Studies* vol. 40, no. 1, 2006, pp. 5-36.

---. *Reading Beyond the Book: The Social Practices of Contemporary Literary Culture*. Routledge, 2013.

Fuller, Danielle, and Julie Rak. “’True Stories,’ Real Lives: *Canada Reads* 2012 and the Effects of Reading Memoir in Public.” *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études en littérature Canadienne* vol. 40, no. 2, 2015, pp. 25-45.

Gilbert, Ellen. “Opening Doors to Literature: People & Stories / Gente y Cuentos.” *The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion* vol. 3, no. 2, 2019, pp. 93-8. DOI: 10.33137/ijidi.v3i2.32595.

Glenn Sumi. Review of “Fifteen Dogs by André Alexis.” *Goodreads*, 5 December 2015, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/23129923-fifteen-dogs.

Godard, Barbara. “Notes from the Cultural Field: Canadian Literature from Identity to Hybridity.” *Essays on Canadian Writing* vol. 72, 2000, pp. 209-47.

Hanson, Aubrey Jean. “Reading for Reconciliation? Indigenous Literatures in a Post-TRC Canada.” *ESC: English Studies in Canada* vol. 43, no. 2-3, 2017, pp. 69-90. https://doi.org/10.1353/esc.2017.0022.

Haynes, Jeremy. *Rewarding Civility in Canada’s Battle of the Books:* Canada Reads *and the Polite Discourse of Nationalism.* 2018. McMaster University, PhD dissertation. *MacSphere.*

Higgins, Jenny. “Economic Impacts of the Cod Moratorium.” *Heritage NL*, 2008, https://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/economy/moratorium-impacts.php. Accessed 27 May 2021.

Hirschman, Sarah. *People and Stories / Gente y Cuentos: Who Owns Literature? Communities Find Their Voice Through Short Stories.* E-book, iUniverse, 2009.

Horace. "Ars Poetica." *Poetry Foundation*, 13 Oct. 2009, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69381/ars-poetica. Accessed 7 August 2021.

Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious.* Routledge Classics, 2002.

Jennifer (aka EM). Review of "Fifteen Dogs by André Alexis." *Goodreads*, 1 April 2015, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/23129923-fifteen-dogs.

Jill. Review of "Fifteen Dogs by André Alexis." *Goodreads*, 14 December 2015, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/23129923-fifteen-dogs.

Krista. Review of "Birdie by Tracey Lindberg." *Goodreads*, 14 July 2015, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/23590716-birdie.

---. Review of "Small Game Hunting at the Local Coward Gun Club." *Goodreads*, 30 December 2019, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/39293273-small-game-hunting-at-the-local-coward-gun-club.

Lang, Anouk. "'A Book that All Canadians Should be Proud to Read': *Canada Reads* and Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road*." *Canadian Literature* no. 215, 2012, pp. 120-36.

Leanne Simpson. Review of "Birdie by Tracey Lindberg." *Goodreads*, 21 March 2015, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/23590716-birdie.

Lindberg, Tracey. *Birdie*. HarperCollins, 2015.

Litt, Paul. "The State and the Book." *History of the Book in Canada, Volume III: 1918-1980.* University of Toronto Press, 2007, pp. 34-44.

MacSkimming, Roy. *Public Lending Right in Canada: Policy Foundations*. Canada Council for the Arts, December 2011, https://publiclendingright.ca/-/media/Files/Plr/ResearchReports/PLRPolicyFoundations.pdf. Accessed 5 August 2021.

Marx, Karl. *Capital, Volume 1*. Penguin Classics, 1990.

---. "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte." *The Political Writings*, Verso, 2019, pp. 477-583.

Matthew Quann. Review of "Birdie by Tracey Lindberg." *Goodreads*, 31 March 2017, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/23590716-birdie.

---. Review of "Fifteen Dogs by André Alexis." *Goodreads*, 17 December 2015, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/23129923-fifteen-dogs.

McGregor, Hannah, Julie Rak, and Erin Wunker. "Introduction: Living in the Ruins." *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins.* Edited by Hannah McGregor, Julie Rak, and Erin Wunker, Book*hug, 2018, pp. 1-28.

McKay, Ian. "The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History." *The Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 81, no. 4, 2000, pp. 617-645.

McWhinney, Andrew. *Fighting the Absence: Class and Contemporary Canadian Fiction.* 2020. University of Alberta, BA (Hons) dissertation.

"Media Kit." *People & Stories / Gente y Cuentos,* https://peopleandstories.org/media-kit/. Accessed 22 July 2021.

Milz, Sabine. *A Materialist Study of Canadian Literary Culture at a Time of Neoliberal Globalization*. 2004. McMaster University, PhD dissertation. *MacSphere*.

---. "Is Canadian Literature Still "National"? Twenty-First-Century Canadian Literature in Spatial Perspective." *Studies in Canadian Literature* vol. 35, no. 1, 2010, pp. 5-39.

"Mission Statement." *Heritage NL*. https://www.heritage.nf.ca/about/index.php. Accessed 25 May 2021.

Mok, Tanya. "Parents, pet owners warned after hot dogs laced with 'unknown substance' found in Danforth and Greenwood park." *National Post*, 25 Sep 2013, https://nationalpost.com/news/toronto/parents-pet-owners-warned-after-hot-dogs-laced-with-unknown-substance-found-in-danforth-and-greenwood-park. Accessed 4 June 2021.

Moss, Laura. "Canada Reads." *Canadian Literature* no. 182, 2004, pp. 6-12.

Orla Hegarty. Review of "Small Game Hunting at the Local Coward Gun Club." *Goodreads,* 7 July 2019, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/39293273-small-game-hunting-at-the-local-coward-gun-club.

"Organization Profile - Canadian Broadcasting Corporation." *Government of Canada,* 3 December 2020, https://federal-

organizations.canada.ca/profil.php?OrgID=CBC&lang=en. Accessed 15 February 2021.

Pinder, Kait. "Action, Feeling, Form: The Aesthetics of Care in Tracey Lindberg's *Birdie*." *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études en littérature canadienne* vol. 44, no. 1, 2019, pp. 218-38. https://doi.org/10.7202/1066507ar.

Rifkin, Mark. *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination.* Duke University Press, 2017.

Schlider et al. "Dominance in Domestic Dogs Revisited: Useful Habit and Useful Construct?" *Journal of Veterinary Behavior* vol. 9, no. 4, 2014, pp. 184-191. https://doi-org.libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca/10.1016/j.jveb.2014.04.005.

Schroeder, Sarah Bartlett. "Librarian Responses to Public Lending Rights in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom and Implications for the United States." *Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* vol. 91, no. 1, 2021, pp. 52-63.

Shannon. Review of "Birdie by Tracey Lindberg." *Goodreads*, 18 Sept 2015, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/23590716-birdie.

"Shared Reading." *The Reader*, https://www.thereader.org.uk/what-we-do/shared-reading/. Accessed 20 July 2021.

Speller, John R. W. *Bourdieu and Literature*. Open Book Publishers, 2011.

Szeman, Imre. "Introduction: A Manifesto for Materialism." *Essays on Canadian Writing* vol. 68, 1999, pp. 1-18.

The Hamilton Public Library Board. *Financial Statements of the Hamilton Public Library Board*, 2020, https://www.hpl.ca/sites/default/files/2020-12-31_HPL_FS.pdf.

The Pervert's Guide to Ideology. Directed by Sophie Fiennes, performances by Slavoj Žižek, P Guide Productions and Zeitgeist Films, 2012.

Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* vol. 1, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1-40.

Walcott, Rinaldo. *Black Like Who? Writing Black Canada.* 2nd ed., Insomniac Press, 2003.

Wildcat, Matthew. "*Wahkohtowin* in Action." *Constitutional Forum constitutionnel* vol. 27, no. 1, 2018, pp. 13-24. https://doi.org/10.21991/cf29370.

Wolfe, Patrick. “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native.” *Journal of Genocide Research* vol. 8, no. 4, 2006, pp. 387-409. https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240.

Worden, Daniel. “The Memoir in the Age of Neoliberal Individualism.” *Neoliberalism and Contemporary Literary Culture*, edited by Mitchum Huehls and Rachel Greenwald Smith, John Hopkins University Press, 2017, pp. 160-80.

Wyile, Herb. *Anne of Tim Hortons: Globalization and the Reshaping of Atlantic-Canadian Literature.* Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011.

Zanchi, Daniella. “Playing for Good: The Public Value of CBC’s *Canada Reads.*” *Journal of Popular Culture* vol. 52, no. 3, 2019, pp. 564-81. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/jpcu.12802.