

# The Capilano Review



Sun smiling golden over cracked pavement  
and deep skin;

—*Joy Gyamfi*

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**Cover Image:**

Marika Yeo

*and they will see the signs in the regions and in themselves* (detail), 2015

lustre, glaze, and underglaze on ceramic

5.5 × 3 inches

# Editors' Note

It is uncommon on this unceded Coast Salish land called “Vancouver” to see the radiant faces of so many black people in one room; more familiar are we with those rare, unexpected moments when we see another solitary “i” in this city, as Ian William so aptly notes in “Our eyes meet across yet another room,” that the on-stage dialogue last June between Dionne Brand, Christina Sharpe, and David Chariandy felt like a long-awaited gift. We left invigorated. What was the work of words for us as students, activists, creators? How do we do the work of words in the climates that we find ourselves in? David Chariandy—our professor for only three months that summer but someone we now envision as a lifelong mentor—encouraged us to follow this thread. He connected us with *The Capilano Review*’s former editor, Andrea Actis, another new mentor, and thus this special issue of *TCR* on “the work of words” was born.

When we began to curate this issue, we were unsure of how the submissions might come together, as might be the case with any collaborative venture. We’d invited contributors with the prompt *What is “the work of words” for black creators now?* and excitedly awaited their interpretations of the question. Despite our uncertainty, we were awestruck by the conversation that we saw between the pieces. This issue is not just held together by blackness, nor does it attempt to provide a definition of blackness. These pieces capture a multiplicity of black joy, fear, desire, communion, sorrow, and life.

Our cover image, a close-up of a sculpture by Marika Yeo, seems to carry this multiplicity. The sculpture is visibly cracked, but rather than being unworkable, the parts are carefully pieced back together in a motion that signals a radical vulnerability. This radical vulnerability, encapsulating an openness and a hope, however fraught, seems to permeate the contributions this issue holds. To quote Caleb Femi, “supernovas are in fact dying stars,” and it is amidst the prospect of dying stars that we fight and live, as the inscription “Black Lives Matter” on the activists’ shirts in Joy Gyamfi’s images remind us. At the same time, that image cannot be read apart from the smiles that surround it. We know that we must find the time to “dance calypso an roll,” as Sonnet L’Abbé so beautifully writes—to live whether it “is or is not history” (Wayde Compton).

This issue is dedicated to those living, multiplying, dreaming, dancing supernovas. We hope that wandering through these pieces is as nourishing for you as it is for us.

—Emmanuelle Andrews and Katrina Sellinger

# from *James Douglas: An Opera*

Wayde Compton

## OVERTURE

A dancer, a soundscape, and a voice of history.

## VOICE

Gold on the Fraser River lured them: first the British, then Americans, then those who were neither/nor. Eighteen fifty-eight in a fur-trading frontier. An Empire the sun never set on, so they said. The colonies of a barely-governed north and/or west.

The Hudson's Bay Company built forts and extracted jurisdiction. A corporation shaped like an army or an army shaped like a corporation. Versa vice.

But gold would throw open the door. American citizens would march north. To prospect. To overwhelm. To annex. Colonial lateral violence. Drove of Yankee miners. Manifesters of destiny.

*(Pause)*

James Douglas rose up through the trade. Completely loyal to the Crown. The bastard son of a Scottish planter and a "coloured" Guyanese. Later married Amelia Connolly, Cree and Irish. They built a swarthy family in a time of white invasion. He became a leader of white colonial rule who was uncertainly white.

*(Pause)*

What Douglas did to hold the British claim against the US was to send for 600 blacks from San Francisco. To live and work in the colony. To be a buffer. To be a levee. Blacks not wanted by America would become Brits not wanting America here. A bulwark of neither/nor. Douglas was or was not himself black. Did or did not bring them home. Could or could not set them free. Is or is not history.



# ACT ONE SCENE 1

Fort Victoria, 1861. Christ Church.

*PRISCILLA STEWART stands at the front of the CHORUS  
as they sing.*

STEWART

A North-South war was on its way,  
any fool could see.

A North-South war was on its way,  
any fool could see.

But just what side the West would take  
was a blue-eyed mystery.

In Zion Church we prayed.

They're going to segregate

CHORUS

the sunset we'd run off into.

STEWART

I said they're going to segregate

CHORUS

the sunset we'd run off into.

STEWART

Jim Crow stalks the glittering bay  
of a gold rush San Francisco.

CHORUS

In Zion Church we prayed.

STEWART

Douglas is the governor  
Up north on British land.  
Douglas is the governor

Up north on British land.  
A whisper-coloured brother.  
Another chance to start again.

On the dock of Fort Victoria,  
On the rainy streets of Canaan,  
On our way to equal scales  
we prayed for streams of gold.

Let them plunder yellow rocks.

CHORUS

The only gold is home.

STEWART

Let them plunder yellow rocks.

CHORUS

The only gold is home.

STEWART

We got an alloy governor.  
We are a breathing poem.  
A Pharaoh, a Moses, a maybe.  
To cross a coloured parting.  
Another bloody Red Sea.  
Another root through thirsting.

for

some colour other  
than red, white, and blue,

and blue,

and blue,

and blue,

and blue,

and blue...

# "They're all conjurors":

A Conversation with Deanna Bowen & Cecily Nicholson

Emmanuelle Andrews & Katrina Sellinger

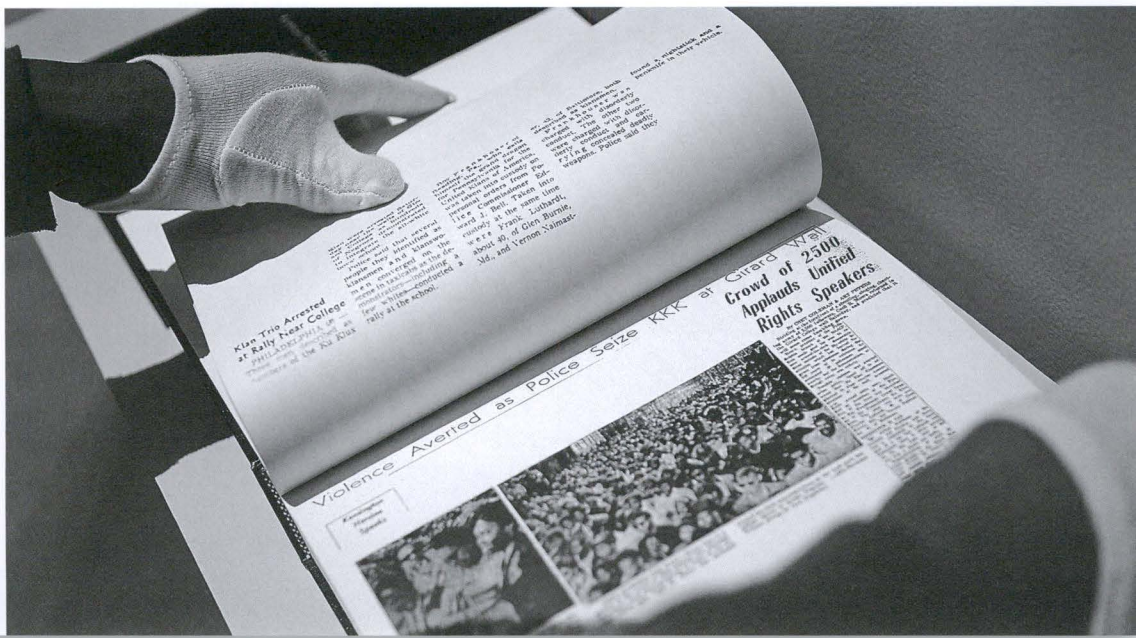
*On a Thursday afternoon this past November, we orchestrated a Skype call with Deanna Bowen and Cecily Nicholson across three computer screens and two time zones. We'd come in with a set of questions and ended up getting answers to questions we hadn't even thought to ask.*

*As junior scholars, we recognize this rerouting as part of our academic experience, but having the opportunity to work through these questions with black women is something new for us.*

*We had chosen certain words because of what we'd seen as their expansiveness—we liked the potential inclusivity of "creator" and "creative process"—but our conversation brought forth their limitations as well. Words can't always do what we want them to do. They are always in flux. Still, this conversation—this collaborative work—expanded our understanding of what the work of words might look like.*

**Deanna Bowen:** I'm thinking about the failure of language and the ways in which language and words don't do some experiences, some aspects of Black experience, justice. I think about the value of silence and how much silence is just as much a very critical and important dialect, so to speak. Yeah, those are the first things I'm thinking about. I'm also thinking about the work of words as a tool to dismantle the master's house.

Deanna Bowen, "Volumes of Counterintelligence 1 & 2,"  
installation view, from *Traces in the Dark*, ICA Philadelphia, 2015  
Photographer: Constance Mensch





All: Mm-hmm.

**Cecily Nicholson:** Yeah, I agree with that. I also think about collaboration and conversation. As a poet I'm working with words and I'm trying to find ways to use my voice, which isn't an easy thing for me. I think it's not an easy thing for many artists. I mean, it's a discipline or it's a work or it's a practice—you know, these things. So I'm trying to find that voice but trying to place it in concert and trying to be present. And I mean that for all my intersections, thinking through a layered positioning, as we all do in a sense. We all live our lives, but certainly as black women and as survivors, ongoing; that work becomes important in terms of holding space. In terms of what I'm witnessing and participating in, sometimes that concert of words in collaboration is about disruption. It's about interruptions. It also is—as Deanna has already pointed out—necessarily, at times, a refusal to make even a sound. Sometimes it's a matter of refusing the conditions in which we are supposed to be speaking.

**DB:** I think the one thing I'd add to that is this idea that words can do the *work* of articulating our erasure. I can extend that out as far as you wanna go, really, but I think there is something very particular about the Canadian landscape and the ways in which words are *necessary* in defining this notion of the absence of Black bodies on the Canadian landscape.

**CN:** Absolutely.

**KS:** I think these are great responses. We didn't want to define “black creators” too closely because we need it to be open-ended, but this might be a good place for us to go, like what are we thinking about as “black creation”? We wanted to include academic work, artistic work, activist work—just all of the different levels of creation—but, yeah, what do you think about this category of *black creation*? What does that include for you?

**CN:** This word “creator” I can't help but hear in a Christian biblical sense. I understand we're trying to think through creative practice alongside words like “knowledge production.”

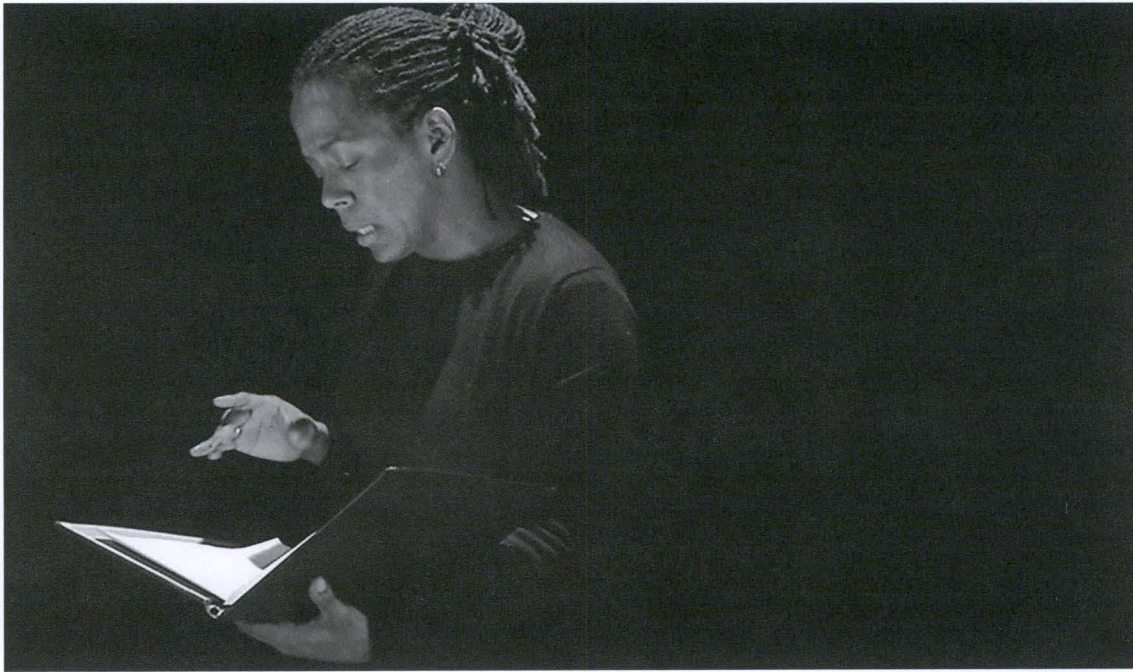
**DB:** I would like to jump onto it for just a little bit to highlight that the people I'm working with are not just “creative” people. I *am* working with academics. I'm working with a lot of historians and librarians. They're all *conjurers*, and that's the word that comes to mind for everyone I'm working with. These are all people who can contribute to my efforts to define Black experience in Canada.

EA: That's interesting because when we were thinking of this term, "creators," we actually wanted to make sure we *were* including academics as well. In ways, "creators" might actually leave them out, in some respect, or maybe the word does need some more expansion. So, yeah, I'm glad that you've both brought that up because we did kind of take it for granted, I think.

CN: And "conjurers" is lovely. When we're thinking about our everyday people who are not necessarily a part of an institution or gallery and we're meeting on the street, there's a lot of possibility for creating and conjuring in all kinds of ways.

KS: So, then, talking about what you imagine the work of words to be, how do you see that work happening in your fields? Again, this question is kind of broad and vague because we want you to just take it wherever you go!

Deanna Bowen, *sum of the parts: what can be named*, video still, 2010



DB: In the field or in our practice?

KS: Oh! That is a good question. Can we say both?



DB: Sure, just makes my answer longer! First and foremost, I look at my practice as being an act of publishing. I believe that there are many types of languages and many types of dialects within them, and I imagine that just about anything I create—be it video, film, sculpture, whatever—is a kind of language that helps me to disseminate a narrative out into the world. All of my work is archive-based, so obviously words and documents are critical components of my research. They are the tools and the information about experiences that I would never be able to get from, say, the people I've grown up with. Words have been—words *are*—the things that I use in performances and in the construction

of my family stories. I mean, it's just everything about writing words, writing language, defining Blackness—all of those things are taken up in my practice, and so various types of writing inform everything that I do.

CN: I appreciate that breadth. My fields combine social and cultural fronts. It feels nebulous. I have a hard time locating it, except it does have spatiality like the street, the gallery, you know, the venue, on the road. My last work of poetry is mainly in the context of road travel. I'm trying to be more sure about how I use language and how to connect to a plurality or a multiplicity, code-switching, and looking to translation—whatever means of communication. I can't do it as an individual, so it's about the social. I can fall into a tendency to try to control writing and this is supposed to be part of a practice, being thoughtful about things, and being *deliberate* and *intentional*.

*young white university students  
son of uneducated, working poor parents  
quick of mind. Blonde to a leather face*

THE LONG DOORWAY - ACT THREE, Scene three

(WE DISSOLVE TO THE CELL IN THE DON JAIL. DONALD IS STANDING UNDER THE WINDOW. THE GUARD APPEARS & OPENS THE DOOR. WILSON COMES IN. THE GUARD LEAVES)

DONALD: What do you want?

*Frank Wilson* WILSON: I want to defend you. *this black man, abt 20 years old. intelligent quick intense*

DONALD: Leave me alone. (HE TURNS AWAY) *Walker is a smart sharp. Considerate*

WILSON: I want you to tell me about your fight with Edison.

*Don't face:* DONALD: What for? You're not going to be my lawyer. *Glasses*

*Frank Wilson* My Dad's phoning the Society. *he's looking*

WILSON: The Society's phoning your Dad.

DONALD: (TURNS) Yeah --?

WILSON: Until they tell me I'm off, I'm on. And while I'm your Counsel, I'm going to get the information I have to have.

DONALD: (GOES TO THE DOOR) I'll get you thrown out.

WILSON: Donald.

DONALD: (FACES HIM) What?

WILSON: Why did you and Edison fight? Were you always enemies? I want the truth.

DONALD: What're you talking about? I liked Edison. I never had a better friend. He's smart, and he's quiet, the way I like a guy. He doesn't spout off all the time, and when he does say something, I know what he's talking about. He's like me a hundred ways, you know what I mean? He wants the same things --

WILSON: Then?

DONALD: (TURNING AWAY) We just fought, that's all.

WILSON: You told me he started it.

DONALD: (PAUSE) Did I? *(FRAGILE)*

WILSON: Was that the truth?

*Consider complex of honest platonic tension*

Deanna Bowen, "ON TRIAL The Long Doorway - Annotations," artist pages for *Canadian Art* (Fall 2017)



I wanna open up more to an active ad hoc, improv, experimental, river-current, creek-meandering kind of approach to seeing language and words happen—again, also, more in collaboration. It's good to have the poise and confidence to roll with dialogues. That also doesn't come easy for many of us but the words are needed for adaptability, creating safety, obviously creativity—as we're talking about today—but certainly *care*, as well. Many of us do a lot of care work. I say “many of us.” I'm referring just back to this category of black creators. I'm thinking especially of black women that I know, and myself. We do a lot of care work, which involves a lot of listening. So the work of words—back to silences within the refusal—has also meant being still and quiet in order to be able to listen. The work of listening and understanding is a part of my everyday.

**DB:** Because I'm always dealing with history, I couldn't help but think about the relationship between Black people and the written word, language and writing. Black people could be killed for knowing how to read and write during slavery times. So the thing that's coming to mind is the preciousness of language and writing and speaking up for oneself—and speaking for a community. Then, from there, I think about the failure of the printed text and the way that the printed text, historically, has failed to define Black presence, to define either the individual writer or the field itself. These ideas make me question why I do so much performance, why I'm always working from scripts—what is that about?

I'm also exploring the physicality of language and how actors and performers and performances have a way of bypassing our disconnect from language—certainly from the printed word, anyhow.

Deanna Bowen, *ONTRIAL The Long Doorway*, installation view, Mercer Union, 2017. Photographer: Toni Hafkensheid



With performance I can see this other way in which language works in the world and the way that it can pierce through white disassociation. These are the things that I'm thinking about very much when we talk about the work of words and its relationship to Blackness and Black creatives.

EA: This reminds me of how Christina Sharpe, in her book *In the Wake*, refers to "Blackened knowledge." And even of her use, or her *work*, with certain words. She explicitly traces the word "wake," for instance, and describes it as many things—as keeping watch over the dead, as the path of a ship, as awakening, as consciousness—and she kind of expands that word to mean many things and make it relevant for black people. It's "Blackened knowledge" when she uses it. Could you maybe speak more about that or how that resonates with you, or doesn't?

DB: I read the book very early in the year in an effort to contextualize or to put words to my practice. I had just completed a road movie about my family's migration from Kansas and got as far as my mind could hold.

I thought about Christina's writing, about the wake and being "woke" and all of those kinds of different definitions of the word. What she gave me were the words for an intuitive process, and a bodily process, that I was going through, in which language did not come to mind. So it was an important discovery to find that text. It came to me at a particular time in my research where I was thinking through, really, the history of this Creek-Negro, "Black Indian" lineage that I come from.

And what struck me about the *book*—and I have given a public talk with some other people at the AGO, and I mentioned this there—was that Christina's writing speaks frequently about the relationship of Black bodies to bodies of water. That was one of my disconnects from her writing—because



Deanna Bowen, *We Are From Nicodemus* – Deanna Bowen & Angela Bates,  
video still, 2017





my family never talks about water. We talk a lot about the *land*—land that we lost, land that we were running on. And so that opened up kind of a line of query for me: *because* our family has been about the land for as long as we have, it led me to realize that we had always been in relationship to, or living with or around, Indigenous peoples the entire time. The book opened up this other possibility, probability, that this *Black* family line that I was researching was more likely an Indigenous family line that had been interrupted by Blackness via slavery. So when I think about the wake and where Sharpe goes... this is not *her* language—but she speaks to the reclamation of dead bodies, Black bodies, and also the efforts and the generations of grief that one has to go through. Beyond the narratives of slavery and Blackness, I can't help but think also about the thousands of years of genocide against Indigenous peoples, and how my family could be part of that long traumatic history as well. So the wake work has become a compounded effort for me in the last year.

EA: Thank you for sharing that, Deanna.

CN: Brilliant. I appreciate the chord you just struck around, you know, this association with bodies of water when we have been decidedly inland so long. Still, quite often in my work, I'm referencing the movement of water, the river, the creek, the rivulet, the ditch pooling—routes through culverts, yeah, constricted by the state, rerouted by colonialism, and certainly in relationship to Indigenous territories, multiply.



EA: I think one thing that keeps being brought up naturally is also something we've been interested in hearing more about, which is the idea of the work of words being about relationships with other black women or conjurors, or however you want to define that. Katrina and I, for example, read and edit each other's work, which I've found has been integral to my academic growth. And it's not only that support—that physical black presence—but also that ability to be understood by someone. We'll aid each other when we're kind of floundering. When we're talking through our ideas, we help each other recognize the value in what feels like abstract thoughts. The work of words, then, is perhaps also *for* other black creators, and also influenced *by* our relationships with those creators. So could you speak to relationships you've had with other black creators and how those relationships have influenced your practices?

CN: I really appreciate you drawing out this question. I wonder if I could speak, first of all, to the notion of influence before that of relation, because I came through an isolated rural context as a child, and there was this incredibly integral pull, a necessity, to seek out written words. That was what was accessible to me. People were not as accessible as words were at that time. I mean, aesthetics and art history, let alone black art, were not concepts that I understood. I don't know that I would have been able to centre myself as a human being if I hadn't reached out early to literature and poetry. I think of reading Dionne Brand as a teenager, as I migrated into the city, and negotiating understandings of place, like through Toni Morrison's *Jazz*. I can recall since then a number of startling points where I've come across multidisciplinary artists whose practices, like Deanna's, work across a number of discourses and are especially concerned with language and archive. I'm thinking of when I first came across your film, the one that was shown at MICE—

DB: —*oral histories*?

CN: —*sum of the parts*, was it?

DB: Yeah.

CN: It was a very emotional experience. I actually cried as a stranger in the audience, although it turned out I was in pretty good company. And part of what was happening there for me, as someone overly defined by the state, as a former ward of the state and living through kinds of displacement, was

this sense of familiarity. I wrote about this in the afterword of my recent book because I was trying to explain how when I'm looking at Deanna's work, for example, I experience this study. It's not my family—these complex histories to which you've devoted, it seems, a lifetime, in terms of research and care for. And yet, somehow, it did seem familiar. And what I realized in listening through was that even if I can't access those records, even if those archives and those documents and those stories and the orality is gone—and it is violently gone, for me—I still came through, and I came through with what must be parallel threads, narratives, and stories. And it spans out to harmonies of stories and practices. I had a chance just in the last couple of years to meet you, Deanna, but also Charles Campbell, Camille Turner, Khari—actually, Khari McClelland I met years ago—but visual artists, musicians, where I'm just like how's it happened that we've missed each other, or *I've* missed y'all, for so long? And realizing as I look at the different projects, like Charles' *Transporter* project, Camille's *SonicWalks*, and Khari's sense of music as a "transportation device," that all were concerned—are attentive to—movement. The most profound sense of place, I've realized, is in the context of movement and of being *something* that is not simply a displacement. Therein is great meaning and great capacity. It's been a necessary shift, to find a place in the cultural landscape, if you will. And I don't mean CanLit. I mean in the *longterm*, I've never sought to contribute to a national project. I *do* feel a sense of belonging to a convolution of aesthetics, black aesthetics, and solidarity.

**DB:** I want to follow with what Cecily has talked about around isolation. You know, for me as a family member of this particularly insular community, and then having the experience of trying to articulate who they were in Vancouver twenty-five years ago, it was a very small pocket of Black people that I could speak to in the creative world who understood what I was trying to get at. And I can tell you just how much of a *profound* emotional support that was at that time. Speaking about Blackness in Vancouver—in Canada, generally—is a very difficult thing, and so having allies—having *colleagues*, compatriots—who are doing this work is such a critical part of how we sustain this work, because the isolation will kill you. So I think a lot about that, and I think a lot about how hard I have been working—certainly in the last five to ten years—to battle against the isolation, in part because in the few opportunities that I've had to connect with Black creators across the country, the common lament is feeling



as though we're the only ones doing this work, and how you want to forfeit doing the work because you have this sense of lack of support. So I have just made it a goal, in part because I am so passionately committed to the writing of Black Canadian experience...I've made it a goal to connect myself with as many mutually-concerned Black creatives across the country as I can. Part of this is an egocentric trip about denying the government the ongoing use of this narrative of "lack of Black people" or "no Black people" in Canada, and I want to be able to assemble a body of creatives that completely smashes that lie. Maybe this kind of fits within what Sharpe was talking about around the reclamation of Black bodies, because even this work fits within this practice of "wake" work. I think about the "work of words" when I was in the emerging years of my career, when I was just desperately trying to find language that articulated this middle space of American—Black American—Canadian, and what that was about. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* was a *perfect* text to articulate the invisibility on both sides of this alleged border. *That* book gave me some buoyancy, because I felt that that one individual, that one book, was proof that there was somebody else in the world that experienced the invisibility that I was experiencing. I think, also, about creative works by Black people that you can't access or you resist accessing and the lessons—there is *still* a lesson—in that. By example, Morrison's *Paradise* does the work of articulating all-Black towns in Oklahoma, like Clearview where *my* family comes from. I think I've tried reading it at least five or six times now. And the resistance that I've come to accept is due to the fact that this particular story is too close and too hard, potentially too harmful for the psyche at this stage of the game. But the resistance was a lesson, nonetheless. I think about the blessing of experiencing a kind of Black "Renaissance," as far as creative practices are going here in Toronto. I gotta say that the collective mass, this community of Black makers very focused and very clear about the fact that they are makers, is such a gift to a hard heart because doing the work twenty years ago, there were very few of us out here. And that's not to take up the mantle of, you know, "I built the world." I'm sure Dionne Brand and many other creatives have a similar sense of the singularity of what they were doing, maybe twenty, thirty, forty years ago. So seeing communities of creators that are Black people who are out in the world and *want* to do this for a living, *want* to make this a career choice, *want* to make it a life practice, is so incredibly affirming. It is a beautiful thing to see all of these Black creative people in my world, in the city, across the country, across the nation. I mean, it's huge.



**CN:** There's always been a foundation wherever my homes are, but certainly on this coast for the last eighteen years. I have people. It's not that we haven't had people. I think of the work of Junie Desil and Julie Okot Bitek. I think of the work of Nadine Chambers—their integral practices and knowledge through the years. I think about what it has meant to be able to have those connections, and to have close allies and righteous poets and a mix of community down with figuring out what it means to be a good friend and ally. I don't hear enough of that around here in Vancouver where there are some insidious conditions for black people and a particular misogyny directed at black women.

**DB:** To add to what you were saying, I would say, also, that just by nature of the platform that I've been given in recent years, I've put a lot of effort into making space and calling out people who I think deserve recognition. And don't get me wrong, I'm not assessing "are they good or bad?" but just people who I know that have been doing the work diligently for long, long periods of time and have not received adequate recognition. I got a little smart-aleck this year and thought that I could push a little bit further, so I have taken it upon myself to edit a publication on Indigenous, queer, differently-abled, racialized, or otherwise outsider media artists. Again, I had this platform, so I applied for a Canada 150 grant and I got a very large chunk of money to edit a publication and make the way for forty writers, with the intention of having them articulate this place of difference—as cultural producers—in this country. That has been a huge undertaking on my part, but it really is about fostering the next generation of critical thinkers. I was very upfront in the proposal that this was a pay-it-forward strategy of generating critical dialogue about the Canadian cultural scene, and so it's not just about the articulation. I am also trying to help stoke fires of people who will go after the "State" and name the things that need to be changed.

**KS:** That's amazing. I think this kind of leads into the question that we had started around citational practice, because that isn't *citing* people, but it's helping get their work out in a different way. So, thinking about whose work you cite and interact with...again that's part of the conversations and relationships you're building. But, yeah, if either of you wanted to speak more about citational practices in your work?

**CN:** Well I don't work in academia anymore and so citations...they're obviously not exclusive to that field, but I find my relationship over the years has definitely shifted about *how* I'd like to use a citation. Sometimes when I use external texts my methods are not always respectful. Sometimes my use of a document that is an

antagonism or an aggression I need to subject to the conditions of my own writing. And there are many moments of great relevance to me that I can't formally cite.

I feel like the moment we talk about citation I'm on my heels a little bit because I think it's been a real challenge to represent sources just this way. That said, I think your question was about citations of black folks, of writers and creative people. It's something to have publications, the moment of the interview, the moment of the afterword, the acknowledgement, the public address...these are all opportunities to point not just to citations but to strong influences that ground me.

**DB:** I have a few ideas about citations: first and foremost, I think of the ongoing tendency of leaving Black knowledge out. I think it's critically important to cite where wisdom is gleaned. So it's really more of a proactive kind of a stance, in the sense that I tend to be working, more often than not, with folks that are *not* in academia, *not* writers, who are, you know, country folks with a long memory. I think it's important to name those people because they are often invalidated or dismissed, and so it's, again, another moment in which I'm flagging or highlighting people whose wisdom and insight needs to be recognized. I also think about the citation in my practice as a necessary tool because I present ideas and histories that the gallery-going community—the white gallery-going community—is not necessarily keen to take up or believe. Citation has become a necessary tool in order to validate what I put out in the world. Because I'm talking about, say, things like hate groups in Canada, the immediate response tends to be, “Well, prove it.” This is where the citation comes into, literally, the arrangement of the works that I produce and where the archive fits into the equation. It is a very purposeful response to the pushback that I've experienced, the pushback that I imagine every time I put some different knowledge out into the world.

**CN:** And let me just say I appreciate all of those takes, and I agree fully. We are in different kinds of practice, I think, and I can hear how preemptive and necessary what you're talking about is.

**DB:** Yeah.

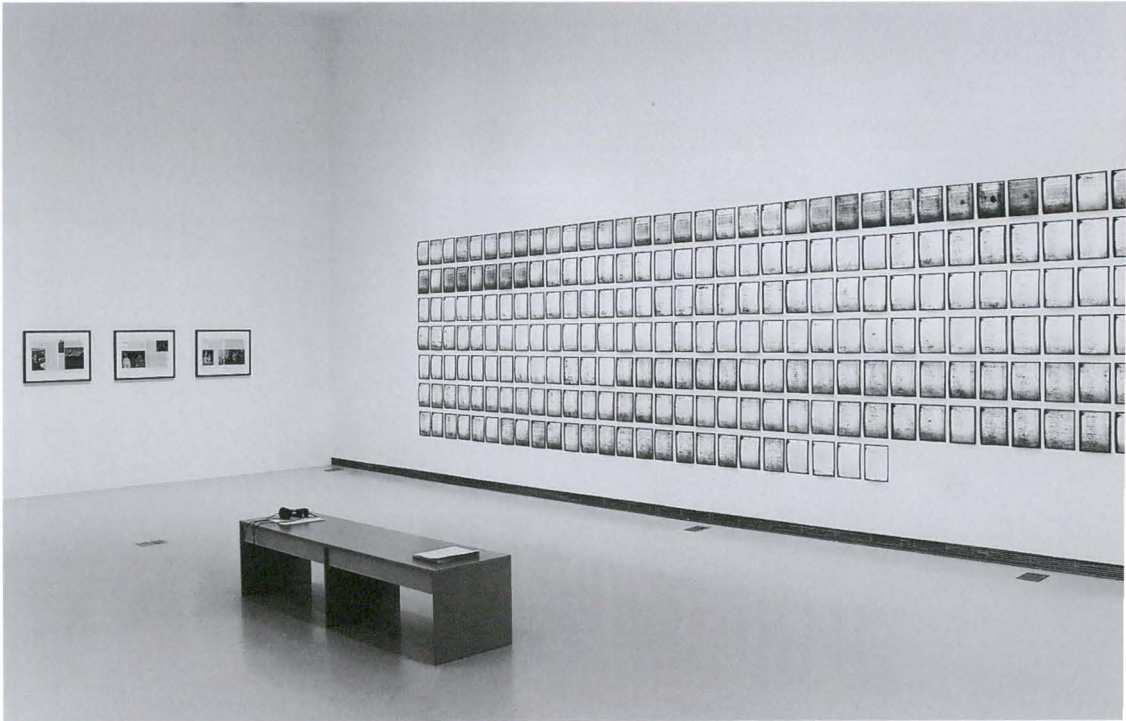
**CN:** And that's how citations work for me as a reader, for example; I'm looking to them as a point of pedagogy, for sure. For authors or artists I respect, I'm gonna look to see where that map takes me, to how they've formed knowledge.



Especially when thinking about orality, lived experience and knowledge, especially of elders. And we've learned a lot—I hope we all have learned a lot—from relationships to Indigenous protocols around relationships to knowledge and art, specific to community, to nation, and to land. There's critical learning and teaching around protocol, but I don't suppose that you can just transpose it generally. It's an interesting time to learn, to think through methodology. I think there's a lot to grow and I'm not looking to academic spaces to instruct us necessarily.

DB: The other thing I would add, in *this* political climate right now, where everything, *every* aspect of truth, is under attack, I think it's critical to continue to cite other documents, other knowledge, other wisdom, as the power and weight of words and language is being eroded by governments and individuals elsewhere. I think about the histories that potentially can be erased in this particular climate. I think about the necessity to continue to aggressively archive, again, with an understanding that citations will be necessary for the next generation.

CN: Yeah, now I'm gonna be off in a quandary, thinking in terms of the poetry project, because I think there's a freedom I'm searching for, often on that page, and it is not about truth necessarily. It's a conversation. A lot of the times, I'm



Deanna Bowen, from *Invisible Empires*, at the Art Gallery of York University, 2013  
Photographer: Michael Maranda (AGYU)



mainly concerned with being in conversation with people who would believe me, if that makes sense. And in recent years, I've shifted away from centralizing particularly a white-dominant assessment, really, of my poetic project as good, bad, or—whatever—ugly, and have become very, very interested in growing networks of communication. So I'm gonna think more about how citations might work in that mode, how I've used them, but I'm also just...I do wanna find some fluidity in language. There are ways in which a visual image can take us far. The citation, the point of reference, is just this place in time—this person took the photo, and this happened. So that is the fact of it. But what happens affectively in relation to that photo, and the atmosphere and context and how it's multiply read—in dialogue, and in the social—it starts to spiral in a way that I think is—or could be, at times—quite beautifully scattered.

**DB:** Because I'm so preoccupied with history, I think about the archive and citation this way. And it's interesting, also, because more often than not the gallery space is so terribly behind as far as inclusion of other people goes, and because I'm so damn protective of the people I'm making work about, I still feel the need to prioritize “blocking shots,” so to speak. I wish for, and think a lot about, the ability to not prioritize white readers, however which way you want to define that. I haven't completely figured out how to do that, just by nature of the fact that the gallery system is so slow to change. My audience doesn't shift—not by much anyhow.



DJs l'Oqenz & Nik Red spinning “Won't Back Down,” installation view, from *Nuit Blanche* Toronto, 2017. Photographer: Yuula Benivolski

CN: Yeah, and the conditions are violent, so I understand. I wonder, just in musing, listening to you, what is the role of anonymity? So, for example, I've been a part of a poetry collective that publishes anonymously, and that has included black members. To what degree are we doing a disservice, perhaps, or contributing to the removal of our voices, or to what degree are we invested in a kind of communing and commonality in which we're trying to move, in some ways, beyond the individual? Citations overwhelmingly link back to individuals, and I think that's a concern in the long run.

DB: Well, this goes back to one of the original questions about the "work of words." I think that these kinds of exploratory practices and projects are *necessary* as well. We could get terribly, terribly lost on prioritizing the greater good of the afro-diasporic community globally, locally, and with that err on the side of *always* educating, *always* disseminating information specifically for a community. If a broad readership doesn't get what you're trying to *do*, I think that the questions that are raised and the process of trying to do this are really, really important. And the questions that they raise might be the by-product that you're looking for. That might *just* be what the goal should, could, be.

EA: It's so fascinating and such a privilege to be able to talk to you both and hear you speak about these things. It's definitely got me thinking about a lot, so thank you *so, so* much.

DB/CN: You're very welcome.

DB: This was such a fabulous conversation!

EA: Yeah! I'm glad you think so.

DB: I'm thrilled with the chat—I wish we could go on for hours. Maybe we need to!

# Six Poems

Ian Williams

Where are you really from

1.

In the guessing game, the white man gets many guesses.  
He may continue to guess even after the answer is  
revealed. Could you be loved, he is guessing, and be  
loved. If I answer correctly he wins. Say something. He  
is team captain and sole player and horse and foxhound  
and whistle and first person shooter to my birth. Say  
something. It's a complicated pursuit. Could you be, could  
you be, could you be loved?

2.

While a white man waits for me to answer he is searching  
his inner Wikipedia for a fact or a current event about the  
island or continent I am. Carnival, genocide, pirates, cruise  
lines, a woman he used to work with, blood diamonds on  
the soles of her shoes, a-wa a-wa. The list could be longer.  
He knows a lot about where I am from whether I am from  
there or not.



3.

I played tennis with a white man who would play my balls when they landed beyond the baseline and my faults as well as proof. There's a long wake across the ocean. Proof of. *I don't know anybody who's actually still racist. I don't know why we're even talking about it.* Because of you, I wanted to say while waiting to receive. *I'm totally team postracial.* He meant nothing by that which is not to say he meant well.

4.

Post that, at a church potluck I intervened for a friend: He's not going to tell you that, man. And the white man looked at me as if I were his phone and had lost reception. He explained a genocide to a Filipino woman. And my friend with the French name from an African country, who was born post conflict and had never been a child soldier, said—Next time I'll just say my name is George, George, George of the jungle. The Congo is so close anyway.

Where are you

from where are you know  
no really where are you from here  
no where are you really not of the world brought  
no from where they are no from  
where no where of the world even as I am not  
where no where of the world even as I am not

## Tu me manques

is how the French miss.  
Backward. Like car wheels in commercials.  
You me miss. Every possible word in the wrong  
place. There are only three.

I had a  
farm in Africa, no just a friend on the French-Swiss  
border who argued the English *I miss you*  
didn't make any sense. Had? How could you  
meaning me miss you meaning him. Easy.  
You he explained miss me because we are not together.  
Who's missing? I wanted to know. You are. You are  
gone somewhere from me. *La lune*. I cannot be missing  
from myself. Ever. You are missing from me and here  
he clamped a love handle and that causes me great  
how do you say *l'angoisse*.

We are apart now  
we never met actually we Skyped our whole  
drosophilic friendship together. He made a joke once  
when I asked for details (he had a postdoc  
on breast cancer proteins) that he was in charge  
of terminating the rats. By guillotine. That was the joke.  
Then he spoke very quickly the real way—an injection  
I think. How faint the tune. I could never tell  
how tall he was or ask correctly how high  
the moon.

As long as we're longing I had a  
farm in Africa, no just another friend on the border  
of Rwanda and the Congo who said *I miss you*  
for *tu me manques* was a perfect and incorrect  
translation. Just trust me. Everything makes sense  
until you have to explain it. Have? You don't say  
*tu m'aimes* for *I love you*. Correct. That is very true  
but *surtout* because I don't love you. See the stars  
How they shine for you. Wait, wait, wait. Not you,  
not your words, not your feeling.



Why does everything have to be about race with  
you people?

— — — — —  
          Leave yourself  
          — — — — —  
behind for a minute in this poem  
you are reading a poem and (I hate poems  
like this but) in that poem a man has left  
— — — — —  
a note you have read that poem  
— — — — —  
before you were supposed to be shocked  
by its audacity but you were nineteen  
and more ~~strike~~ ~~struck~~ stricken by the cost  
— — — — —  
of the anthology than by that poem (stop  
saying poem)

          now you are say sixty (sixty)  
and as you're downsizing you come across  
the anthology with that poem is called this  
is just to say (sixty) as I'm sure you've figured  
out by now and you are the type who cares  
more about the price of plums than plums  
themselves so do you keep the anthology or not (don't  
answer yet)

— — — you want to know what you wanted  
to know at nineteen why couldn't someone tell you  
straight up whether this poem is about more  
than plums or not is it just to say this is to say  
and or not you have lost your hair to grey  
and menopause that was irrelevant forgive me  
you are so sweet and so old  
why should you  
decide you will not forgive him for the note  
or the poem it's hard isn't it to parse who you are  
from who you ought to be to parse your creole  
from the queen hard isn't it to recognize yourself  
in that poem although he says *you* to the woman  
in that poem in this poem you know he does not mean you  
of course cannot even see you of course every poem (stop)  
every poem (stop) everything you have ever read  
has been addressed to someone beside you (stop)  
there you go there you people go again  
making everything about ~~yourself~~ yourselves  
or should it be you

And Finished knowing—then—

I said we'd talk later—I wanted to  
dance with somebody—to feel the *heat*  
with somebody—I turned off the burner—  
The microwave beeped—Don't you wanna dance  
say you wanna dance don't you wanna dance—  
I said, We'll talk later—

then my inbox filled  
with ears underwater. then I noticed all the shoes  
at my door were mine. then the slats of the bed  
came loose and I plunged into teeth. then all  
the onions turned black. then a loved one  
unloved me online. with somebody who—me.  
then the neighbour's unhooked landline  
stitched through the wall—



Our eyes meet across yet another room

white    white    white    white    white    white

white    i    white    white    white    white

white    white    white    white    white    white

white    white    white    white    white    white

white    white    white    white    white    white

white    white    white    white    white    i

# HOW CAN I EXPLAIN TO THE CAT'S CLAWS THAT BENEATH MY SOFT PANTS I HAVE SKIN?

Aisha Sasha John

WHEN PEOPLE ARE FUNNY, INDEPENDENT, LISTEN

NIGHTTIME, BEING IN BED, SLEEPING

UNWILLING, DISORGANIZED, RESENTFUL

WHAT I AM DOING IS NOT WHAT I WILL SOON

WHAT DOES ANYTHING MEAN (WHY?)

WHAT I DID RIGHT, WRONG (WHAT?)

ONE OUT OF ONE OUT OF THREE

THE CAT JUST CLIMBED ATOP ME

I COULD LEAVE MY LAIR TO FIND A WAY

TO LEAVE THIS TOWN BECAUSE IT'S FLAT

I FILL IT WITH MY SOFT HAIR BOUNCING

NEED TO EAT A MEAT IMMEDIATELY

GIVE A SHIT ABOUT YOURSELF ALONE

WATCH IT BE GOOD GREAT

THE SECOND LIFE OF MY TEAR  
THE GOOD LIGHT I SEND YOU IN SECRET (LOVE)  
FROM AIGHT TO LIKE  
WHICH COULD TO IS  
THE BORING AND THEM'S BUTTS  
THE BETTER AND THE BAD  
WHAT FAITH LOOKS LIKE ON A GOAL  
TIDY AND UNLINED/TO BELIEVE LOVE  
AWAITING-INSTRUCTION AWAKE  
WE CAN NEVER RETURN BUT I CAN'T SLEEP  
THE WATER AT THE SPRING AND WEALTH  
CONCERNED TO CALLOUSED  
FROM JANUARY TO SPRINGTIME  
FROM SCRATCHING TO SWOLLEN  
LARGE HANDS TO LARGE FEET  
OK TO ACCRA  
ALMOST TO OBSOLETE  
FROM ANNOYED TO ANGRY  
THE LITTLEST ME I HOUSE CRYING



WORLD-FILLED WATER

THREE OUT OF ONE OUT OF THREE

I BOUGHT TOO-BIG JEANS

I TOUCHED MY EYE TOO MUCH

I AM HELPING MYSELF AS IS MY PARKOUR

ON THE SCALE I MUST TO FINANCE KEY FELLOWSHIPS

OTHERWISE I WOULD NOT ORGANIZE ITS DISTRIBUTION

I'M SUPPOSED TO SHARE WHAT I'VE KNOWN FOR MONEY

EXITING THE SHIP NOW BYE

WORLD-FILLED EARTH

AUTOTUNE-AROUSED CAT

THE MOON IS HERSELF

FROM CURIOUS TO KEEN

NOURISHED ON A BLACK GRASS

TENDED BY A DREAM

ISLAND WITH FRESH FIGS AND FLOSS

ALL MY WEAPON IDEAS WERE SHIELDS

ONE'S NOT GONNA SMALLER THEM'S FEET

ONE'S NOT GONNA BIGGER THEM'S HANDS

TOILET PAPER IN A BASKET  
WHEN I GO THERE ALONE IN THE FUCK DAWN  
SHUDDERING, SOFT  
SENSE DEVELOPMENT  
AS A FUNCTION OF MY LIBERATION  
MY AUDITORY DREAMS  
AND SUGAR NOSE  
IN THE CONTEXT OF MY LONG ARMS  
AND HISTORY OF CONVERSION  
BY MYSELF WITH CLEAN TEETH  
TO TRUST PREVIOUSLY EXPRESSED INTELLIGENCE  
WHERE I AM OBVIOUS  
WHAT EVEN HAPPENED?  
MARVIN'S THIRD WORSE  
A "YEAR"

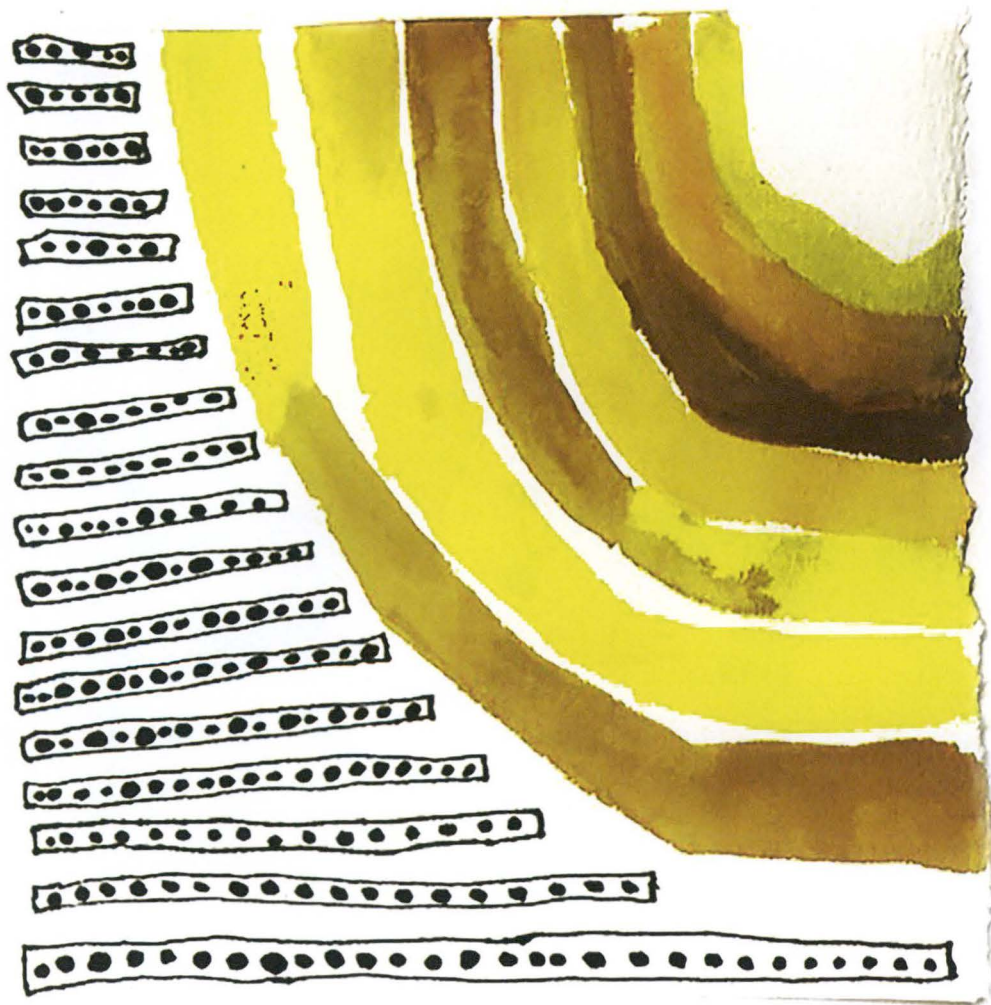
# same dust

Marika Yeo

My work is often created from the premise of *search*, the act of seeking out traces of things left behind while both recreating and celebrating a tension in fluidity and movement. The surfaces are patterned with designs that reference West African and Caribbean prints along with floral patterns from the British Arts and Crafts movement. These patterned forms represent a desire to understand the layers and pieces of history and culture that have had an influence on my background.

As I seek to understand the coming-together of these materials, I also intend to emphasize the ambiguity that is generated by the spaces and cracks left in between. My love of working with clay and layered patterns has allowed me to reflect on the symbolic uses of these materials and to recognize the catharsis that can emerge through the practice of reinscription. As I go through the steps of bringing individual pieces together to form a new whole, I draw upon a different form of language to communicate that which is continually in a process of breaking and re-making.

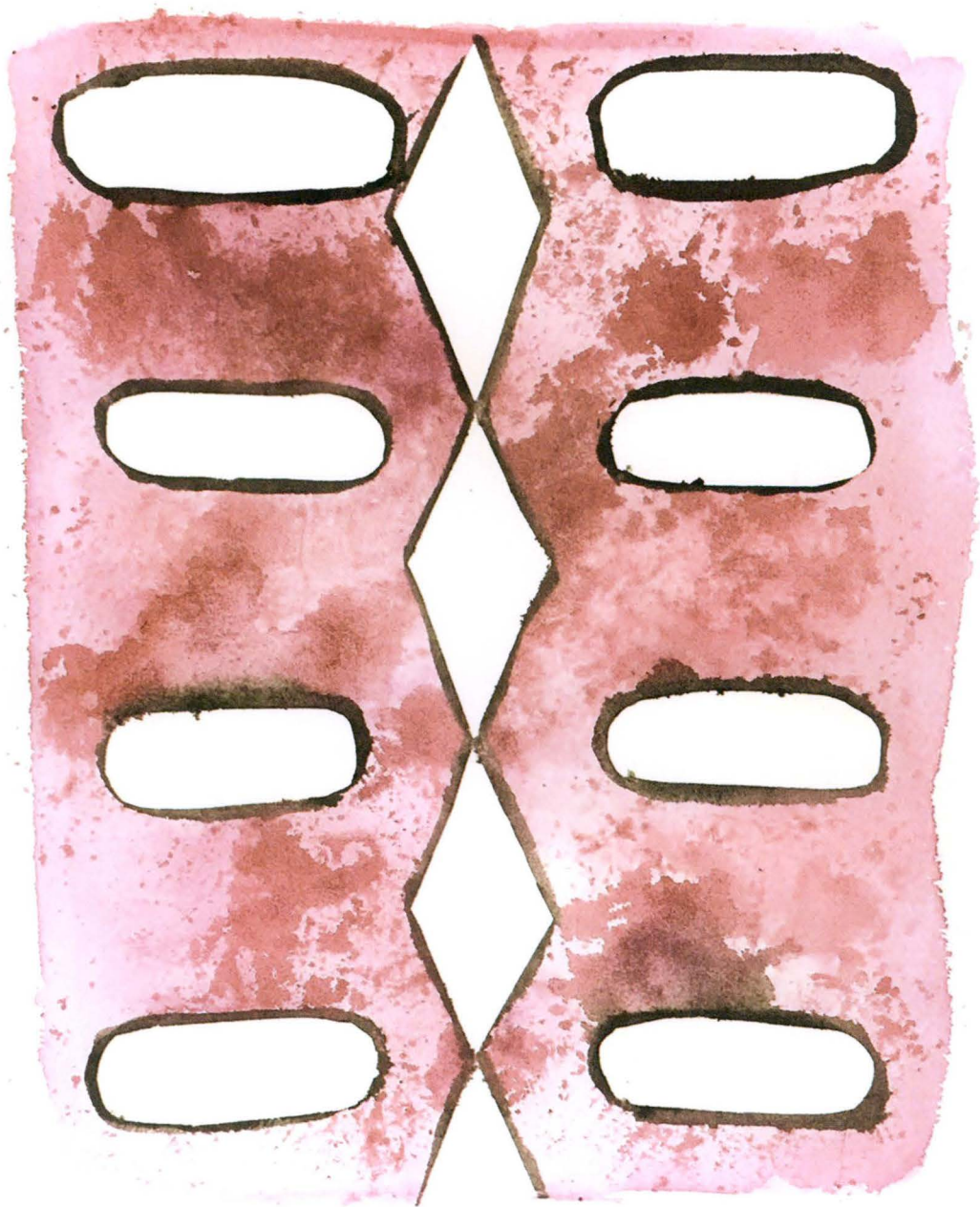




*sweet was the ink*, 2016, gouache and ink on paper, 6 × 6 inches



*and longing bath no dwelling here, 2016, watercolour and ink on paper, 9.5 × 11 inches*



*Red Earth*, 2017, watercolour on paper, 9.5 × 11 inches





*untitled, 2017, gouache on paper and underglazes on ceramic, 9 × 11 inches*



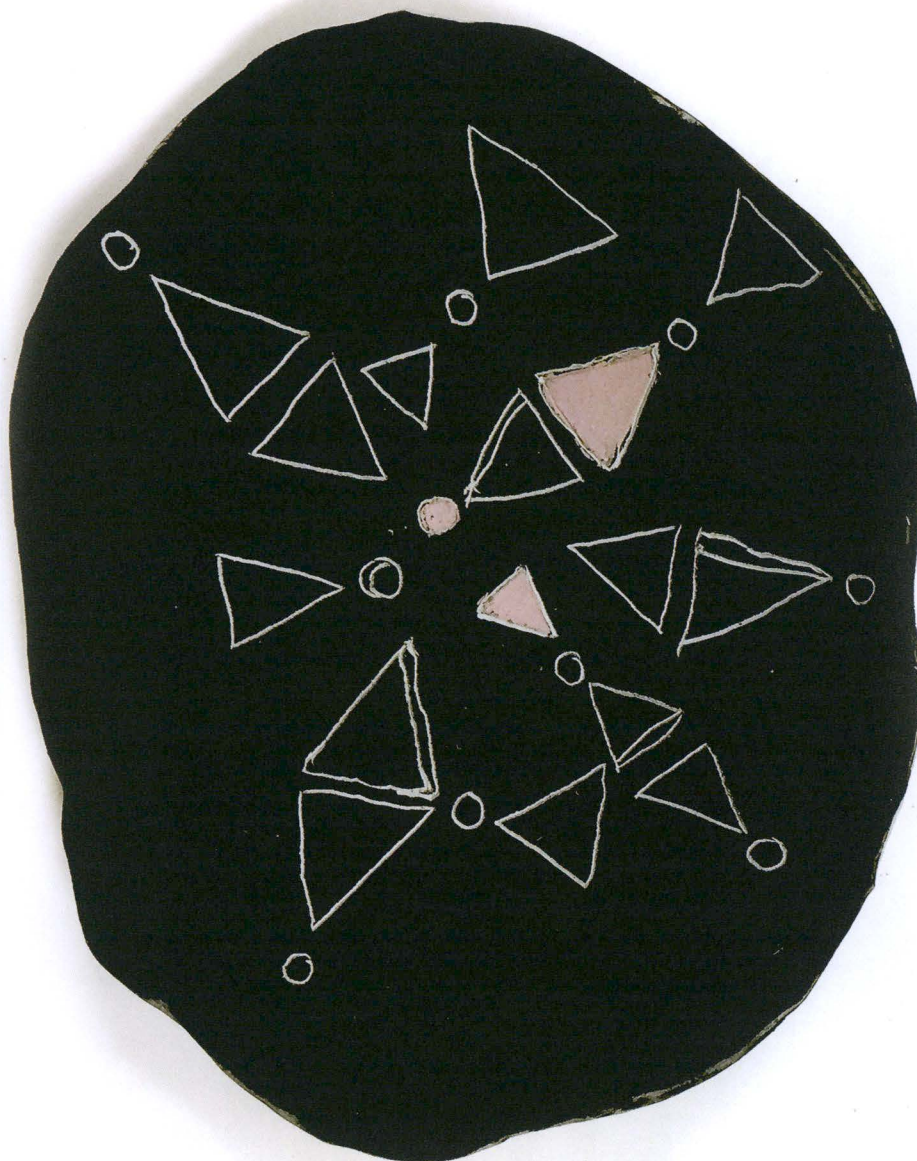
*untitled*, 2017, underglazes on ceramics, 5 × 5 inches



top: *untitled*, 2017, underglazes on ceramic, 6 × 5 inches

bottom: *untitled*, 2017, underglazes on ceramic, 6.7 × 5.5 inches





*Directed*, 2017, underglazes on ceramic, 6.3 × 5.5 inches



left: *Transfer*, 2016, underglazes on ceramic, 7 × 5 inches and 7 × 5 inches



right: *untitled*, 2016, glaze and underglazes on ceramics, 7.5 × 5.5 inches, 7 × 5 inches, and 4.75 × 3.5 inches









*to forget*, 2015, underglazes on porcelain, 12 × 6.5 inches



*then what life have words*, 2015, underglazes on porcelain, 12 × 6.5 inches





*In Conversation*, 2012, glaze, underglaze,  
cold finish, and gold leaf on ceramics,  
8.3 × 7 inches, 8.3 × 7 inches, and 12 × 8.5 inches



# Dark Boat

Canisia Lubrin

"Show yourself," Pap says, "and don't be in no way unclear."

"It's only me. I want to know what you've seen," I said, pushing the red button on the recorder to on, watching the tape make its slow run inside the dark, plastic womb.

Then I hid it all in the universe between Pap's oil lamp and sketchbooks on the mauve side table. When he found the breath to speak, he said, "All I have to give you is fury, anguish, regret, voices, voices, voices." He signals with a whistle that I should come closer. His eyes are smoked grey with cataract; his hands have given up on holding much onto anything.

"Last night I seen children, all of them, faces mature as elderberry, as anything, going up and down guava trees, stuffing guavas, pink and white, deep in their pockets. And I seen fishermen pulling their catch up shore, a single human tangled in they net. I seen light snow, Margaret Thatcher hauling it out from Tiananmen Square."

"Seen anything more today, Pap?" I say.

"None yet. Just don't go to the back of the house," he cautioned, his hands reaching for me but gripping air. "Don't believe the police when they come. Tell them you know not one thing."

"What is in the back of the house?"

"Soldiers. Seven buried there. One under the tree where your navel string is buried."

## §

I look like him but some decades in the past on a day when he might have faced down a wide fear and survived. I'm wrinkled around the eyes as he is on his forehead. Across from him, I sit and wonder at the thirty-five degree mid-afternoon that seems his invitation to wear a yellow flared skirt full of white and red hibiscus, two pairs of underwear, and a black shirt beneath his teal Members Only Jacket, now several sizes too small.

"Listen," he says like every hurt in the world is his, "my strength of mind is all mix up in having a grandson who better do more like a carpenter than a dictionary. Do don't say, you hear me?"

I can only stare at this man who'd once been built like a tenement and who is now bent, disturbed, stormed like a ruined place.

"Do don't say," he says, "now, repeat."

I am near him now. I speak softly into his ear because this close to him, I am swallowed up in my own unease in some half-dusty corner of a misbehaving mind, so I mumble my agreement. Unsatisfied, he makes me lay on my back on the floor with my eyes closed. He says "say 'til you believe." I turn off the tape recorder. The greater sad thing is my vast guilt. I disdain Pap's ownership of these stories he keeps telling me. The ones, at the end of the day, I need to forget when the world has stopped watching. When all the spirits have gone back to their sacred tombs, their sacred towers, their putrid pits.

§

Today he is fixed, studying the meadow outside the window. He hasn't responded to any of my questions or compliments since I arrived. The light at the peak of the hill waits like a congregation of fireflies. Apart from the few cocks pecking, the hill pulses with an unsure wind through the low bush hauling a smell like rotten fish into Pap's bedroom.

By the floor creaking down the hallway towards the bedroom, Pap moves his ears up and down.

"Maid, you walking like bull," Pap shouts and laughs airily.

"Well your bad eyes ain't at all left you dull," she says stopping at the door, taking a moment to breathe, to smile at him. She's old, too old to do this work. Her cheeks pour over her jawline nearly choking her teeth. Her grey hairs gather on her head like thunderclouds. "Now, if you don't mind I'm coming in with a cup of custard and sourdough bread soaking in a bowl of warm milk," she says, stopping to breathe incrementally, smiling with all the quickness this side of the hill.

Pap sits without touching me, puts his hand beneath his pillow and flashes a yellow-stained piece of cardboard with wil brek hip fur fod written in what looks like charcoal, the words spilling onto the edges. When she reaches for the sign she knocks the bowl of milky bread over and into the enamel bedpan next to me where I was still laying on the floor at the foot of Pap's bed. Her face stretches low and long like playdough. She is as penitent as they come as Pap turns to the commotion and frowns. Then he flings the sign behind him and says, "You think to fool me, little woman? You never been clumsy no day in your lifes, no?"

"But I would never dream of it. Say you're my man-with-a-boat—save me, Big Man, you know?" She shakes as she kneels next to his bed to wipe up the accident. And then he tosses himself at her, weeping.

Only momentarily, she grips his shoulders and lets go but stays close; he wipes his face on her shirt. I'm struck by the whole exchange and can't think of an appropriate response so I keep to silence like some plantagenet angel.

He reaches over and clenches my arm and pulls me and I am briefly sad that I was close enough for his hands to reach me. I hate not being able to tell whose scent I'm breathing in. The revulsion in me falls off and on the wall appears a woman. She should have wings wide as an altar—by the look of her blade-thin torso, her luminous eyes, her thread-stitched single-draped red robe—but all she is is flesh, bare gleaming flesh, a scaled head for hair, blood veining around her insides at an impossible speed. Most disturbing is the blood rushing down her legs without dripping to the floor. I see no bone in her. She is a smooth, brown translucence on the surface, like some blessed marble. I blink her out of sight as this three-way hug I didn't bargain for sets the sun for good tonight and I can barely feel my legs lift off the floor. But they do. And I demand to be put back down. The wingless woman steps away from the wall toward us and I let her reach me. She is round with light, her pupils black as a donkey's.

"You're worrying," she says, "I'm just here for how this ends."

Then, she walks around me not through me as I had expected. I watch her closely where she now sits, in the corner next to Pap's sketchbooks, not smiling, not speaking, not blinking, simply watching me as I stay unmoving in the fear of my own end.

## §

The sharp smell of disinfectant gliding through the window shrinks my lungs as Pap introduces me to the maid, again, as the suit and tie.

Before any of this, I had meandered through several noble professions until settling into the académie. Pap has never since failed to remind me that I wasted my life on a PhD. This is one thing he tells everyone in the few languages he was able to learn in his lifetime. The French, the Spanish, the survival Japanese he'd picked up in Nagasaki.

The maid welcomes his repetitions because she's seen the very old man in him stumbling past sentences with the light in his eyes almost out: *the suit and tie el traje y la corbata*. She's been his help since we moved him to this place ten years ago, but he acts every day like he had only just arrived here. His eyes are slits like he's negotiating how to step onto a lampless road at midnight either nearing the end of his life or searching for its half-sacred, half-wrecked beginning. Finally, Pap points to the corner where ten faded green notebooks are stacked next to a picture of grand manman taken on the London Bridge



sixty years ago. I feel light because now no one can say I had dreamed up the non-winged woman. I know this is Pap confronting her in the best Pap way: with a hoarseness lifting the French from his gut as he stays his blindness with a blinkless stare at the woman. *Je suis d'accord avec l'obscurité.* He is still pointing, tremulous with exasperation.

"Carajo," the nurse says, "you must have looked just like the suit and tie when you was a youngster."

I'm overcome. The world is wrong. I cannot speak about the woman who should have wings with the only people who are likely witnesses and choosing not to speak about the woman without the wings for fear of things similar to things I fear. Surely Pap in his blindness knows to feel a thing come down from heaven.

Pap closes his eyes and opens them. Again and again.

"Thinking that can be some kind trouble," he says to the maid. "Thinking that will only hurt because I don't remember what I look like yesterday. When I was young I wanted who the man was in the mirror. I did wanted to give anything to love him."

Pap curls his lips, pulls some long hairs from his nostrils, and when he is done his expression is the same as before. When, I wonder, did his nose go numb? Maybe it is true that consciousness knows when to abandon one sense for another. He's sitting upright now, clasping his hands, nodding as if to someone who's got important things to say.

"I'll get more of that spilled food," the maid says, "why don't you take off that jacket?" Pap lets her help but then holds his arm, bent halfway out like a wing until he stops her for good. Now I'm sure I'm the only one who's seen the-good-woman-with-no-wings.

"Some days I don't know where here anymore, you know? What time is the milkman coming?" Pap says.

"The milkman doesn't come anymore," I say, keeping my eyes on the woman, "hasn't for a few decades, Pap."

"You're a library full of things people will need forget," he says.

"What about you tell me something from your life, then, your childhood?" I say. "What would you want to remember?"

"See," he says to the maid, "he like asking questions in two part. Me and him, both."

I nod to her to suggest she is excused. She leaves as though her exit were rooted in a madness, one of those unreasonable looks furrowing her brows. There was something in her eyes that was foretelling, a future—maybe a

sooner battle—waiting for me, but whatever hint of something I should have understood by now pulled away from me, still tethered to her and I do not care to follow. For a moment I begin to doubt my own memories, myself in an awful silence, too visible to my faults.

“Okay, so I’ll start,” I say. “When I was a child my father and his father took me fishing and as we came to a beach at Anse Cochon, we saw rabbits—fifteen, maybe—and their does dashing into the mangrove and my father was convinced that they had been set off by some colonial mania and decided that we should rescue them. But my grandfather, no more than fifty at the time, was a suspicious man, if at his best, only surreptitious about signs. He said that what we were witnessing was a kind of rage, the rabbit kind, and it wasn’t contagious, that it was only people who went mad while the rest of the animals went on as they should. Then he ran ahead of us yelling the foot of the stoop the foot of the stoop.”

I stop and look at him, hoping the story could conjure a drop of familiarity.

“Who you talking to? You afraid?” Pap asks.

“I am,” I begin, and become mute at the sudden disappearance of the woman who looks like she had lost her wings. I ask Pap what he remembers about rabbits or the foot of the stoop but he is not with me anymore. He is looking through the wall, silent and chewing on air as his dentures drum for want of anything to bite. I wait, knowing that some things are slow-coming like suns after the big bang, like a hard ghost in a see-through town.

## §

By the skin of his forehead pulling up he looks as though he’s suddenly resumed consciousness.

But do I ask what the surprise is? I do not ask.

He stares like most fading people do proudly baring teeth and anguish. He gets up and walks.

“I remember pulling you out of the mud. You were sinking well fast,” he says, “and I had tell you that you done fell into that mangrove because of that time you exchange all the—”

“—rhymes in ‘Jingle Bells’ for dirty words. Yes!” I say. Though I should know better, my heart was doing the Macarena.

“Well, son, you listen good. On the day you find yourself smoking cigars with padnas,” Pap says, getting up and slapping his knee, “remember that close behind it you close-close to singing ‘Adios Amigos.’ Is one thing to be

out there, but in here”—he taps on his temple—“in here all restaurants, big hotels, fancy boardwalks kissing this sea shining black-black with nighttime, virgin beach after virgin bitch, museums the world done put up there—all full of people you know all fighting like hells for happinesses—and you?—mad as that atomic blast, got your eyes on them all wishing that the scene wasn’t blocking in endless fogs.”

It takes me a minute to realize he is waiting for me to say something. It is too hot and too late to have anything to say.

§

Of course not all our visits went that way. Last week he wanted to go for a walk and on that walk I took him up to Masqué Hill to show me where he felt the first pull of his hand towards paint and its dealings. “This where I draw *Man and the Baby*,” he said. “That painting done bring me your grand manman. Now, wait, before you fling your hand up like that crazy Austrian, it done give me to your grand manman too. I was looking out at that pasture and the sun was just coming up. There was big man slapping his sheep in the clearing and as he do that, you know, a mist-up come thick-thick by the fresh sunlight. Then every sheep and big man himself dissolve in the mist.” Pap stopped talking.

“Will you go on?” I ask.

“On?”

“With the story about *Man and the Baby*.”

“Hm,” he said, breaking phlegm in his throat. “Well, I had a small notebook in my pocket, you know, a gentleman always carry some paper on him—you don’t want any seed of badness to find you without a way to remember yourself of the lesson. So, anyway, in that little book I sketch *Blackman and Baby*, I call it then. It was dark that day, but the darkness was soft, a rainstorm kind of day. Like my darkness. And then I went and painted it and put it on your grand manman doorstep with a note about going for food and ice tea and long walk. I find a boldness, you see? It fling me over the six-months of footsie I was been stick in about her. God, she was a beauty and a goodness you never think earth deserve. And that painting is why you here, son. Don’t believe the people who tell you that only music make people. Painting, that’s the river that bring your father into the world,” he said.

“*Blackman and the Baby*, which one is that?” I joked.

He looked insulted but permitted me some ignobility.



Back in his room, we are eating rice pudding scented with star anise.

"By the way," Pap said, "is me as a young man hitchhiking on the coast, wearing a two-toned—brown and beige—fedora, a black trench coat, croc-skin shoe, carrying a naked crying baby on my shoulder. The whole scene is scratched in, as though a cat had did it, you see?" Hearing him describe the painting brought on such a daydream that I stumbled into his notebooks. I laughed about how the books felt like thorn bushes.

"It is coming, sonny boy," he said, laughing as though he'd understood something severe.

"Oh, nothing's coming, grand papa," I said. This felt like a moment to be defensive.

"Well, you just wait. First you stumble into bushes. Then you stumble into diapers."

"I am telling you this is different. I was—"

"—different how?" Pap asked stiffly.

"Different in that...well," I said, "I was sucked in your world just now. That's all."

"Exact. And lose sight of yours."

I stood there withholding the weight of something that, I bet, had us both thinking: here's something true and strange between us lacking a name, and we turned around at the same time and looked back at each other.

"Is alright," he said, "most people does like you. They afraid they gone catch it from me. Or that something bad will happen."

In truth, that was it. I was that intractable man, weary of being touched, of remembering too little. Conscious of being tough and afraid of living long enough to lose my mind someday.

## §

It never happens when you're thinking about it. Like those people who expect you to know something just because a horde of people in their own world know it. They'll throw that thing about, no problem. Like Dostoevsky.

Only a decade ago, we are sitting on the bench outside Pap's old greenhouse. There's some gurgling coming from near the stone oven on the right flank of the pea lot. On the far side of the driveway to our left, his neighbour is watering the garden: frangipani, pink and white oleanders, spearmint, eggplant. I describe his neighbour as having the appearance of a character in a Dostoevsky novel. "Okay, so you know Dostoevsky and a million other people know Dostoevsky. But do I know Dostoevsky? I do not know Dostoevsky," he offers.

"Dejected, miserable looking is all," I say, remembering that on my fifteenth

birthday he gave me a signed copy of *Poor Folk* saying seamstresses make the world go round. Soon he'd begin to funnel about the near-sterile hallway between his bedroom and the living room searching for something big and important where there is only carpet. Six weeks later, he'd detour a diagnosis of early-onset Alzheimer's to only six years later start losing his vision and blame even that on his muddling mind.

§

On Friday, as I was leaving, he called to me. I laid my satchel in the hallway next to his door.

"How come you don't have your tape recorder today?"

"Switched bags and left it in the other."

"Well I have story for you today. Here," he said, handing me one of the notebooks in the corner. I flipped through the first ten pages. Early sketches of some of his finest watercolour paintings. He must have read hesitation into my silence and the slowly turning pages.

"Flip all the way to back. Is all stick in here so I don't need working eyes." He bounced his index on his temple and before I could protest, he continued:

2011. I in Nagasaki. I had just got off the phone with your father when the ground beneath me, still, just a moment before, started doing things that a ground in an upright world should never do. It shake then stop then bob and shake and stop. Four times in all. I had a conversation with the mayor of Tokyo the day before and wanted your father to know all about it. He had tell me in his best trivia voices that the Pacific Plate under Japan do hits the mainland at 8.9 centimeters every year. The San Andreas Fault so slips below California at a quarter that speed. And there I find myself witnessing the everything of a seismic trivias. The only thing that gone through my mind at that moment was the world is tips, the world is tipping. Little boy, do you suppose the mind, as it age, finding restlessness more easy because it change the speed at which it moves the body?

He stopped as though he needed some time to reflect. The last sketch in the book has a title that makes me kneel: "To Remember Everything is a Sudden Wash of the Tides."

He continues: It was over and I was sure of be safe because holding on to the feel of too much danger is a quick way to kill the spirit. So later that day it start again. That house moving like a snake, screams from a little girl outside that I

try to get to, bamboo blinds spilling on the floor, the nonstop begging of the tsunami alarm: move up don't look down don't look down. I rather remember being brave more much else. Like fishing on the edge of a big waterfall. But it could be the Christ coming again and I will still run away now.

If none of this was bravery, I thought listening to Pap, then all of it was madness.

I rotated my wrists and shoulders, slid the pen into my shirt pocket, and held the notebook between my arm and torso as I sat wishing I didn't have to wait another four weeks to see Pap again.

§

"The shack on the shore have a roof made of huge teeth. Brahman is roasting things: lobsters, oysters. The kind of things that leave you feeling brave," Pap says.

"Anything else?"

"What we up to besides catching some breeze?"

"Who is we?"

"I with your father. I with you and your father. I with your grand manman and I with you and your father but we all terrible small."

"Look, there," Pap said, pointing. "Dolphins racing like epileptics in a culvert under bridge. Guatemala."

"Why do you think they're there?" I ask, knowing little of how to respond this time.

"I suppose they just happy. You gone be happy if you never been in drought a day in your life."

§

Another day for wearing his Members Only Jacket.

He shakes soft crumbs off its sleeve, folds his arms and the jacket pulls up showing a penis you did not want to see. Apart from that, you look at him and understand that a person does not need functioning eyes to see through you. This is when I figured it out. Why did it take me this long? Psychiatry can be too close, too loud to make any sense.

I say, "I'm going to tell you about a man named Charles Bonnet."

"He better be worth the few seconds I has left," Pap says.

I told him. I told him hallucinations mostly to do with diminutives and cartoons and things with outrageous teeth and bright colours...



"I stop you right there," he says, "I not gone like him taking my little minutes."

"Very well," I say as darkness creeps in through Pap's window and the woman who'd had her wings stolen appears again, sitting on his windowsill, this time, a shadow of wings spread out large along the wall watered down by the light of a full moon. She does not smile. She does not speak but rests her wingless shoulders against Pap's headboard and puts her hand on Pap's head. Here he chews on nothing and keeps his head dead-leveled with mine.

"Then get outta here," he says, "tell everyone I'm not crazy."

§

Sometimes, when I think someone is with me, I want to run as fast as I can from certainty. Right now, my eyes burn so I reach up to rub them. My hands reach no further than a few centimeters. 8.9 maybe. I open my eyes and the orange-red of an intense sunset fades in dots, white noise and then whiteout. I startle thinking it is the woman in her last, terrible glory coming to tell me her news once and for all. But when my eyes adjust to the light, there's *Blackman and the Baby* sketched like a mural on my wall. Voices rise and fall. The hallway is lit, shadows stretch through a pleating doorway. A grey tray hovers above me. I appear unable to move, to bring my hand up to shield my face, to bring my feet up in self-defense. Some talk of fallouts from people dressed in white. A miniature maze of white dots fall into my mouth but everything from here on out is dim. Someone is holding my head tilted back, my chin slightly upward. Charles Bonnet, I murmur, Charles Bonnet, Charles Bonnet. Water. They've poured water into my mouth. I try not to swallow the maze but the slow drag of mucous down my throat tells me I've failed. The woman hovers above me. I need to breathe. I call out for Pap and the maid. No voice comes back to aid me in my anguish. Is just me in this dark boat. Only me, just I.

The lights go off, a soft spark stays close to the floor. Shadows disappear through the slit beneath the doorway. The world rumbles and turns, mute before a buzz. I am being cradled by a force I cannot see. It is cold. It is damp. I smell marble, wet grass.

"Show yourself," I say, "and don't be in no way unclear."

# Keep Breathing

David Bradford

Caught            a gash of them  
the flow strewn    the body  
of water licked over  
the strong hand    pulsed onward  
away from a hold of them

That real people have died  
this way in the current  
Thrown there offloaded  
cud

to the immanent passage  
More, Thomas      Prime, John  
the old ocean      old tongues

held nowhere inside me  
I can reach  
without a knife

## Grasping at Straws

## Walk and Talk

Little miracle but

that much more    concise is  
my ass    atop lowtop sneakers

This all I've got  
is my human look    to be  
known by too little    too much  
          thought to handhold a gaze

my commuter legs    up  
          to my voice box in meaning  
          to be    looked at  
while my mouth is open

What can be done of watching  
          for being watched is  
          I worry    about all of it

and lose things

This autotelic hind of me  
gone easy    those few years  
          I walked a camera instead  
          before I found it again  
          a poem

          I don't deserved

*Softshoeing across marble*

          cooling perfect sale fruit  
                          cobbler



Where did I take that?

All day off on missing parts  
not getting shortlisted

hungry for ice cream

*These fucking kids*

doing my back exercises

*are killing* No one

*What was the* Nowhere?

*Can I* Shut up

*I just* Up

# The Last Breath

after Sonia Sanchez

Given not so much  
an artefact A debris  
kind of field

Given the moaning  
come out ain't ever  
the problem

Given you get as far  
as the ceiling You sit  
long and hard enough

it move your big teeth  
out your work arm  
off your throat

out the give you cut  
thru your good people  
Your buck mouth

it shush yourself  
Give light a mirror  
out your bloat chest

kissed so clean up out  
the room wings so shed  
of your bullshit

it give in the sweetest  
you ever been on a bearing  
Claps in Fuck Your Mess

Up a hot mass  
out your head  
It keep you breathing  
and you keep breathing  
the end

# from *Sonnet's Shakespeare*

## Sonnet L'Abbé

CXI

Hot-formed lady shake she donkey. Sweet brown sugar twist she behind. What for a tune, chile, if not dancin? The Mighty Sparrow he mek yuh wine. Little gyal goddess done teef men's eye. She got a roomful dem peepin she backside. Hot heat spreadin down onto she belly. Wet heat from her form mek a boy loose tie. Female form provide the action. In public, sweetmen answer she smile. Child, public manners don't mek batie less round. Female body drive the dance hall wild. How come yuh sittin when yuh batie so poom-poom? Yuh nice amerindian friend gone come. She give Sam Baksh reason to dance. Dhaalpuri, samosa and a bottle of rum. She dance to Mighty Enchanter "Dulari-Beti." She swing to Aubrey Cummings' lead guitar. She dance to Colin Wharton; she work The Saints. She like the dum dum duddy of the Telstars. Shanto song body the spirit uh Guyana. Mek the Indian tap and white British mind. We no more under England rule of law. Down yuh colonialism! Rattle yuh behind! Like a kwe-kwe is dance hall be jumping. Partiers plenty high wine will drink. Portions of chow mein, souse and dumpling. Latrins' steam counksy, rass strong stink. King Fighter, he bounce up wit Lilian. Roaring Lion mek sly observation. Better nah marry pretty-ass one. That girl will mek fuh bitter union. Thick dunk woman devour double an pepper. She dingolay; she dance calypso an roll. If yuh not erect, best expect correction! Pity men think she under bai control. Gyal friend, bacchanal does be bouncing yuh backside. Tsk, yuh tek your eye and pass me? River Corentyne heart, your serpentine twine. Yuh is enough to cuss—remember who yuh rass be!



I'm staring at Shakespeare's poem. Blocked. Carnage because Black was not counted fairly. Torn into faithless weather because literature assured Black bodies bore no right to beauty's name, because until now is Black's traumatology streaming in successive waves. Those critics never unpack the intestinal *douleur* of one's own beauty slandered with a bastard shame. Informed since I could read by the monarchy's hand on the throat of English, I've put on an enunciative face, trusting the figure of speech's power to fair the ink of English thinking. The foreign anguish, language! With art's facelessness I borrowed legit face; with my sweet syntax, a beauty that they couldn't disown. Shame on who? Shame on who? I'm literally bowed over the keyboard of my computer. Sometimes you see yourself profaned. Sometimes you're profaned—nothing unusual—by the archives you're working in. Why feel disgraced in two thousand seventeen? *Le professeur francophone que j'ai rencontré* on Bumble blanks at my imaginary stresses: okay, your poems are about race, but we don't have to think in black and white over dinner, do we? Somebody doesn't. This situation suits some bodies just fine, and they will date me, if I don't bring work home. I'm churning through Shakespeare's sonnet, contemplating easier occupations. My children, who were not born into fairness, who no beauty ever lacked, who never happened at all, read this grudging creation over my shoulder. They are with me always, as I fail at ease. They don't exist, as I cleave to my poetry like a significant other who never asks anything of me, who isn't hurt by my inability to lighten up. Nothing's coming, just a gust of weather, a failure to work through a sonnet's hatred. Slavery's tongue is in my head, kissing me, saying smile, smile, beauty shouldn't look so hard.

To me, you were a freaky, fairskinned father figure of song. Uncensored lyricist, your naked verse caressed my unnubile, ten-year-old, deflowerable ecstasy. How young we were when first we heard of your eye caught by Nikki masturbating in a hotel lobby. Aphrodisical purple synth chords, electronic hymns to funk, your androgynous beauty lashed titillating, throaty sex at nuclear winters' and cold wars' threat. A little red Corvette drove me from the conformist interests of schoolbooks into the Revolution's love manifesto. I hummed verses of Purple Rain as I developed breasts. The mixed-race, liquid-gender vibe, the auteur-pompous sparkles and rings topped charts. Funky fellow, pre-autotune imp spinning turntable gold, you inspired sensuous excess. Pop rock father, sugar daddy, my innocence was lost to the sounds of Head and doves crying. I seduced a girl in the recreation room of her parents' split-level: bubblegum perfumes, pink skin, thrilling tongues—soft, wet, hot juvenilia. Madonna's crosses burned; her sinfulness commoditized was our first fetish; meanwhile your fresh mouth was horrifying rich-mommy-and-senatorial-ball-buster Tipper Gore. Parental advisories hadn't yet happened; your "filth" was labelled vulgar by purity police; kids learned to dig albums authorities branded explicit. Stealing from Little Richard, Curtis Mayfield, Marvin Gaye, Chuck Berry, Elvis, James Brown, Stevie Wonder and Bowie, at a pace hyper would call hyperactive, you dropped so many tracks your label sweated. The unprounceable symbol which became your thing (on your cheek, "SLAVE") frustrated music journalists lacking adequate font for the-artist-formerly-known-as. A soundless glyph as the artist's name was contractual insurrection. Masculined feminine, eyelined manly babe, decimating categories of groove, defy mortality! Hush our fears of life-without-Prince. Shh, fears of this opioid-strutted age. The Purple One vibrated at a mauver level. Pleasures of you were born while he was. His bedroom, a butterfly sanctuary. Man, a sexy motherfucker's dead.

The Boulevard Club must have stifled a shudder when my mom rang to inquire about memberships. Young Guyanese newcomer hadn't thought about how courts are segregated by those whose bequeathed equities proudly make them "exclusive." At Crawford and Queen, the public hard-surface courts at lowly Trinity Bellwoods didn't wear only whites; her groundstroke forehand powered straight to my dear dad's doting heart. Meanwhile, apartheid South Africa was inviting only the fairest and most PR-friendly competitors to its tournaments. A jewel of Wirraayjurraay, they'd let in. To Evonne Goolagong they promised fair treatment, though some say that she shouldn't have agreed to be an honorary white while they denied Arthur Ashe. You faced shame-drills at the corner of Compton and Atlantic, your father testing the power of shame to make you lose your cognitive edge. Like Tiger Woods, you ascended into aristocracy's recreational spheres, where country clubbers game. Rankine's already written a Serena who dares to be so bold as to call out negrophobic umps, while a rival's right to blonde privilege she'll shrewdly let pass. Mine is the Redditor-marrying Serena, living the fantasy more blondes understand. Trophy babe. Signature fashionista hanging with Wintour. Snotty, false friends must swear a thousand allegiances to you, crowned earner. Supermom-to-be, your attractiveness to the sponsorship industry is smoking hot. Companies with your face on their storytelling brand themselves mother-of-all-stamina, conqueress-while-Black. I'm driven to witness: I want to bear the way you do, trusting my Black performance will be assessed fair, that this best linesmanship will meet literary judgment in its place. I want nothing to do with art's false modesty. I want to hold court where Black won't save me. I want the physicality of my deeds, the demand of the excellence. Without a brown girl's desire to play tennis, I wouldn't be here, so manifest of what I think, my game proceeds.



& poor

Caleb Femi

## Two Bodies Caught In One Cell

A light crawls through the window and folds in on itself  
to kneel beside a boy praying in a South London police cell.  
Of these two bodies, one was there at the Beginning  
which goes without saying that one of these bodies is the first  
of God's children and since we are all God's children  
the two bodies sit as siblings would inside a cell  
where no way is up and no side is the right side  
and the cell expands as all extraterrestrial things do beyond  
the capacity of the walls.

Walls cannot exist without justice  
and the needle that points to justice is magnetized  
by what we are able to sleep with. Do we not know sleep  
by night? The third body that is always there  
until the body of light shoos it away  
like a shunned sibling, a Cain  
found beside the light body of Abel  
waiting in a cell, praying.

## Coping

Dark skin boys scare everything in the dark  
though really  
we're just trying to scare away the dark.

Round here this is how we greet each other:  
*what's good, my g?*  
as if to say, *are you safe, my g?*

Isn't this how you would call out to your friends  
if you too were in a dark place,  
standing on the edge of a ledge?

Shoutout to us boys who play out here,  
God knows how we do it.  
Maybe God doesn't know,

maybe an estate, tall as it is,  
is the half-buried femur of a dead god  
and the blue light of dawn

his son in mourning, looking  
on the things we do  
when there is one less boy amongst us.

How we pour the holy spirit out of the bottle  
onto the concrete where his ashes lie,  
stir it into a clay, mould it into a new body

and like a kite in fading wind,  
watch his soul return back to good earth  
settling into his body like he never left.

Isn't this what you would do for your friends  
if you too were in a dark place,  
standing on the edge of a ledge?

## Boys In Hoodies

The inside of a hoodie is a veiled nook where a boy pours himself into a single drop of rain to feed a forest. Each tree grateful for the wet boy, unaware that the outside world sees this boy as a chainsaw.

Have you heard the canned laughter of a chainsaw? Don't listen for it in forests, amid the ankles of trees, or the tongue of dried leaf.

Listen in the vibration of pavements when the concrete is wax,  
outside of a Morley's where one chainsaw says to the other  
*'member that time when*

*and the money was in his socks.*

Then a rip of laughter erupts like the chugger of iron

or heavy rain

and nearby trees brace for death or life.



You are 4 minutes from home  
 when you are cornered by an officer  
 who will tell you of a robbery  
 that took place 40 minutes ago in the area  
 and you fit the description of a man—you laugh  
 13, you tell him, you're 13.

You blink and are petted on the shoulder  
 by another officer whose face will take you  
 back to Gloucester Primary School,  
 a Wednesday assembly about *being little stars*.

This same officer that had an horizon  
 in the east of his smile when he told  
 your class that you were all *supernovas*:  
*the biggest and brightest stars*.

You will show the warmth of your teeth  
 praying he remembers the heat of your supernova  
 but he will see only the dark side of your moon.  
 You will watch the two men cast lots for your organs.

*Don't you remember me?* you will ask.  
*You gave a talk at my primary school.*  
 Whilst fear condenses on your lips,  
 you will learn that supernovas are in fact dying stars  
 on the verge of becoming black holes.

## East Dulwich Road

When a knife enters you, there will be no pain.  
People on the street & on buses will stare  
as if witnessing a natural phenomenon.  
They will imagine the pain they think you are in  
but you will feel none at all.

You will question if you have always been  
an empty cove waiting to be filled by another boy's rage.  
Whether this is how mutation works, after many generations  
your black body now comfortably accepts the blade  
like an inheritance—a birthmark on your obsidian torso.

## Concrete

is the lining of the womb  
that holds boys to their mothers.  
When Edwin took a blade to the gut  
bled out like a stream running back to its brook  
concrete held him soft as a meadow would a lamb  
that his death looked like a birthing.

We who did not know how to weep  
raged into the night like the ambulance  
that came to lift the empty body  
(his mother asked for the sirens to be turned off  
lest it disturb her now resting boy).

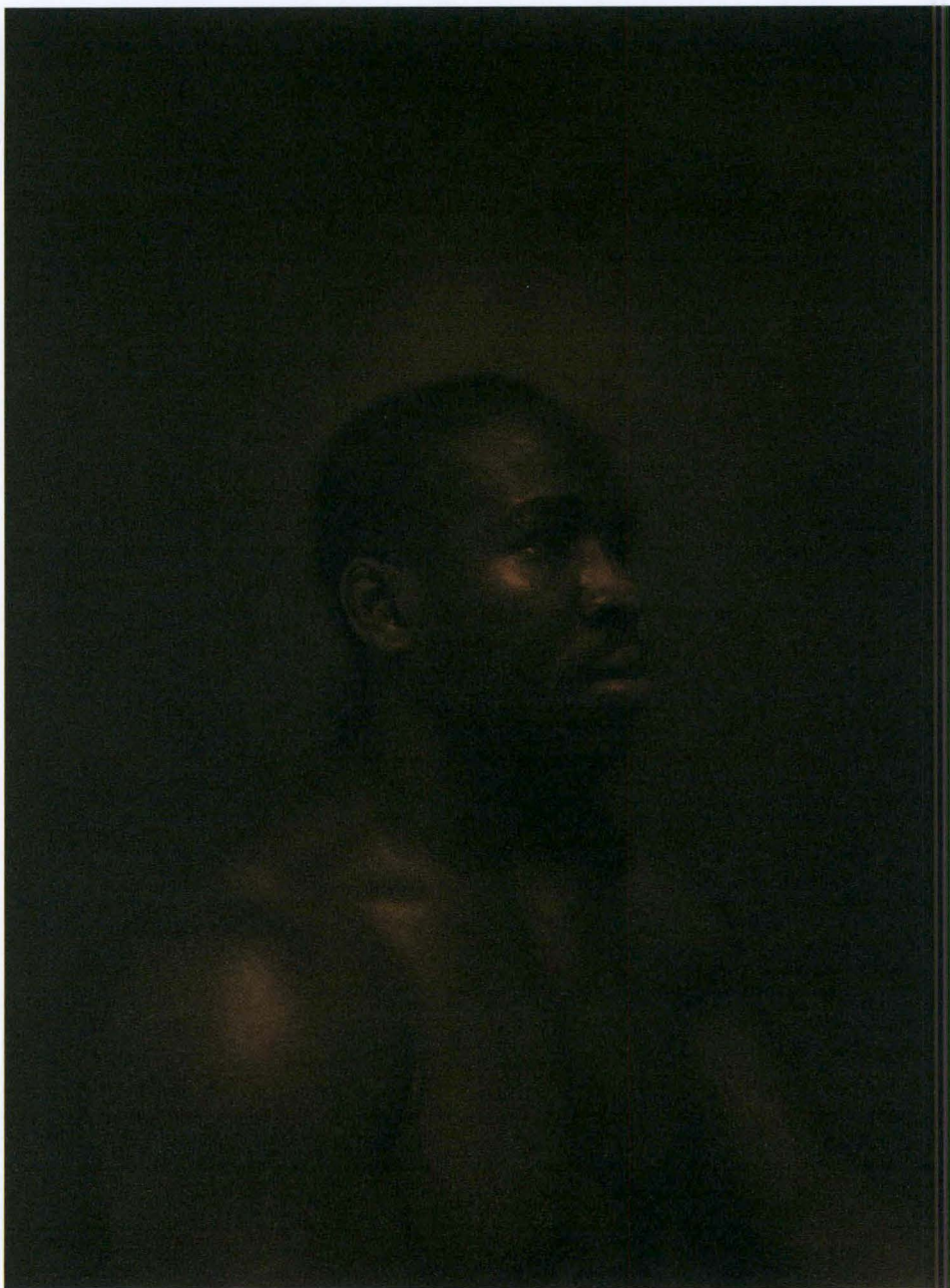
That night we went to chew on the pitchfork of war  
so that our grief, as if it were a rotting tooth,  
may be plucked out.



Caleb Femi, *No Face No Case*, 2017, jpg, 10 × 8 inches







Caleb Femi, *Light*, 2016, jpg, 6 × 6 inches

# MOONLIGHT / SUNRISE

Joy Gyamfi

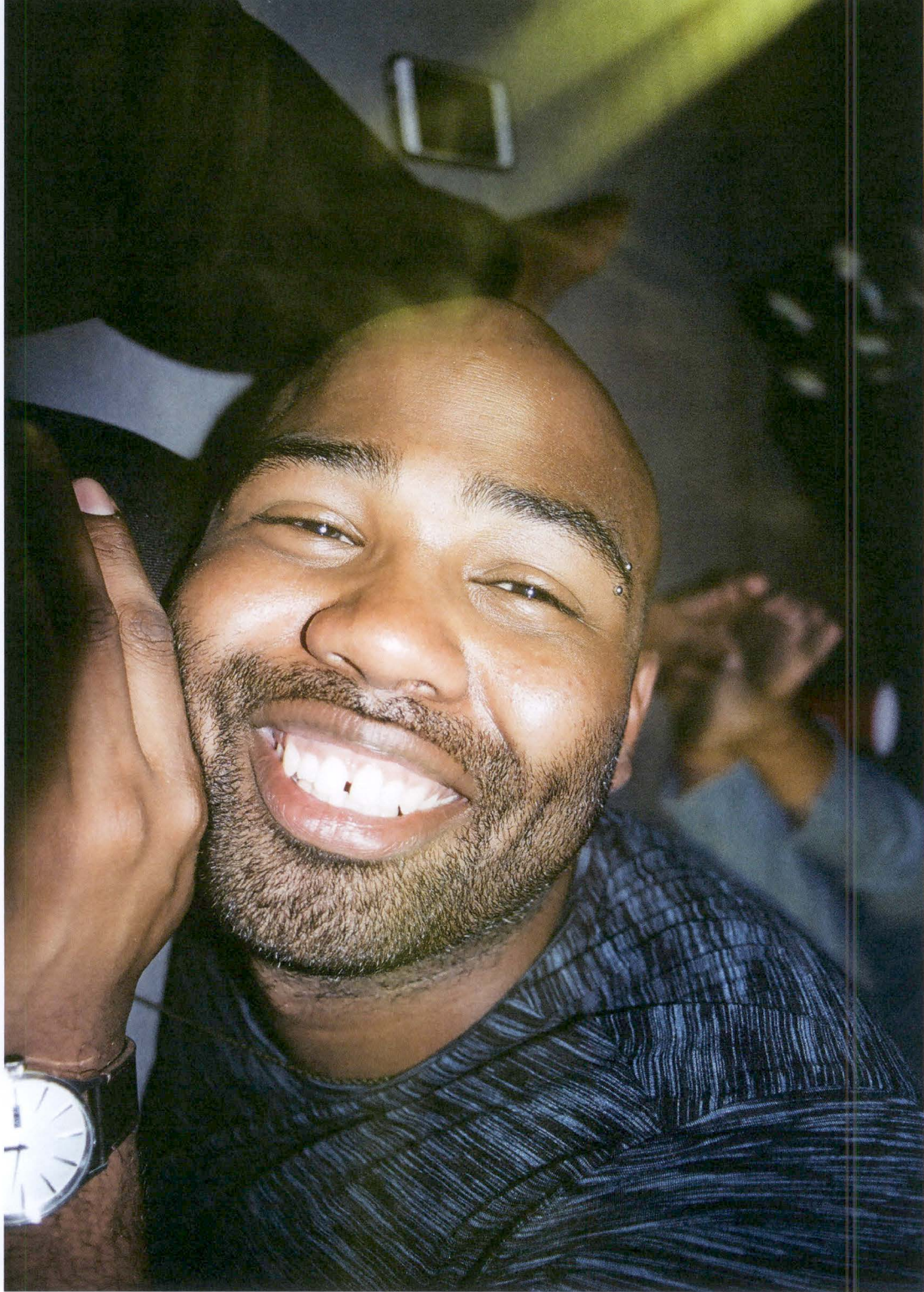
I.

I dream about black boys.  
I dream about black bodies in the middle of winter;  
black bodies in the middle of the road,  
surrounded by broken twigs, melting in the snow  
until  
someone's mother asks  
where is my son and what the fuck have you done to him?  
I see her quiet rage in the tremble of fingertips.  
I sense her sorrow in the way that she hangs her head,  
face towards the ground  
as if she could see  
his last steps before death.  
I dream while mother moon glows softly in the sky.  
Beneath bruises, between broken bones,  
black boys  
bleed blue.

II.

I hear black boy joy in the screams of a distant summer.  
Black boys scream in the middle of summer.  
Sun smiling golden over cracked pavement  
and deep skin;  
they are still learning how to love themselves.  
It's okay to be soft,  
I whisper.  
Black boys flutter, scattering ashes in the wind.  
Waves are just gallons of ocean water dragged by the moon.  
I see a black body in the middle of blue.





Joy Gyamfi, *Ivan*, 2017, film photography, 10 × 15cm



# Film Photography

Joy Gyamfi



Joy Gyamfi, *Cicely*, 2016, film photography, 10 × 15cm



Joy Gyamfi, *Elydah & Jebet*, 2017, film photography, 10 × 15cm





Joy Gyamfi, *Divya*, 2017, film photography, 10 × 15cm

# from *Coming to Love*

Emmanuelle Andrews & Pedro Daher

Using the lyrical merging of spoken word and literature, the 9-minute film *Coming to Love* expresses black self-love through personal reflexivity and the creation of moving paintings. Shot in various locations in Vancouver in the spring of 2017, the featured women hail from across the globe and do not represent a homogenised vision of “black women.” *Coming to Love* aims instead to give black women the ability to be banal, exploring how they come to love themselves in a world that tells them they’re not good enough, how they work towards self-preservation and self-determination, and how they negotiate their subjectivity, their womanhood, their being, their identity, and their pride.



Emmanuelle Andrews and Pedro Daher, *i move with the beat of a rhythm*, 2017, film





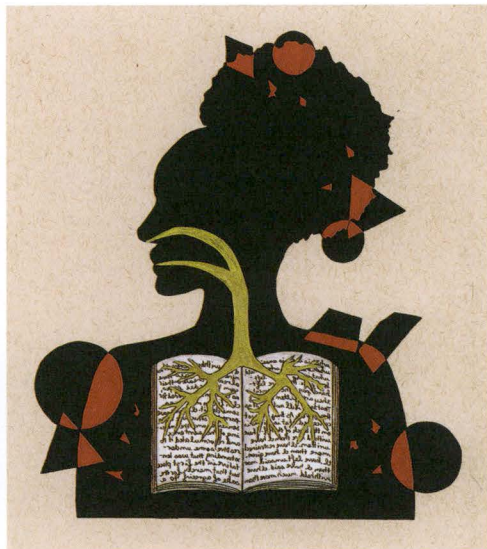
Emmanuelle Andrews and Pedro Daher, *i have strong arms that hold*, 2017, film



Emmanuelle Andrews and Pedro Daher, *i want to nourish*, 2017, film

# Aspirations

Lucia Lorenzi &amp; Julianne Okot Bitek



we work in spaces      apart  
on definitions   on being   recognition  
   recognized  
& here it is only here   in sight   us  
   in our own arms  
breath into form   us in space where we  
   ask  
   how are we  
what are we when we're out of sight  
   from  
   ourselves  
   do we be  
   can we be  
recognized recognition happens when  
   we  
are us in these spaces   us in this wake  
   over there   over elsewhere  
   how do we be

tell us about the day when Dionne Brand & Christina Sharpe came  
to  
town                  both of us scholars    both Black    women

both of us scholars   both Black   women  
 we think about sexual violence & the woman  
 Black body & the girl Black body & power &  
 patriarchy & the skein on our skin both of us   tell us a story   they  
 living black bodies & like these unceded lands   ask us  
 mostly   tell us about the  
 feeling invisible   mostly   day when Dionne  
    Brand & Christina  
    Sharpe came to  
 feeling mostly   town  
 feeling cold   even on this gift of a day   it's  
 warm & the sky above the clouds are blue  
 but it's cold until we see until we're skin kin  
 together



we meet at segal building one of  
 vancouver's heritage buildings once a  
 bank & now described as a remarkable  
 tell us a story of old-world architecture & new-age  
 they ask us  
 tell us about technology  
 the day when  
 the evening of june 9th an auspicious day for  
 Dionne Brand  
 & Christina my father would have been 84 had  
 Sharpe came to this is where we speak to each other  
 town he lived  
 it's a gift of a day warm not raining  
 where we see each other where we  
 the twitter post from Christina a photo  
 note the disjuncture from the  
 obviously taken from above the clouds the  
 performance spaces where we live in this  
 immediacy of social media leads me to  
 where each comes representing but  
 we're read as a foreign other & yet we  
 believe this is a message that she's landing in  
 Dionne & Christina Sharpe & Brand over us like  
 wear our skin dark on land that has  
 vancouver today  
 baptismal water; historicized us as absent and defines us  
 i can barely hold myself together i'm as  
 talk about that they say  
 excited as a girl i get to the grand doors and  
 invisible  
 someone asks if this is the place where yes  
 Lucia asks how  
 it is we walk into a grand hall into ghosts  
 to be inside an  
 that may not show & memories like  
 archive that is  
 impositions from the past  
 full of pain &  
 living as we do in the wake of slavery in spaces  
 violence seek  
 joy where we were never meant to survive or have  
 Dionne  
 been punished for surviving and for daring to  
 says remember  
 make claim or make spaces of something like  
 the detail of the  
 freedom. we yet reimagine & transform spaces  
 red ribbon in  
 for & practices of an ethics of care as in repair  
 the description  
 maintenance attention an ethics of seeing & of  
 of the runaway  
 being in the wake as consciousness as a way of  
 slave seek joy  
 remembering & observance that started with the  
 door of no return *in the wake* 130-131

aspiration is the word  
 that i arrived at  
 for keeping & putting  
 breath in the Black  
 body

*in the wake*  
*on Blackness & being*  
 130

the clerk lives in time like this several &  
simultaneous the author lives in place & not in  
time weighted in place i am always aware  
of myself in place there is no universal me i  
this is where we speak to each other this is where we speak to each other  
am specific i am the critique of the universal  
where we see each other where we see each other where we  
we live distances apart "the blue clerk" 208  
note the disjuncture from the . note the disjuncture from the performance  
performance to be inside an spaces we live in this where each  
spaces we live in this archive that is comes representing but we're read as a  
comes representing but full of pain & as a foreign other & yet we wear our skin  
both of us scholars both black women  
foreign other & yet we wear our skin violence seek dark on land that has historicized us as  
we think about sexual violence & the woman Black  
dark on land that has historicized us as absent & defines us invisible  
body & the girl Black body joy & Dionne & patriarchy &  
absent & defines us invisible  
the skein on our skin both of us living black  
bodies on these uncended lands mostly so we breathe in words  
invisible mostly the detail of the of beauty terror  
mostly red ribbon in strength will  
feeling cold even on this gift of a day it's warm & both of us scholars both black women  
the sky above the clouds are blue & then walk back into the the description we hold hands  
but it's cold until we see ourselves of us that will take & the woman Black  
together bodies on these uncended lands mostly & the runaway girl Black body & power & patriarchy &  
both of us scholars both black women joy  
we think about sexual violence & the woman Black us aglow  
body & the girl Black body a young woman speaks her words  
the skein on our skin are like etchings on my scalp & how feeling cold even on this gift of a day it's warm &  
bodies on these uncended lands mostly the sky above the clouds are blue so we breathe in words of  
invisible mostly but it's cold until we see until we're skin kin  
mostly together applause Dionne acknowledges her of beauty terror  
mostly words & her presence strength will  
feeling cold even on this gift of a day it's warm & we hold hands  
the sky above the clouds are blue & then walk back into the  
but it's cold until we see until we're skin kin selves of us that will  
together breathe us through until  
morning

# Marking Untold Stories

**Jalen Frizzell**

To choose to tattoo your own body is a political statement for Black people. An act of self-affirmation.

When I started tattooing I never anticipated my work to go in the direction of being POC-focused, only because at the time I had been sipping my own cup of internalized racism. I hadn't realized anything was missing. It took time to understand—and is still an education I'm participating in every day. After two years of working reception at a tattoo shop, I'd learned how strongly I felt tattooing to be my calling, but also how much of myself I never saw in the industry. Black hair in tattoos or illustrations was never truly showcased for its beauty. An image of a pin-up or of any "attractive" person in a tattoo design would almost always have eurocentric features. And tattoo artists would be unsure of how to approach my skin tone.

A majority of the global population has melanated skin and non-eurocentric features. So why should we have to wear the faces of our colonizers in an experience that is literally transformative? My work, therefore, consists of two things: finding strategies for creating vibrant and lasting tattoos on melanated skin and exploring the possibilities of representation. We deserve to have the peace of mind that our tattoos will be beautiful for years to come. And we should also be able to see ourselves in what we have put on our bodies forever.

My tattoos evoke the Black experience with symbols of our everyday lives. Examples include tools for self-care, beloved items found in the homes of guardians who raised us, and other objects of our upbringing that shape us as Black people. I thank my mentor for seeing my potential and all of my clients for trusting me with their bodies. It is an honour to be a part of the tradition of tattooing, and I could not dream of something better than making art for my people. How interesting it is to think we can suture spiritual wounds by causing physical ones.





Jalen Frizzell, *Butterfly Lady Sketch*, 2017, pencil on paper, 3.5 × 6.5 inches



Jalen Frizzell, *Afrobabe 1*, 2018, tracing paper and Micron fine liner, 3.5 × 6 inches



Jalen Frizzell, *Afrobabe 2*, 2018, tracing paper and Micron fine liner, 3.5 × 6 inches



Jalen Frizzell, *Shea Coulee Line Drawing*, 2017,  
tracing paper and Micron fine liner,  
4.5 × 8.5 inches



Jalen Frizzell, *Josephine Baker Line Drawing*,  
2017, tracing paper and Micron fine liner,  
5.5 × 10.75 inches





Jalen Frizzell, *Strength and Perseverance Line Drawing*, 2017, tracing paper and Micron fine liner, 5.5 × 10.5 inches



Jalen Frizzell, *Black Love*, 2017, tracing paper and Micron fine liner 4.75 × 8.25 inches

# With Love and Words

Phanuel Antwi

I have long admired how Dionne Brand, David Chariandy, and Christina Sharpe each, in their different ways, not only write about black life but *love it*, care for it, especially in language. They create new languages for poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and for theory and cultural and literary criticism, too, charting the complex range of black and colonial writings in the Americas. This is my way of noting two things: the network of support (the friendships) that exist across and between these spaces irrespective of language, territory, nation, history, capitalism, colonialism; and the ways this careful support suggests that distance does not always create a barrier to conversation.

I see the conversation between Brand, Sharpe, and Chariandy as an intergenerational collaboration, one which is not caught up in circuits of debt and does not establish standards against which to mark off each other's blackness. I say this because Brand's and Sharpe's and Chariandy's works have taught us to foster spaces and languages of self-reflexive debate—an ethics of conflict—which many of us draw upon to create modes of disagreement that do not draw lines of separation or replicate long-established boundaries of stifling literary propriety present in canon-formation. This is possible, in part, because all three writers trouble the limits of generic boundaries, pulling against categorization and offering a thick and intricate demonstration of generic vulnerability. Being in the company of their work is an encounter with infinitely pleasurable explorations of the ways in which language allows access to ideas, images, and forms for consciousness that break from both social and syntactical norms. Such work helps us see how black cultural production sits at the intersections of many (and oftentimes conflicting) epistemologies, fields, disciplines: Canadian Literature, Black Diasporic literatures, Postcolonial Literature, Queer Writings, Memory Studies, Women's and Gender Studies, Avant-Garde Poetics, and so on. Not only do their narrative and poetic experimentations yield innovative criticism, breaking the capsule that seals us off from awareness of the full complexity of what it means, and the forces required, to be humans in the modern world; they also deny readers the historically explained simplifications of black life forms and compel us, in Sharpe's words, to attend to "the known and unknown performances and inhabited horrors, desires, and positions produced, reproduced, circulated, and transmitted, that are breathed in like air and often unacknowledged to be monstrous" (*Monstrous Intimacies* 3).

Dionne Brand's writing is equal parts delicious prose, complex meditations on the function of language, raw examinations of erotics—in the Lordean sense—and stunningly bold disruptions of largely unspoken notions regarding what constitutes respectable discourse. What is magical about reading Brand's work is the ways her aesthetics attune readers to the converging rhythms between history and language, ethics and politics, hopefulness and despair; nestled within these interplays, the range of Brand's work emphasizes the terrible fragility of human life. Her aesthetics drum up a plainness of diction and, by fearlessly favouring this diction, tilt the poetics of everyday life and speech, standing upon this skewed ground to better articulate the interiorities of our social relations. Common threads run through her body of work. One is the racially gendered inventory that Brand mobilizes to record grief and grievances of the “earth,” “its history of harm,” “and the carelessness of [that] history” (*Land to Light On* 48). It is not an overstatement to say that Brand's work as a whole is an inventory rerecording recorded harms: at every turn it is eager to *unseed* the unjust realities otherwise lost among the overproduction of media, demanding that each one of us part ways with our addictive complicities and, as the poet-speaker in *Inventory* does, commit ourselves to “hear what is never shown”: “the [mundane] details” (28). To hear what is contained in the never-shown requires an ongoing commitment to vulnerability, to the weight inside and outside the details, but, at the same time, an ensuring that we do not feel trapped by them. Simply put, we are lucky and privileged that at this moment in our history, amidst a cascade of seemingly unrelenting geopolitical crises, we have available to us a writer, poet, and intellectual whose work has for more than twenty years focused on embracing the possibilities inherent in the disruption of all-too contemporary prejudices and antique certainties and who helps us live with the vulnerability, precisely, of what it costs to be living in the twenty-first century.

The ethics of care and vulnerability that we see in Brand's work also characterizes the worlds that David Chariandy quietly and powerfully conjures up for us in his critical and creative work. The release of *Brother*, Chariandy's second novel after *Soucouyant*, amplifies the tone and texture of diasporic romance. The romance, we learn, is not a move away from the difficult complexity of living in diaspora; the diasporic romance Chariandy captures for us here is the unseen, unvoiced, undoing tenderness of black kinship. Whether it is the joy celebrated by two brothers in spite of their different poses of masculinity or the daily negotiations of the violence that conditions black lives—informing how we love and how we language our love—Chariandy sits us in the differentiating soundtracks of black kinship, audibly and visibly highlighting how violent histories shape our insecurities and vulnerabilities along class, race, gender, and sexual lines, while also showing how no one is without love in our world. There is a literacy to black love in



*Brother*: we hear it in the set of noises language in the barber shop; in the worry in the mother's volume over her sons; in the tension of sexual desires wrapped in the brother's life. While readers are invited into this literacy, they should read the lives of black people not for their transparencies. The bodily joy and lingering tenderness of *Brother* offer a caution to readers not to expect the violence in and against black lives flashed across screens and headlines to be the interpretative mode in the novel.

Some of you also know Chariandy as a critic who specializes in English-Canadian, Anglo-Caribbean, and African Diasporic literature, as well as interdisciplinary theories of postcoloniality, diaspora, and "race." Chariandy's essays are among the first critical studies to prize the intersections of Black Canadian and Caribbean Canadian writings as crucial to an understanding not only of Canadian literature but of the lives and cultures of the African Diaspora. Essays like "Postcolonial Diasporas" and "Fictions of Belonging" are now among some of the most referenced essays in the fields of postcolonial and diasporic literatures. These essays remain astute and relevant to the disciplines today because much of what Chariandy argues in them shapes our ability to understand how localized micro-histories can calcify into centres of epistemic justification for the same injustices fostered by macro-histories. He also underscores the differences between diasporic groups and how these differences come to bear on the ways in which the effects of race are lived and read. I'm always looking forward to a Chariandy essay because his writing, which straddles the creative and the critical (if such a distinction is necessary), is continuously shifting, in the sense that he is continuously grappling to find ways to exemplify the best in the critical essay genre and in so doing not only shifts the conventional academic lenses through which to think but also models for us how best to do that work.

Christina Sharpe's love for black people shows up in every word I've read of hers since I first opened her book *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects*. As a graduate student, I was struck by the ways Sharpe's concept of "monstrous intimacies" offered me language to think through the "everyday mundane horrors that aren't acknowledged to be horrors" (3) that constitute black subjectivity from transatlantic slavery to its afterlives. Her identification of the illegibility of this "mundane horror," the continuous incomplete movement from slavery to freedom, underscores the conditions of terror in the making of self for post-slavery black subjects. Focusing on the "everyday violences that black(ened) bodies are made to bear," she "examine[s] and account[s] for a series of repetitions of master narratives of violence and forced submission that are read or reinscribed as consent and affection: intimacies that involve shame and trauma and their transgenerational transmission" (4). Sharpe's examinations of the "sadoomasochism of everyday Black Life" challenge the moral philosophy enmeshed in romantic

readings and stagings of black suffering that unhears black vulnerability and unsees the lingering tenderness of black kinship. What was instructive for me then (and remains so now) was not only the scope of Sharpe's archive, but the ways in which *Monstrous Intimacies* stretched the temporal boundaries of studies of slavery and freedom from the nineteenth century to the twentieth century and from the US South to the global South. Insisting that black freedom is enmeshed in the violence of the past—that these violences “are markers for an exorbitant freedom, [and] to be free of it marks a subjection in which we are all forced to participate” (4)—Sharpe emboldened me to continue asking: How do we grapple with this forced participation? This haunting that is also our inheritance?

As in *Monstrous Intimacies*, where the artist Kara Walker's silhouette cutouts “represent a violent past that is not past” (156), Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* is a reminder of ways black lives exist in a modernity that has made black death the condition of operation. The aesthetic ambition of *In the Wake* also straddles that putative creative-critical divide and offers us an example of the generic vulnerability that is a hallmark of the work these three writers do with words. Words, in Sharpe's hands, are matter for liberation work. Words portray visions of freedom, depict the sacred, express power and protest, offer revelations of social forms, and foreground the treatment of black life forms. Words have poetic relations: Sharpe is keen to depict the elastic pitch of trauma in words, the fugitivity of words, and the need to undiscipline their archival force on our lives. Words, like weather, take on new live forms in *In the Wake*, highlighting value in the ordinary.

To conclude, here are three writers who love black life in words, in actions, and in a context of vulnerability and a culture of violent disposability. Their love and care and joy offer us a method, a theory, a politics for the work of words.

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# from *The Work of Words*

Dionne Brand, Christina Sharpe, & David Chariandy

*On June 9, 2017, Dionne Brand and Christina Sharpe delivered the 2017 Shadbolt Lecture, sponsored by the Writer in Residence Program of the English Department at Simon Fraser University. The lecturers were invited to read from recent writings and then use this as a means to discuss “the work of words” more broadly, with special attention to their own celebrated books but also to the broader climate of language today. Christina Sharpe read from In the Wake: On Blackness and Being (Duke UP, 2016) and Dionne Brand read from The Blue Clerk: Ars Poetica in 59 Versos (forthcoming from McClelland & Stewart and Duke UP, 2018). What follows is an edited excerpt from their onstage dialogue moderated by David Chariandy, author most recently of the novel Brother (McClelland & Stewart, 2017).*

**David Chariandy:** Thank you both for so generously sharing your writings and thoughts with us this evening. I'd like to begin quite simply by inviting you to suggest how the pieces you've read speak to each other. What work does reading these pieces in tandem perform for us today?

**Dionne Brand:** Well, let me explain first the Lola Kiepja piece. Lola Kiepja was the last speaker of Selk'nam. The Selk'nam people lived in Tierra del Fuego—or what is now called Tierra del Fuego—at the bottom of South America, Argentina, and Chile. They were wiped out by European settlers who were sheep and cattle farmers. Not only were they wiped out by them by 1960, or something like that, but they were wiped out openly and officially, such that a bounty would be placed on the killing of a Selk'nam. And the bounty would be doubled for a woman. So, I walked into the Venice Biennale a couple of years ago, into this long corridor of disappearing or disappeared languages. And we—Christina also was there—we just wandered into this corridor of these speakers along the way, and as you stepped in front of a speaker you would hear the sound of a language that was either dying or dead.

I stepped in front of this particular speaker, and it was Lola Kiepja speaking. It was this incredibly eerie sound, and I burst into tears listening to what was the last speaker of this language. The text read in English, “Here I am singing.



I have arrived at the great mountain range of the heavens. The power of those who have died comes back to me from infinity. They have spoken to me. Here I am singing." I just thought of the great violence that had eradicated these people but the wonderful gift of this voice, even though this voice would never be heard in its full meaning because there would be no one left to understand it in the visceral ways that a language is understood. I thought of violence, the violence that underwrites this part of the world, but also I thought of the singing that overwrites it? So, each of the pieces that I selected to read today suggested this interplay.

That's also connected, to me, to the piece drawing from when I entered the museum at Docklands and found the name "John Brand" on the wall. I wondered who this "John Brand" could possibly be, because my own last name is an unusual last name in the Caribbean. It's only found in a couple places, like Montserrat, where my grandfather was from, and Trinidad. So I kept pursuing this name. Of course, it is a name of some slave trader, as all our names are in this part of the world...unless we changed them consciously. So how that name is underwritten in violence but how, I suppose, I tried to overwrite it in singing. Then, of course, the Borges equally. I thought suddenly these pieces came together with those two words—"violence" and "singing."

**Christina Sharpe:** There's also a relationship between violence and singing in my own writings, and I think they speak to each other through my work with the word "still." This word appears in Dionne Brand's "Verso 55": "You're still alive, and you've come to greet us. Yes, we are still alive." I'm thinking about "still" both as the *longue durée* of violence that has been enacted against people of African descent over centuries and that continues into the present, but also the *longue durée* of resistance to that violence, survivance of that violence, or something surviving even in the midst of death. I've also written about M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!* The book is *Zong!* with an exclamation point, which breaks "Zong" the ship into "Zong" the song. I think it's in an interview Philip did with Pat Saunders where she's quoting somebody else—I think maybe an Akan woman—who says, "We sing for birth. We sing for death. That's what we do. We sing." So, I'm thinking about that relationship, about song's relationship to life, death, and these other occasions. Also—I'll end with this because I could keep going on and on—there's a moment toward the end of the text where I try to think about what I have called "an ordinary note of care," and my one example of that is the ruttier for the marooned and the

diaspora which comes at the end of Dionne's *A Map to the Door of No Return*. The ruttier is a song that you memorize, that sailors memorized, of navigational directions—including what you write about the taste of water, the salt in the water, the movement of tides, etc.

But also, for those of you who have read *Beloved*, as well as *A Map*, there's that moment in the novel where Paul D is on the chain gang in Alfred, Georgia, and there's Hi Man who says the "hi" in the morning and the "ho" at night. He takes this on, and it means an end of violence or the end of labour. It's also the thing that gets them to safety during those torrential rains. I think of that as this song that indicates violence—it doesn't *break* the violence that you encounter, but it does create some kind of breathing room to survive, perhaps, to another day within that violence to get to someplace else. So, it's a form of underwriting and overwriting—the underwriting of violence, the overwriting of song—as well.

DC: Thinking again of Christina's work on the word "still," I'm struck by the ways in which each of you, in specific works, animate a specific word, and how that word becomes invested with layer upon layers of meaning—how a particular word becomes a method for a particular project. I'm also deeply struck by how each of you return to particular sites of atrocities. For instance, museums, archives, and ledgers—all bearing witness to the colossal and echoing violence. Can you speak a bit about these particular practices in your writings? The work of the ledger, for instance?

DB: Well, there was such erasure of that ledger, even though that ledger also existed. Because the perpetrators of that violence were quite proud of these acts, and they actually wrote them down. They have long lists of what's been done. But those lists, of course, present those acts as heroic, as civilizing, as civilization-making. So, I think it's my job, sometimes, to go over that ledger with my own forensics—with the forensics of liberation, if you will—and re-see and rewrite the ledger. That is, to highlight the violence, which is often clouded by victory, clouded by triumphalism—clouded by a new narrative, the narrative of conquest, which associates itself with the human, right?

So it's my job. But it's not even my job. I just happen upon it. It is there to be seen. There's the constant *work*, every day, that those structures do in occluding, in erasing violence to make hierarchy seem seamless and—

CS: —to make it seem reasonable.



**DB:** And reasonable, yes. So, there's a constant work going on as I do this other constant work.

**DC:** There's a related practice I find so powerful in your work. I guess it involves not only revealing existing ledgers in newer, truer lights, but also actively making an inventory of violence yourself. People might say both are historical methods—but as a *poetic* method, I find that really quite striking. Possibly because they evoke more palpable encounters with atrocities.

**DB:** If anybody's been to one of those castles on the coast of West Africa called "The Door of No Return," and you walk into one of those castles, it is palpable with history. You think about what you are *experiencing* in there. It's so—present. Those bodies are present. Those people are present, and that violence is present. I don't know. It's just really interesting that they exist anymore and that one has this incredible ambivalence about their existence as museums. But it is as if every day that happened in that castle is happening again. That is the feeling one experiences in those places. But back to the "Inventory" poem...I mean, the inventory poem is a poetic form, anyway. But that particular poem, "Inventory," I made at a moment when there's nothing to do but make a list. That is your job at that moment, to make a list, at a moment of incredible damage? It is all you can do to make that list. You cannot observe the list properly yet.

And as I went along writing that list, which came out of sitting in front of the television looking at, I think, the first war in Iraq, hearing about the bombing, looking at CNN as if they were describing a certain drama that was just coming on, seeing that vague map of the Middle East with a star that said "Baghdad." Nothing in between—no lines, no roads, no people, no trucks, no houses, no—none of the particularities of *actual* human beings who this will have an impact on. And then, the adjectives attached to that war—the "shock" and "awe," etc.—as if one were doing the subtitles to some kind of a movie, but a very explosive movie with lots of planes and lots of things but no consideration of the minute damage to everyday life, yeah? So I just thought, how obscene it was for me to—I'm sure some of you have heard me say this before—to get up and go upstairs and sleep while this was going on. But to sit and to write it down was a form of active witnessing—and to write down the possible life that was going on, the possible lives that were being affected by it?

**DC:** I wonder if we could return to the practice indicated by Christina a moment ago. That of simultaneously marking both violence and the living voice



through a meditation upon individual words. I'm thinking now of Dionne's book *thirsty*, in which that word "thirsty," uttered by a victim of a police shooting, becomes a means of identifying state violence but also need and desire. This is also what's so striking about *In the Wake*. It is a book about the persistent, enveloping anti-Blackness that is the aftermath of slavery. And Christina analyzes and addresses this through what she calls "the semiotics of the slave ship." Each chapter focuses on specific words, such as "the ship," "the hold," "the wake," and also "the weather." There's perhaps no more powerful term for a depersonalized, all-enveloping environment of anti-Blackness as "the weather." My question, again, is how do individual words animate a particular project—help us see, again, the violence that underwrites, the singing that overwrites?

CS: I started to speak to that in thinking of the word "still." Once, I was about to teach *Beloved*, and I was reading it again, and I realized there's this whole section on the word "still." Sethe is standing on two feet meant for standing still. She's pregnant—heavily pregnant—standing on two feet meant for standing still. Still at the tub and ironing board. Still at the churn. Still at...you know. So, her "still" is not the "still" of a heavily pregnant woman who isn't enslaved. Her "still" is full of labour. It's durational. There's really no end to it? But also, the "still" of the deaths in my own family, which I've noticed I always skip over when I talk about "still." So, thinking of all the different meanings of "still." "Still" as in the opposite of *moving image*. "Still" as in predicatively, as in holding oneself still. "Still" as in the present. "Still" as in non-moving. So, I'm always interested in holding as many meanings of the word? Holding as many meanings together and separately, but always keeping them as activated as possible.

I had also forgotten about how much "weather" appears in both the John Brand and in the Borges—the one with your grandfather's library. Borges, I remember. So that was really interesting, too—and of course, weather was so important in terms of slave management, plantations, navigational instructions for those slave ships. So how much that animates both of our work.

DB: And the amount of science that came out of the study of weather during this period—the period of the slave trade and slavery. The weather for planting. The weather for labour. There's actually that book about it.

CS: Yeah. How the weather would affect lung capacity—but usually that didn't actually affect whether or not the enslaved people were forced to labour in the weather. But it was still a way to measure how these things affected the body.

**DB:** Yes, all the measurements of weather and time and agriculture that came out of that period are incredible and a thing of their own. But I like the word “still.” In reference to what we’re talking about, it seems to me that “still” also means just halting everything that has happened before and since. I think it’s a very heavy, heavy word, “still.” It also means, in some senses, “yet again.”

**DC:** Yeah, yeah.

**CS:** Absolutely.

**DB:** And “over and over again.” But it also is a measure of breathing space for nothing happening around it. So, I love that word, but I love what you’ve done in *In the Wake* with the notion of the weather. Maybe you could talk a little bit about that.

**CS:** Again, that partially comes from that line “everything is weather”? That it’s just weather. So, the way in which you said it—that one both takes note of it and doesn’t take note of it, but it is always present. It is always acting on you. It is, I think, about a knowledge of where one is and also how one prepares in order to encounter the “factness” of where one is. So, you try to dress for the weather. If you know that the weather is anti-Black, you also know you comport yourself in particular ways, but you also work to rupture that? So, I thought that weather really spoke to the ways in which all of these forces are acting. And they enact things on us quite differently. We might be experiencing the same weather, but like those people on the contemporary ships crossing the Mediterranean, the effects of it are not evenly distributed. They never have been. So, I think “weather” gets to all that.

**DC:** Earlier, Christina was generous enough to visit my class. Some of my students are here right now. And there was a moment in which you invited us—in this powerful way—to contemplate what is the weather like here, how do particular ecologies of anti-Blackness work out in specific sites of the African diaspora?

**CS:** Right. How do you have microclimates where you can actually get something else done, so that there are lateral moves where you have a kind of microclimate. You’re working toward liberation, but you have these micro-moments—like in *Bail Out Black Mamas* in the US. You’re working toward prison abolition, and you’re working toward the end of cash bail. But you have these moments where, in the *midst* of working toward that, you also do this



other thing. I think of those as microclimates within a larger climate of violence in which you try to create a sustainable life. In which you don't accede to everything that would try to suffocate you, to all of the forces that are intent on that kind of suffocation.

**DC:** Which is why, I must say, I find work written by both of you so profoundly important in that you allow us to chart those connections between those microclimates, those different spaces, landscapes, and geographies. Your projects have never been confined to specific national or regional spaces. They prove themselves global in orientation while demonstrating close attention to specific places.

**DB:** I also think that just writing, itself, is that. It creates those microclimates, if you will. Because to make a poem, for me, is to create that space where not only the vulgar and brutal exists but language opens places where someone might actually recognize themselves outside of the short instrumental stereotypic location that in public they occupy—or in the public they occupy. So, I think writing is itself a space where that happens or can happen.

**DC:** Do you consciously think of how your personal experiences inform your writing? Christina, you begin *In the Wake*, published by a very prestigious academic press, with the line “I wasn't there when my sister died.” What's the ethics of writing the personal, if we can still use that term in your work?

**CS:** I was quite worried about the first part, the first fifteen pages of the book, for several reasons. One, when my mother was alive, she would always say, “Don't write about me.” I'd say, “Well, mom, I won't,” but I think she'd be happy with what I wrote about her. There's a moment at the beginning where I say, “There are other stories to tell here, but they're not mine to tell.” For me, it actually was an ethical decision. I was sitting with—and I got “sitting with” from Dionne's work—*The Map to the Door of No Return*, “sitting in the room with history,” that “history is always there when you enter the room.” History is in the empty chair.

I thought about “sitting with” as a method. I was sitting with all of these deaths that I was recording, in my own family but also Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Aiyana Stanley-Jones. I could go on? I thought, at the same time, so this is maybe the relationship between the personal, the autobiographical. The personal is always in the text, whether I name it “the personal” or not, it is how



I am oriented to the work. In my book, I think about Michael Brown's autopsy report, though I only use it in the section in thinking about the anagrammatical and Black redaction. But it seemed to me completely unethical to write about other Black people dying and not deal with what I was in the midst of dealing with. To be in the midst of three deaths in my own family—a repetition of three deaths—and other things that were happening in my own family, which was, of course, orienting my relation to the work.

So that was my ethical decision. It's always also been my inclination. I was simply disciplined out of it? When I started writing *Monstrous Intimacies*, I had this whole section that I had to write to get into it about my mother and grandmother, etc. Part of it is speculative, what Saidiya Hartman calls "critical fabulation." But I had to remove that, and God knows what happened to it now. That was, like, 500 computers ago. So, yes, I mean, how I'm positioned in the world, how the weather is affecting my and my family's *capacity* to survive—and I think it's always there for everybody in their writing. Whether you name it your "orientation" or not, that is how you are oriented to work.

**DB:** There is this fallacy of objectivity which dominates in some disciplines—all, actually, even in fiction. There's the fallacy of observing from above and not being implicated, yourself, in it. I do think you're right about it being unethical to suggest that this happens to others and not to me. So, that's on one level. But I am way past not using everything. I use everything because, well, everything is my material. And even I am my material. I *hope* that I then work that material in a thorough way. Not merely in a self-serving way but in a thorough way. Looking at it, looking at myself looking at it, looking at that self looking at that self looking at it. Do you know what I mean? That's my old Communist training, being constantly self-critical about what you are producing and how you're producing it. But my material is just human existence. So, I don't see—I don't make—the distinction, or I don't belong to a discipline that makes the distinction.

I think you can become overbearing, maudlin, self-involved, etc. Those are different things. Those are different questions than whether one uses the personal or the biographical to work as material. The self-serving, you just want pity, or you want affection, or you want love, or you want praise, or you want what... Those are different questions than what you're actually using, which is the actual minerals of living.

CS: But I'd even say that there's a deep history of work within disciplines—like, sociological work—that does that, like Du Bois's *Souls of Black Folk*, *Philadelphia Negro*, etc., there's a long history—Ida B. Wells' *Red Record* too—which, somehow, we are not supposed to remember as we go about doing our current work.

DB: Yes. And it's particularly pointed at certain kinds of people with certain kinds of experience. That you cannot be analytic about that experience yourself because, of course, you are suffering it. But someone else can come in and study you and write about it. So, we can dismiss all of that, and we don't need to even talk about that.

CS: But what about you? As a writer whose work I admire and respect, I want to bring David into the conversation.

DC: One thing that concerns me—I hope I have addressed it, but it does concern me—is becoming a confessional subject such that I am making myself legible to people—to others, to those that hold power—rather than to you, the very people that I write for and to, and whose work sustains me. I start to doubt because I worry that I am, again, being for others.

CS: For capital.

DC: For *capital* and, again, who am I confessing to? And what operation of power is working in that way? And how does that become easier for certain readers rather than others?

DB: But I think that doubt is the good thing, right?

DC: Yeah, yeah, maybe.

DB: Because that holds you or that holds us honest to the project. So, there are people who don't have that doubt at all. You know what I mean? Yes, I understand what you're saying and that one must always be conscious of that possibility, but I think the doubt is what secures the ethics of writing, in this instance. But, this brings me to my argument about narrative and poetry? You've heard me go on about this enough. I try, every time I come here or anywhere to attempt to describe what I'm talking about, and I will make one more attempt. I think that narrative is so implicated in coloniality that that worry that you talk about—that worry is real. That there are ways in which a condition, as Black

people, is already present in narrative. So, one is always talking adjacent to it or against it. But *it* is present, right? The *condition*—the present condition or the ongoing oppression of Black people—is always present in the narrative, and one constantly tries to—one has to address it all the time. So, one gives it *room* all the time. One begins with it, or something. Help me out here, Christina. What am I trying to say?

CS: Well, you said once, “Maybe Black people should just always speak in poetry.” Something about narrative structures already containing the seeds of our own undoing, and that maybe poetry opens up...like you talked about—you extended “still” to think about the breathing space. Maybe poetry allows for that kind of space—a breathing on the page and in the world that you’re getting at.

DB: In a sense, you’re a Black writer, and you say “I,” and immediately it conjures all of these past incarnations of that “I” in terms of the history of narrative or the history of English narrative anyway, right? Nineteenth-century English narrative already contains you in a particular way. And women are also contained in those narratives in particular ways, and you are always struggling against that containment and what is already always present, which you are always writing...

CS: ...against.

DB: ...against, right? Or you are always importing, even when you are objecting, you are importing the argument with you. So, yes, this is the difficulty that I think you’re speaking to there also, yes.

DC: I think it’s a question that comes hard and heavy on the novel, on fiction, on narrative.

DB: And the particular ways in which Black people are supposed to appear in this contemporary moment in narrative fiction.

DC: There we go, that’s it. That’s it.

DB: And attached to the market and attached to a certain kind of personification of Blackness. The success of those narratives is really based on their repetition. You know what I mean? Their repetition and an elaboration of that repetition, right? So, then, they become the spectacular body, not the ordinary going-



about-your-business body, but this spectacular Black body that must appear in a particular way all the time.

CS: But then that's not the body that appears in your narratives.

DB: Well, hopefully not. I mean, my foot, thank God, is always in poetry, which is why those narratives are not very successful.

DC: They're successful. They illustrate, most definitely, the enduring power and necessity of Black narrative.

DB: But it's a great trouble. I like working out this business about what might happen. What is the person who might appear? Who is the person who might appear if I cut away that presumption or that demand for the Black spectacular?

DC: Um, so this seems to me a risky question. But what about the work today of that specific word "love"—as in Dionne's recent book *Love Enough*? Is it fair to say there is a certain kind of critical perspective on love, even as you remain open to its power?

DB: In *Love Enough*, there's a character, June, who goes through a number of lovers of various types and genders. But she talks them to death, you know? Especially the last one who has no relation to her usual political affinities, etc. But June, that figure, June, her notion is: is there an ethical love? Is there a love that isn't sentimentalized, that isn't commoditized, that can peel itself away from commodity and the commoditization of romantic love that exists in the modern? So, she's still thinking through that, and she is discomfited each time it tries to hang on to that kind of commoditized, romanticized love. She's incredibly uncomfortable with it. In this way, June is similar to myself.

CS: I also think about...is it in "Ossuary I"?

DB: III. Yeah, "Ossuary III."

CS: "I lived and loved in momentous times"?

DB: Yes, yes.

CS: I don't have an answer to that question. I'm just thinking with Dionne's work and, again, thinking about June. Because one of my favourite moments

in that book is when—I hope I’m not spoiling anything—but when Sydney is about to leave and she tells June, “You’re a collector of sadness.” And even in the moment of her imminent departure, that’s an act of love because it gives June something to settle into. She names June’s orientation to the world and her melancholic condition. And that’s a gesture of love, an ethics of “Okay, I’m leaving, but this is something that you can...”—it seems like something that you can think with and feel with, and it gives her some peace in that moment.

I’ll go back to another question about the ethics. I felt like—you also create what you want to read in the world. I thought, coming from my working-poor family background, that I needed to write that. So that’s my ethic of care as well? That because I know that there are many other Black people in the academy who have experiences similar to mine, and we’re not supposed to be where we are. We’re not supposed to speak that experience. So that’s a sideways answer to your question.

**DB:** No, I think it’s a good one.

**DC:** Yeah, I think it’s a great response, and it reminds me of how, in speaking about your mother in the first chapter of *In the Wake*, Christina, you describe how she “tried to make a small path through the wake. She brought beauty into that house in every way that she could; she worked at joy, and she made liveable moments, spaces, and places in the midst of all that was unliveable there.” I think this is the feeling, the ethical relation, I’m grasping to affirm and name...

**DB:** We mean *care*. We mean an ethical positioning to another human being, all those things, right? It just suddenly gets complicated—very, very complicated—much more so than the broad, flat notion that’s out there, which has adhered itself so much to the word “love.”

**Fern Ramoutar:** Hi. I want to return to a quote that you made, Dr. Sharpe, about how the weather is the total climate and it is anti-Black. That just struck me because I think to be born Black is to know that weather intimately, and in some cases to know it exclusively. But the effect, whether intentional or not, of the work of your words, of all of your words, is to change the weather and to expand my capacity and, I think, the capacity of many black women—I can't even speak for all of us, but I can speak for myself—to expand our capacity for survival. So, my question is what is the weather that you're working towards?

**DC:** Whoa.

**CS:** Beautiful.

**FR:** What is the world you're working towards and what does freedom look like to each of you?



# the forecast

Lila Bristol

the first time we changed the weather, noone blinked, because noone knew.

two girls huddled in the back corner of the last car  
on the green line.  
rolling west.

they wrote slowly into a small, square napkin,  
waiting between bumps to add two or three shaky letters  
t  
to  
to a l  
to a li  
to a line.

it was like the construction of this little verse was the most important task in the  
world.  
and it was,  
in the end.

“4 hours to goooo”  
the first girl belted out,  
side-eyeing the napkin lyrics  
though she knew every word by heart.

“4 hours to goooo”  
sang the second,  
her voice rising quickly to meet her girlfriend’s  
in a dark blue harmony.

“if your wash day’s only an hooooooooour”  
both voices floated together now,

one quivering boldly above the other,  
insistent on melancholy.

“don’t talk to us noooo moooooooooo”  
the train shot out of the tunnel,  
into the severe brightness of a sunny morning.

as their voices lingered on the final note,  
both girls collapsed into laughter and into each other.  
they did not notice what flashed across the sky,  
temporarily swallowing the clouds.

a single sheet of lightning on a clear, blue day.

after that,  
every time after that train ride,  
whenever we put words into the world

(a book an essay an album a script a song a chorus a cheer a chant a “rant” a  
poem a podcast a call for action a call to action a—  
you know what i mean right?  
the things we produce so brilliantly?  
the things we create to reimagine the world?  
the things without adequate compensation? without permission or recognition  
or reparations?  
so,  
i guess what i’m saying is,  
all the things)

the weather changes.

you remember right?  
last summer in Flint?  
after some residents wrote that book about survival in a state-sanctioned  
genocide?  
when it rained for weeks?  
and then someone checked?  
and all the rainwater was clean?

you remember right?  
over winter in Baltimore?  
after Nikole Hannah-Jones wrote those essays about how school taught her  
babies the meaning of the word “value”?  
by making them wear their coats and gloves and hats and boots and scarves  
inside their schools that noone would heat?  
and then a warm wind blew every day until april?  
but only through the windows of the cold schools?

you remember right?  
in September a few years back?  
after Solange released her fourth studio album?  
All the Seats?  
and the entire country was filled with columns of sun that somehow followed  
and blessed only the listeners who *understood*?

for all the ways this moment seems different,  
it is probably also the very same.  
they are still helpfully suggesting that  
what we should probably do is hold back maybe  
restrain the output, for now,  
in the name of “safety” and “mutual respect” and my personal favourite  
“weather stability.”

but for all the ways this moment seems different,  
it is probably also the very same  
because we still do not believe in lies  
that seek to outline the shape of our freedom.

it's just like that saying  
you know how it goes:  
we will never stop building what we deserve.

oh—you never heard that one?



# Contributors

**Sonnet L'Abbé** lives and writes in Nanaimo, on the traditional territory of the Snuneymuxw. The poems in this issue are from her forthcoming collection, *Sonnet's Shakespeare* (McClelland & Stewart, 2019), in which she overwrites all 154 of Shakespeare's sonnets.

**Emmanuelle Andrews** is a British black feminist currently studying for her MA in Gender, Race, Sexuality and Social Justice at the Social Justice Institute, University of British Columbia. She is also a filmmaker, dancer, and lover of words, recently attempting to combine all three, with Pedro Daher, in their award-winning short film *Coming to Love* (2017).

**Phanuel Antwi** is assistant professor of English at the University of British Columbia. He writes, researches, and teaches critical black studies; settler colonial studies; black Atlantic and diaspora studies; Canadian literature and culture since 1830; critical race, gender, and sexuality studies; and material cultures. He has published articles in *Transition Magazine*, *Small Axe*, *Interventions*, *Affinities*, and *Studies in Canadian Literature*. He is completing a book-length project titled "Currencies of Blackness: Faithfulness, Cheerfulness and Politeness in Settler Writing."

**Juliane Okot Bitek** is a poet. Juliane's *100 Days* (U of Alberta P, 2016) won the 2017 Glenna Luschei Prize for African Poetry and the 2016 INDIEFAB Poetry Book of the Year Award. *100 Days* was also a finalist for the Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize, the Canadian Authors Award for Poetry, the Alberta Book Awards, the Robert Kroetsch Award for Poetry, and the Pat Lowther Award. Juliane lives and loves on the unceded territory of the Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh, and Squamish people.

**Deanna Bowen** is a Toronto-based interdisciplinary artist whose practice examines race, migration, historical writing, and authorship. Bowen makes use of a repertoire of artistic gestures in order to define the Black body and trace its presence and movement in place and time. In recent years, Deanna's work has involved rigorous examination of her family lineage and their connections to the Black Prairie pioneers of Alberta and Saskatchewan, the Creek Negroes and All-Black towns of Oklahoma, the extended Kentucky/Kansas Exoduster migrations, and the Ku Klux Klan. Her broader artistic and educational practice examines history, historical writing, and the ways in which artistic and technological advancements impact individual and collective authorship. She has received several awards in support of her artistic practice including 2017 Canada Council New Chapter and Ontario Arts Council Media Arts production grants, a 2016 Guggenheim Fellowship, and the 2014 William H. Johnson Prize.

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**David Bradford** is the author of *Nell Zink Is Damn Free* (Blank Cheque Press, 2017) and *Call Out* (2017). His work has appeared in *Vallum*, *Prairie Fire*, *Lemon Hound*, *Poetry Is Dead*, and others. An MFA candidate and Ontario Graduate Fellow at the University of Guelph, he splits his time between Toronto and Montreal.

**Dionne Brand** is a renowned poet, novelist, and essayist. Her writing is notable for the beauty of its language and for its intense engagement with issues of social justice. She was Poet Laureate of the City of Toronto from 2009-12 and is a member of the Order of Canada. She won both the Governor General's Literary Award and the Trillium Prize for Literature for *Land to Light On* (McClelland & Stewart, 1997). Her book *Ossuaries* (McClelland & Stewart, 2010) won the 2011 Griffin Poetry Prize. Among her works, *No Language Is Neutral* (McClelland & Stewart, 1990) and *Inventory* (McClelland & Stewart, 2006) were nominated for the Governor General's Literary Award. She has won the Pat Lowther Award for Poetry for her volume *thirsty* (McClelland & Stewart, 2002), which was also nominated for the Griffin Poetry Prize, the Toronto Book Award, and the Trillium Prize for Literature. Her critically-acclaimed novel *What We All Long For* (Knopf, 2005) won the Toronto Book Award. Her latest novel, *Love Enough* (Knopf, 2014), was shortlisted for the Trillium Prize in Literature in 2015.

**Lila Bristol** is a Black, queer woman and an economist. (Don't get her started on that.) She currently splits her time between Toronto and Chicago. Her writing seeks to illuminate the ways Black people experience and interact with freedom.

**David Chariandy** lives in Vancouver and teaches in the Department of English at Simon Fraser University. His first novel, *Soucouyant* (Arsenal Pulp, 2007), was published internationally and nominated for several prizes, including the Scotiabank Giller Prize (longlisted) and the Governor General's Award (shortlisted). His second novel, *Brother* (McClelland & Stewart, 2017), won the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize.

Three of **Wayde Compton's** books have been finalists for the City of Vancouver Book Award, and *The Outer Harbour* (Arsenal Pulp, 2014) won it in 2015. Compton is a member of the Northeast False Creek Stewardship Group and director-at-large of the Hogan's Alley Society. He is the program director of Creative Writing in Continuing Studies at Simon Fraser University, where he administrates the Writer's Studio.

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**Pedro Daher** is an aspiring researcher in the Institute for Gender, Race, Sexuality and Social Justice at the University of British Columbia. His work seeks to rethink and redeploy difference, releasing it from 19th- and 20th-century projects of racial and cultural difference and from 20th-century reworkings of the concept, such as the famous Deleuzian solution of difference-in-itself.

**Caleb Femi** is the Young People's Laureate for London, a photographer, and an English Literature teacher. Caleb is featured in the Dazed 100 list of the next generation shaping youth culture. He has written and directed short films commissioned by the BBC and Channel 4 and poems commissioned by the Tate Modern, the Royal Society for Literature, St. Paul's Cathedral, and *The Guardian*. Caleb has also won the Roundhouse Poetry Slam and Genesis Poetry Slam and is currently working on a debut collection.

**Jalen Frizzell**, located in Montreal, has been tattooing for a total of 2.5 years. With limited formal artistic training, she is primarily self-taught in drawing and has worked as an apprentice tattooer for 1.5 years. Her inspiration comes from blaxploitation movie posters of the '70s, neotraditional tattooing, Afrofuturism, vintage Black glamour, and the Surrealist painting movement. Her objective is to represent people of colour through the power of tattooing and to use bodily autonomy as well as self-expression to heal the invisible trauma caused by generations of colonial harm.

**Joy Gyamfi** is a black queer writer and photographer from Ghana. She is most likely to be found on Tinder dates at the Art Gallery. Her work has appeared in *The Garden Statuary* and *SAD Mag*. You can find her on Instagram @roughclub.

**Aisha Sasha John** is the author of *I have to live*. (McClelland & Stewart, 2017).

**Lucia Lorenzi** is a settler of Afro-Caribbean and Western European descent, and a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow at McMaster University. Her research focuses on representations of sexual violence in literature and other media, as well as contemporary Canadian literature and drama. Her art practice centres primarily around illustration and mixed-media.

**Canisia Lubrin** is the author of *augur* (Gap Riot Press, 2017) and *Voodoo Hypothesis* (Wolsak and Wynn, 2017), named a best book of 2017 by the CBC, the League of Canadian Poets, and others. She is consulting editor at Wolsak & Wynn/Buckrider Books and an editor at *Humber Literary Review*. She is currently one of the 2017-18 Poets in Residence with Poetry in Voice.



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**Cecily Nicholson** is administrator of the artist-run centre Gallery Gachet and a member of the Joint Effort prison abolitionist group. She is the author of three books of poetry, most recently *Wayside Sang* (Talonbooks, 2018).

**Katrina Sellinger** is a biracial Black femme from the Cayman Islands, currently living in Vancouver, BC. She is pursuing her MA in English at the University of British Columbia, where she writes about Janelle Monáe as much as possible.

**Christina Sharpe** is Professor at Tufts University in the Department of English and programs in Africana and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Her first book was *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* (Duke UP, 2010). Her second book, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Duke UP, 2016), was named in *The Guardian* and *The Walrus* as one of the best books of 2016, and was a finalist in nonfiction for the Hurston/Wright Legacy Awards. She is currently completing the critical introduction to *The Collected Poems of Dionne Brand (1982–2010)* and working on a monograph entitled *Black. Still. Life*. Sharpe has also recently published essays on the work of Arthur Jafa, Martine Syms, Luke Willis Thompson, and Emma Amos.

**Ian Williams** is the author of *Personals* (Freehand Books, 2012), a finalist for the Griffin Prize, *Not Anyone's Anything* (Freehand Books, 2011), winner of the Danuta Gleed Literary Award, and *You Know Who You Are* (Wolsak and Wynn, 2010). His first novel, *Reproduction*, is forthcoming from Random House.

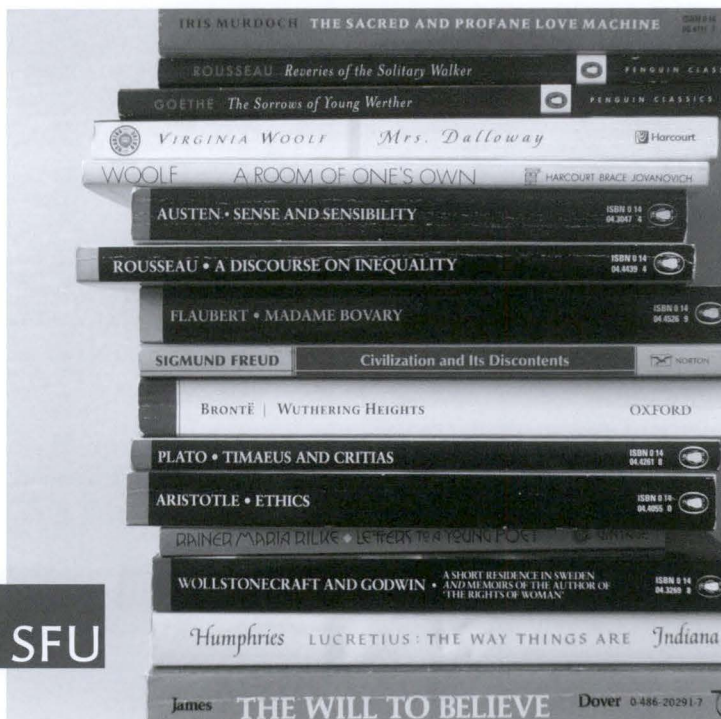
**Marika Yeo** is an emerging artist from Regina, Saskatchewan. She is currently doing an MA in Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Social Justice (with a practice based in Visual Arts) at the University of British Columbia. Her work and research interests focus on race, third space theory, and non-separability—particularly related to her own ancestral roots in West Africa, the Caribbean, and Europe.

The Capilano Review regrets that a printing error occurred in our last issue. Please see the corrected version of Lise Downe's poem "Mystery Train" on our website, [thecapilanoreview.com](http://thecapilanoreview.com).

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