

Intertextuality and Literary Friendship in Caribbean Diasporic Writing  
and "As Man" (Poetry Collection)

by

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation comprises a collection of poetry framed by an introductory essay that foregrounds the aesthetic, archival, and critical impetuses behind the work. Deploying techniques of erasure, found, and lyric poetry, the collection surfaces lyrical subjects and manifests aphoristic affective utterances taken from varied source texts such as letters, memories, and artifacts from my family archives; Joseph Brodsky's *Nativity Poems*; and letters exchanged between two Caribbean diasporic writers living in Canada, Austin Clarke and Sam Selvon. This thesis is embedded within a series of intertextual relationships that instigate poetic and critical explorations of genre, form, and themes within the Anglophone Caribbean literary tradition.

The first section, "Imagining Leaving," consults personal experiences and family histories to stage an inquiry into how diasporic place-making and intergenerational trauma remain central to the constitution of Caribbean subjectivities. The following section, "Natty Oms," engages with Brodsky's *Nativity Poems*, a text that performs diasporic literary community-making through practices of translation of Brodsky's poems by his writer-friends, including the Caribbean writers Derek Walcott and V.S. Naipaul. This thesis produces an erasure poem from Brodsky's work to consider how intimacy, eroticism, and spatial disorientation function as diasporic literary aesthetics. The final section, "As Man," employs techniques of found poetry to signal the role of Canada in Caribbean literary history, as well as to explore diasporic epistolary practices, homosocial intimacies, and Caribbean masculinities.

This dissertation offers three significant contributions to the field of Caribbean and Black diaspora studies. First, through creative practice it renders an account of the personal relations that fuelled Caribbean cultural production among prominent male writers by foregrounding

shared intimacies as opposed to institutional affiliations. Second, it asserts the utility of intertextuality as a creative method, particularly suited to explorations of diaspora, rather than merely as a hermeneutical approach. Lastly, this doctoral thesis advances our understanding of key figures in the development of Anglophone Caribbean literature, insight into production of diasporic aesthetics, and the historical continuities in Caribbean literature across periods and geographies.

## Preface

This dissertation adheres to *The Copyright Act of Canada* which states that "Fair dealing for the purpose of: research; private study; education; parody; criticism and review; and news reporting *does not* infringe copyright." Moreover, in accordance with the legal consensus regarding what amounts to substantial copying, I affirm that in each section of the dissertation, the creative use of found material does not amount to more than ten percent of a given work, nor no more than twenty percent of a published manuscript.

Additionally, some sections of this dissertation have been published in other venues:

1. "Late Winter Epistle" has been published in *Arc Poetry Magazine*. 96 (2021): 72.
2. "June 8, 1979," and "June 20, 1980," have been published in *Pree - Caribbean Writing*, April 2019. <https://preelit.com/2019/04/16/june-8-1979/> and has subsequently been reprinted as "Poems," in *Bookmarked*. PREE Ink. 2021, p. 227.

*To my parents, Colleen and Paul*

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Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought.  
The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems,  
carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives.

— Audre Lorde<sup>1</sup>

Poetry was/is some kind of perfect speech, some way at getting at the core  
of things, their true meanings; some kind of honest submission to life.

— Dionne Brand<sup>2</sup>

To what extent friendship as a vivid idea is *retrospectively* called into  
being, to what extent it is largely if not only an effect of aftermaths, of  
looking back, and for this reason a value recalled principally in tones of  
*elegy*, I can't say. I have the sense, though, that part of what brings  
friendship's virtues into view, or better, into intimate experience, is  
precisely the irreversible vacancy that opens with the loss of friendship's  
company.

— David Scott<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lorde, Audre. "Poetry Is Not a Luxury". *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Crossing P, 1984, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Brand, Dionne. *A Kind of Perfect Speech*. Institute of Coastal Research, 2008, p. 17

<sup>3</sup> Scott, David. "Apology: On Intellectual Friendship." *Stuart Hall's Voice: Intimations of an Ethics of Receptive Generosity*. Duke UP, 2017, p. 9.

## Intertextuality and Literary Friendship in Caribbean Diasporic Writing

### Introduction

This doctoral project mobilizes creative writing practice to explore the complexities of queer postcolonial Caribbean diasporic subjectivity, as well as epistolary and literary intimacies among diasporic male writers in the mid-twentieth century. My interest in these areas of inquiry stems from a desire to understand how creative writing processes, as research methodology, can elucidate "tacit and praxical knowledge[s]" regarding experiences and conceptualizations of diaspora, postcoloniality, and masculinities (Barrett and Bolt 31). Even as critiques of the limits of empirical knowledge proliferate in academic culture, there remains a significant contingent of academics who have expressed suspicion about non-traditional modes of critical inquiry.<sup>4</sup> Like most creative arts research, this project finds its impetus in emotional, personal and subjective concerns. While it is informed by critical discourses and theoretical knowledge rooted in academic rationalism, it also foregrounds tacit knowledge garnered from creative writing processes. Barrett and Bolt in their discussion of situated knowledge and creative research have argued that "an innovative dimension of this subjective approach to research lies in its capacity to bring into view, particularities that reflect new social and other realities either marginalised or not yet recognised in established social practices and discourses" (4). This assertion builds on

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<sup>4</sup> In *Manifesto for the Humanities: Transforming Doctoral Education in "Good Enough" Times* Sidonie Smith contributes to ongoing debates about the future of the Humanities and doctoral education, asserting that new, more expansive conceptualizations of the doctoral dissertation need to be imagined if the Humanities itself is to have a future. Smith champions alternate dissertation forms, suggesting that within the context of the academic job market, if "a finalist for the position submits...a portfolio of several discrete forms directed at different audiences, search committees can get a fuller take on that candidate's scope of interests, maturity of scholarly voice, and flexibility of imagination" ("Responding to Counterarguments"). Smith's argument adds to the growing body of work within the Humanities that contend that alternate forms to the proto-monograph dissertation are equally intellectually rigorous, and necessary in affirming the various modes of scholarly communication. Indeed, Smith argues that "flexibility, expertise in code-switching, the ability to think deeply and across disciplines and networks at once," are skills cultivated through pursuing alternate forms of the dissertation ("Responding to Counterarguments").

Pierre Bourdieu's interventions in the phenomenological tradition, particularly his treatment of knowledge as a practical and embodied exercise, as opposed to a purely cognitive and intellectual activity that is primarily interested in the representation of knowledge.<sup>5</sup> For Bourdieu, tacit and praxical knowledge undergirds all innovation, and yet, "the operation of this logic is often overlooked because it is subsumed into the rational logic of discursive accounts of artistic production" (Barrett and Bolt 4).

My personal and subjective experiences are an important background to this project. I am a Jamaican citizen, born on the traditional homeland of the Taíno, living on the traditional territory of Cree, Blackfoot, Métis, Nakota Sioux, Iroquois, Ojibway/Saulteaux/Anishinaabe, and Dene nations, and homeland of the Métis peoples. I am descended from enslaved Africans who were violently transported to the colonial Caribbean via the trans-Atlantic slave trade between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries to labour on sugar plantations and/or in domestic households. I am also descended from European slaveholders who settled in the Caribbean and participated in and benefited from the trans-Atlantic slave trade. I have lived in both rural and urban areas in Jamaica, and for several months I resided on the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe peoples. I identify as queer Caribbean man, and live with a chronic disability in the form of obsessive compulsive disorder. These varied experiences have resulted in a complex relationship with research and theorizations on race, diaspora, sexuality, masculinities, postcoloniality, and identity. My creative practice is motivated by these individual positionalities and experiences. Through engagement with a range of archival materials, my

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<sup>5</sup> See Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice* Cambridge UP, 1977; and *The Logic of Practice*. Polity P, 1990.

practice considers nationality, transnational identity, friendship and relationships, autobiography, queerness, masculinities, and racial identity.

The aim of this creative research project is to explore the processes involved in developing a postcolonial diasporic aesthetics,<sup>6</sup> as well as to signal the range of creative writing methodologies available in the academy for investigations of both lived and textual intimacies and relationalities. This exegetical introduction, as well as the body of creative work that follows, point to the varied intellectual and creative exercises undertaken to meet these aims. This exegesis provides an overview of the dissertation, elaborating on theorizations and methodologies that comprise the creative section of this project. Following this general theoretical and methodological overview is a breakdown of the three sections of creative writing in this dissertation: "Imagining Leaving," "Natty Oms," and "As Man." In these sections, I make explicit the critical and creative influences on my creative processes; describe the creative work presented; offer contextual information regarding histories of texts and individuals featured throughout the creative component of the project; and engage in some interpretative gestures that aid the reader of this thesis to better understand and appreciate the knowledges this creative project surfaces.

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<sup>6</sup> By postcolonial diasporic aesthetics, I am referring to aesthetic explorations of the concept of "postcolonial diasporas," best articulated by David Chariandy in his article of the same name. Chariandy argues that "we are still struggling to develop adequate terms for the profound socio-cultural dislocations resulting from modern colonialism and nation-building, dislocations epitomized in the histories of indenture, transatlantic slavery, and the expulsion of indigenous peoples from ancestral lands" (para. 1). The work of contending with these histories necessitates developing an understanding of "how historically disenfranchised peoples have developed inventive tactics for transforming even the most sinister experiences of dislocation into vibrant and revolutionary forms of political and cultural life" (para. 1). As an aesthetic, Chariandy argues that "postcolonial diasporas have always indicated something else—irrepressible desires, imagined pasts, projected futures—and that it is precisely this something else, which perhaps cannot but be articulated 'figuratively' or 'metaphorically,' which has helped change the lives not only of self-consciously dislocated peoples, but also all who have found themselves thinking of 'another place, not here.' Indeed, the lesson of diasporic displacement may be this simple, and this politically and theoretically radical: a different space beckons" (para. 22).

*As Man* consists of a book-length collection of lyric, prose, and found poetry. The title of this collection is animated by a number of critical and creative influences. Most explicitly the title of this project is a reference to David Chariandy's remembrance of Austin Clarke, also titled "As Man," wherein Chariandy discusses his relationship with Clarke and his characterization of male characters: "You would always sign your emails to me "As Man," ...I recognized in your writings those characters who understood themselves to be fugitives from conventional masculinity, unwilling or else unable to live up to prescribed ideals and roles" (47). Chariandy's framing of Clarke's interest in vulnerable men is one that has influenced my understanding of Clarke and Selvon, as well as other literary friendships among men; that is, the performative masculinity encapsulated in the signature "As Man" opens a space of irony worthy of inquiry as it is coupled with the intimacy of letter writing, social exchange, and relationality. Consequently, though the title has explicit affiliations with Chariandy's remembrance, it also is evocative of other considerations of Blackness, Humanism, and masculinities undertaken by various critics. Most notable among these are Sylvia Wynter's interventions in critical theory surrounding the violent exclusionary conceptualisations of the Human by European thinkers in the wake of colonization of the Americas<sup>7</sup>; Frantz Fanon's famous declaration that "I am a man and what I have to recapture is the whole past of the world," (226) which similarly seeks to highlight to how notions of objectivity are compromised by Eurocentricity's limited conceptualization of the Human, a phenomenon he characterizes as 'the crisis of European Man'; and Jared Sexton's analysis of the crisis in representation of Black masculinity in popular culture where "black masculine authority have become increasingly important to the maintenance of an antiblack

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<sup>7</sup> See McKittrick, Katherine, ed. *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*. Duke UP, 2015.

social order forged in the epoch of modern racial slavery" (vii). The evocations across critical theory and popular culture that the title does signals the possible reach of this dissertation to a wide range of audiences.

The three sections of poetry that comprise this doctoral project are situated at the intersection of multiple aesthetic and critical theories. The disciplines, creative movements, approaches, and fields of thought that characterize my poetics include Caribbean studies, diaspora studies, lyric conceptualism, masculinities, intertextuality, and sexuality studies. This collection surfaces lyrical subjects and manifests aphoristic affective utterances<sup>8</sup> from varied source texts — Joseph Brodsky's *Nativity Poems*, and the letters exchanged between two Caribbean diasporic writers living in Canada, the Barbadian Austin Clarke and the Trinidadian Samuel "Sam" Selvon — personal memories, and imagined characters. The poems are conceptual insofar as they are interested in the process of making existent language illegible then legible once again and, further, interested *in relation* to other archives, texts, and figures. They are also lyrical in the sense that they offer lyrical subjects shocked into confounding milieus, reaching out for intimacies and belonging, whilst also contending with the resonances of history and the language that surround them.

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<sup>8</sup> This dissertation is not invested in offering a new theorization of affect or making a significant intervention in that field. However, the conceptualization of affect that is most compelling to me and undergirds my invocations in this dissertation holds that "affects are complex and involve aspects of affection and cognition....[F]ollowing Deleuze and Guattari [affects are] the non-actualised part of experience that insists in a state of virtuality" (Åkervall 577-78). Thus, when I invoke affect it is meant to suggest that it emerges from, and insists on, access to a perceptive experience—in the case of this dissertation, of poetry—outside of pure actuality, but complemented by the presence of the virtual. The virtual is "inaccessible to the senses" however, this does not "preclude [the] figuring it, in the sense of constructing images of it, [as I attempt to do in this dissertation,] on the contrary, it requires a multiplication of images. The virtual that cannot be felt also cannot but be felt, in its effects" (Massumi 133).

This project investigates, through poetry, the role of intertextuality and literary friendships in Caribbean diasporic literature. J. Michael Dash suggests that "the only useful approach to [critiquing and creating] Caribbean literature is an intertextual one," an observation which builds on Glissant's conceptualization of the Caribbean as a "multiple series of relationships" (20). This dissertation is embedded within a 'series of relationships' with other texts, and uses these relationships as a point of departure for poetic and critical explorations of genre, form, and themes within the Anglophone Caribbean literary tradition. Intertextuality has a rich history, that is not only about "links and connections between texts," but also "the state of being 'between, among, amid, in between, in the midst' (OED 2018) of texts" (Mason 2). Julia Kristeva popularized the term intertextuality for literary studies and offers a much more capacious definition, claiming that "a text is a permutation of texts, an intertextuality in the space of a given text" (36). Though often mobilized as a critical method of literary and film interpretation, this dissertation employs intertextuality as a creative method. Julie Sanders argues within the field of adaptation studies that "[a]ny exploration of intertextuality, and its specific manifestation in the forms of adaptation and appropriation, is inevitably interested in how art creates art, or how literature is made by literature" (205). Sanders foregrounds the creative

process of adaptation and appropriation as opposed to mimicry,<sup>9</sup> and thus suggests that imagination and creativity are central to employing intertextuality as a creative method.

Focalized in this creative research are literary friendships among male writers in the mid to late twentieth century. While there are many useful canonical theorizations of friendship available — Aristotle, Plato, Cicero, Derrida, Montaigne, Kant, Nietzsche, Schmitt, Blanchot, and Foucault — I am drawn to David Scott's articulation of friendship in *Stuart Hall's Voice: Intimations of an Ethics of Receptive Generosity* because of its attentiveness to Afro-Caribbean masculinities and friendship within intellectual communities. Scott draws on Aristotle, to suggest that "friendship with others is based, first and foremost, on friendship with oneself, or more precisely with the other-in-oneself with whom one feels able to carry on an inner dialogue" (10). This understanding is useful in its elaboration of how friendship functions phenomenologically by implicating oneself in another. This form of relationality, as a frame for my exploration of literary friendship among twentieth century male writers, is instructive in its transgressive potentiality which represents a significant challenge to hegemonic conceptions of Caribbean masculinity. This project considers literary friendships to be a form of intellectual friendship

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<sup>9</sup> The distinction made here is not meant to delimit the potential of mimicry as a disruptive creative and critical method. Indeed, mimicry remains an important concept in post-colonial studies through its effectiveness as a descriptor of the often ambivalent relationship between colonial power and colonized subjects. Among the arsenal of coloniality is the imperative it places on colonized subjects to imitate colonial order through the adoption of "cultural habits, assumptions, institutions, and values (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2007, 125). However, theorists such as Homi Bhabha have argued that the process of mimicry cannot be reduced to the mere act of reproducing colonial values. Bhabha suggests that reading mimicry as a complete reproduction of coloniality among the colonized fails to account for how: i) localized contexts shift the signifying processes of colonial traits; ii) mimicry shares a proximal relationship to forms of parody and mockery which has the potential to destabilize, and limit, the authority of colonial power. Put differently, while mimicry emerges as an imperial strategy for the creation of legible (though still Othered) subjects, it also enacts its own undoing through its insistence on the separability of the colonized subject. This separability then facilitates exposition of the "indeterminacies, contradictions and slippages of imperialism" (Daniels 17). Examples of mimicry functioning as a conceptual and creative method is evinced in the works of V.S. Naipaul, particularly *The Mimic Men* (1967) and *The Mystic Masseur* (1957). For further elaborations on mimicry in postcolonial studies, see Bhabha, Homi. "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." *October* 28 (1984): 125-133.

which solicits "an attitude of attentive receptivity, a readiness to appreciatively hear where the other is coming from" (14). Scott contends, "a large part of what friendship entails, I believe, is precisely this: learning to learn how to listen" (19). This dialogical characterization of friendship is formally represented in the final section of this dissertation through the exchanges between Clarke and Selvon.

The formal techniques of rupture, reorientation, appropriation, and remixing that characterize this dissertation's aesthetics resonate with an understanding of diaspora. Particularly, it echoes critical conceptualizations of the the Black and Caribbean diasporas, as comprising "a field of interchange, complicity, practices of borrowing and mixing of genres" (Antwi 68) that simultaneously "exceeds every attempt for enclosure and containment" (Crawley, "Poetics"). Appropriation of the discursive forms and aesthetic modes of representation of colonial power is employed so that this creative project can more readily intervene in the dominant discourse, interpolate the cultural realities and experiences I describe above, and deploy language to describe the complexities under inquiry to a wider audience of readers (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 17). Put differently, I am interested in appropriation because of its potential to implicate readers through their familiarity with some element of the creative process. Ultimately, this thesis asserts that since language is never truly bound to context, its ability to provoke

resonances across all contexts enplaces us in entanglements with others and subsequently undermines liberal humanist semiotic constructions of the self-possessed human.<sup>10</sup>

### **"Imagining Leaving"**

The first section of this collection, "Imagining Leaving," features multiple forms of poetry: lyric, confessional, prosaic, found, epistolary, haiku, and anaphoric. Many of the poems are in conversation with, and make allusions to, the works of other poets, namely, the late American Claudia Emerson; the Jamaican folklorist Louise Bennett-Coverly, affectionately known as "Miss Lou"; the late Trinidadian poet and activist Colin Robinson; Jamaica's poet laureate Olive Senior; the novelist Jamaica Kincaid; the late Barbadian Canadian writer Austin Clarke; and the Tanzanian Barbadian writer Jane Bryce. These writers' aesthetics inform my own writing. For example, prose poems like "Walking A Pace," "Simeon," and "Carla" resemble the style of Bryce in their brevity, tonal ambivalence, and grounded domesticity. Similarly, poems like "Bioluminescence," "A Niagara Landscape," "Meditation On Blue," "Kingston Haiku," and "Fractioning" demonstrate the influence of Black writers working within the imagist tradition, such as Richard Wright and Sonia Sanchez, who have also shown an affinity for forms such as the haiku. The function of intertextuality in these poems — as they appear via allusions, found material incorporated into the body of the poems, and explicit dedications — signal an entering

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<sup>10</sup> My thinking about the fiction of self-possession and the realization of entanglements has been shaped by various critical communities such as Black feminists, specifically Angela Davis (2011), bell hooks (2018), M. NourbeSe Philip (2017), Dionne Brand (2001), Patricia Powell (2013), Hortense Spillers (1987), Zora Neale Hurston (1935), Saidiya Hartman (1997) and Christina Sharpe (2019); conversations with, and reading works by, Indigenous teachers, namely Reuben Quinn, Dwayne Donald (2004), Sylvia McAdam Saysewahum (2015), and Marilyn Dumont; and Black Studies scholars such as Sylvia Wynter (1984; 1992; 1995; 2000; 2003; 2014), Denise Ferreira da Silva (2014; 2015; 2016), Rinaldo Walcott (2018), Nadi Edwards (2008), Ashon Crawley (2016), and Fred Moten (2017).

into conversation with the Anglophone Caribbean literary tradition. With regards to content, some of the poems reflect the impact of friendships, relations with authority figures encountered as a child, as well as the family relations that inform a sense of self. These personal relations coupled with other poems that more so demonstrate the intertextual creative strategies, position the creative writing in the section "Imagining Leaving" as invested in a poetics of relationality.

Varied thematic concerns can also be observed in the first section of *As Man*. Among the issues explored are migration, complicated intimacies, racism in Canada, domestic conflict, queer diasporic worldmaking, Caribbean cultural inter-nationalism, mental health crises, colonial histories, masculinities, postcolonial ecologies, Caribbean diasporic family relations, individual and cultural fragmentation, and childhood trauma. These poems work towards highlighting the centrality of the varied relationships — familial, ecological, intertextual, cross-national, and historical — that constitute Caribbean constructions of selfhood. As these poems operate within an Anglophone Caribbean literary tradition, they also fulfill particular culturally-specific aesthetic aims. In "Making West Indian Literature," the Jamaican poet and critic Mervyn Morris asks: "Why do we read, why do we write, West Indian Literature? Hopefully, because it gives us pleasure. But also, no doubt, because it helps us examine and reaffirm — perhaps reconstitute — ourselves" (5). The impulse Morris identifies is admirable, and yet an impossible task. The reconstitution of "ourselves" is telling of the early aspirations of Caribbean writers to understand themselves in humanist terms. However, as interventions in Black studies show— particularly the attention paid to the writings of Sylvia Wynter, Jared Sexton, Frank B. Wilderson III, Hortense Spillers, Édouard Glissant, Denise Ferreira da Silva, and Saidiya Hartman, the project of the self-possessed liberal human subject is one that is foundationally racist, colonial, and both

structurally and symbolically violent. As such, while I agree with Morris's affirmation of pleasure as an aim of the processual work of this creative project, I insist that the goal is less so to reconstitute a culturally nationalist vision of the human subject, but rather to demonstrate the capacity that creative work has to implicate readers in the imagined lives of others. Put differently, my work emerges alongside an imperative anti-coloniality which seeks to provoke an ethic that refuses a coherent self, opting instead for a multi-layered, polyvocal lyrical consciousness rooted in affectability.<sup>11</sup>

### "Natty Oms"

The second section of this collection is an erasure of Joseph Brodsky's *Nativity Poems*. The title of this section is connotative of multiple concepts: the late 18th century slang denoting neatness; the nattiness (knottedness) of intertextuality that this project is engaged in; and the figure of the Natty Dread, a slang for adherents of Rastafari, a religious movement indexed to Afro-Jamaican social, material, and cultural liberation politics. This collection is significant as it was translated by many of Brodsky's writer-friends, among them Seamus Heaney, Derek Walcott, V.S. Naipaul, Richard Wilbur, and Anthony Hecht. I am interested in Brodsky's *Nativity Poems* because it demonstrates a collective translation effort which undermines the notion of a

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<sup>11</sup> The invocation of polyvocal resonates with Natalie Loveless's theorization on the polydisciplinatory impulses of research creation projects. Drawing on queer conceptualizations of polyamory, Loveless asserts that "theoretical polyamory informs and re-forms the approach to interdisciplinarity—the organizations of knowledge, attention to hegemonic power structures, and intergenerational reproductions— demanded by research-creation" (63). Loveless argues that "[t]raditional interdisciplinarity, with its intertheory thrust, could be said to be about *who* (which disciplines) one commits to, while research-creation, as a *polydisciplinamorous* orientation, becomes about *how* one commits to producing new kinship ties not only in terms of *content* (the 'who?') but in terms of *form* (the 'how?')" (63; emphasis in original). Though this dissertation is explicitly grounded in the field of creative writing as opposed to research creation — a neologism whose popularity coincides with an increasingly brand-conscious neoliberal academy — Loveless's insight is useful in so far as it supports the capacious intertextual and formally heterogenous scope of this project.

singular authoritative writer; it is a testament to the generative and productive capacities of literary friendship; and it is an exemplar of a diasporic poetics — Brodsky was a part of the Russian and Jewish diasporas, and resided in the United States — that is characterized by mythmaking, isolation, and the tension between tradition and novelty. The Caribbean connection to Brodsky's collection makes the poetry an extension of the histories that I understand to constitute myself manifested in the translation poetics of Walcott and Naipaul. The bilingual edition of Brodsky's *Nativity Poems*, the source text of "Natty Oms," was published posthumously. Despite being a secular Jew, Brodsky is said to have written a poem for every Christmas from 1962 to 1995. These poems were initially published across numerous outlets, such as *The New Yorker*, *The New York Review of Books*, *The New Republic*, *Paris Review*, among others. In an interview with Peter Vail appended to the back of *Nativity Poems*, Brodsky explained his motivations for composing these poems, which were compiled into a single collection in December 2001:

I wrote the first Nativity poems, I think, in Komarovo. I was living at a dacha, I don't remember whose, though it might have been Academician [Aksel] Berg's. And there I cut a picture out of a Polish magazine, I think it was *Przekrój*. The picture was *Adoration of the Magi*, I don't remember by whom. I stuck it on the ceramic stove and often looked at it in the evenings. It burned later on, the painting, and the stove, and the dacha itself. But at the time I kept on looking and decided to write a poem on the same subject. That is, it all began not from religious feelings, or from Pasternak or Eliot, but from a painting.  
(106)

In a news report on his win of the 1987 Nobel Prize for Literature, Brodsky is reported as saying "he would have preferred V. S. Naipaul, the novelist born in Trinidad, as a

winner" ("Exiled Soviet Poet...").<sup>12</sup> Although Brodsky showed great affinity towards Naipaul, one which was clearly reciprocated as evinced by Naipaul's diligent translation in *Nativity Poems*, Brodsky's most prominent literary friendship is the one he shared with the St. Lucian poet and fellow Nobel Prize laureate, Derek Walcott. In an interview with Edward Hirsch, Walcott recalls first meeting Brodsky at Robert Lowell's funeral in the Fall of 1977: "[t]he affection that developed after that was very quick and, I think, permanent—to be specific about this is hard" (119). Though Walcott and Brodsky emerged from disparate cultural contexts, they forged an intimacy and literary friendship that sustained their own writing practices, as they offered inspiration and community to each other. Boston was the locus of Brodsky and Walcott's friendship; it is the city Walcott refers to as the "city of my exile" in his sequence of poems *Midsummer* (43). However, Walcott clarifies in an interview that "real exile means a complete loss of home. Joseph Brodsky is an exile; I'm not really an exile. I have access to my home" (Baer 116). So, though not technically exiles, Walcott and Brodsky were migrants to a different country than their own. Consequently, Boston became for them not only a "contact zone" which functioned as a "social space where disparate cultures [met, clashed and grappled] with each other" (Pratt 4), but also a space that allowed new intimacies to be borne out of a "shared catastrophe" (qtd. in Bucknor 60) of arrival for the formerly colonized subject, Walcott and the Jewish exile, Brodsky.

In my erasure and transformation of *Nativity Poems* into "Natty Oms," I employ a white-out erasure form popularized by the American poet Mary Ruefle. In a review of Ruefle's book-length work of erasure *A Little White Shadow*, Douglas Luman argues:

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<sup>12</sup> V.S. Naipaul did go on to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2001.

While many found poetry books opt for their own formats, Ruefle's is constructed to be as close a facsimile to the original as can be easily reproduced; the pages are archival photo quality copies of the mark-outs – preserving the typography, color, and the sense of texture (even if not able to reproduce the actual sensation). Rather than remove the book from history and forcibly make it contemporary, *A Little White Shadow* is endowed with a kind of historical status and significance that makes it artifact rather than mere artifice. ("Book Review: A Little White Shadow")

Like Ruefle, I make photocopies of my white-outs of Brodsky's *Nativity Poems*, retaining the texture of the white-out and the page themselves. Through this intervention with the materiality of the page, I attend to the collection in the same manner Roland Barthes might in his reference to the text as "a fetish object" (27), wherein, as an erasure poet, my work is concerned with "materializing the pleasure of the text, in making the text an object of pleasure like the others" (58). It is my artistic intention that by picking lines, words, phrases, and letters from the source text, I can generate new meaning whilst also returning readers to their consideration of the physical page as an object, indeed, a viewing of the page as a poetic text in its materiality and as a product of different relationships.

"Natty Oms" is a work of lyric conceptualism, a term coined by Sina Queyras which they position as a blend of conceptualism, in its foregrounding of appropriation, and the lyric form, in its surfacing and valuing of subjectivity. As Queyras notes:

Lyric Conceptualism accepts the tension between the self and the poetic subject, wrestling always with the desire to give over to the poem and to be the poet in the poem.... Lyric Conceptualism is not bound to appropriation. It is not bound to indoors.... The Lyric Conceptualist is a trough that catches the excess, the off cuts, the remnants, the offal of language. (261-63)

Beyond the pleasure of the process, I am interested in the utterances that emerge from a lyrical subject in between the blank space made by white-out. The subject that manifests is one who

finds themselves in somewhere new, alone, and trying to make sense of their own disorientation in a foreign space. The lyrical subject is one who is subjected to the compressions of global capital, such as when the subject expresses: "you catch yourself / like refugee / on the street, / pocket slapping, / hot air. / schlepping along / groaning / for a little" (84). Furthermore, the subject's experiences in "Natty Oms" suggest the erotics of diaspora,<sup>13</sup> which are often understated in critical and creative works. I attempt to suggest how migration renders individuals open to differing intimacies: "a / crowded affair / a threesome s c / rewing, / Above their encampment, the sky / had no place to go" (88). The coupling of the abjection of an encampment and the erotics evident render a stunning and lasting image that engenders a consideration of diasporic life beyond its stereotypical portrayal as only concerned with alienation and belonging rather than precarious and paralyzing material conditions.

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<sup>13</sup> The most popular elaboration of the function of erotics in critical inquiry is found in Audre Lorde's "The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power." Lorde writes: "When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives" (89). Lorde's conception of the erotic does not reflect gender essentialism, indeed, she states early on that "the erotic is a resource within each of us" (87). The Jamaican-American writer Patricia Powell draws on Lorde's erotics in "A Search for Caribbean Masculinities" and extends the discussion to consider its role in revolutionizing Caribbean masculinities. Powell writes: "In my mind, authentic feminine is something more intrinsic, an immense power source that is innate to both men and women and waiting to be tapped" (8). Powell encourages creative writers to invoke the erotic to bring about change in our societies; "As writers we can begin this process with the way we know best, through stories. Stories as we know carry energy.... We can infuse the feminine into our stories to create change. We can infuse this marriage of the feminine and masculine into our stories to create balance. A new story can help bring about a shift in consciousness. A new story can restore balance and harmony in our lives. A new story can reconfigure the psyche, can heal us, transform us, and create social change in our societies. New stories can be salve. They can be the antidote to the ills we know and face daily. They can affect our states of mind. They can help us thrive" (9).

## "As Man"

The final section of this collection, "As Man," consists of a suite of dramatic monologues<sup>14</sup> adapted from correspondences between the Barbadian writer Austin Clarke and the Trinidadian writer Samuel "Sam" Selvon. My approach to "As Man" is inspired, in part, by the poetry and scholarship of Mervyn Morris. Morris's poetry hovers over the entirety of this collection. Regarded as a poet concerned with brevity and concise utterances of subjective truth, Morris's writing promises moments of realization and self-recognition for its readers. The final section "As Man" most resembles Morris's *On Holy Week*, a series of dramatic monologues reimagining the crucifixion of Jesus according to Christian tradition in Jamaican nation language. These poems, like Morris's, are interested in voice and relationality. *On Holy Week* was initially produced for radio and so, too, the poems that constitute "As Man" pay attention to sound and also incorporate Caribbean nation language to signify the particular cultural context of the postcolonial Caribbean and its diaspora. The late Barbadian scholar and poet Kamau Brathwaite coined the term nation language in his pioneering work, *History of the Voice*, wherein he writes:

We in the Caribbean have a [...] kind of plurality: we have English, which is the imposed language on much of the archipelago. It is an imperial language, as are French, Dutch and Spanish.... We have also what is called nation language, which is the kind of English spoken by the people who were brought to the Caribbean, not the official English now, but the language of slaves and labourers, the servants who were brought in. (5-6)

In addition to Brathwaite, Morris was among the first critics to suggest "the importance of nation language in helping to define in verse [sic] important aspects of [Caribbean] culture" ("Professor

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<sup>14</sup> I refer to these poems as dramatic monologues, though they might also be considered to be an example of the poetic form of the epistle. Dramatic monologue in this context refers to what I see as the performative potential of these poems in various media, though I acknowledge that for readers encountering this work in print, the epistle would be a more appropriate descriptor, especially as the source text of these poems were in fact, letters.

Mervyn Morris Named..."). Morris acknowledges V.S. Reid's *New Day* (1949) as the first novel to use the Jamaican language as the language of narration; and his seminal 1967 essay "On Reading Louise Bennett, Seriously," which was serialized in *The Sunday Gleaner*,<sup>15</sup> argues for the importance of acknowledging Bennett as a "poet of serious merit" as opposed to a mere entertainer due to her use of Jamaican language and folklore (197). Morris's early criticism paved the way for later scholars to critically attend to the presence of nation language in Caribbean literature.<sup>16</sup>

Since the mid-twentieth century, the increasing focus on language in West Indian criticism, the rise of the Black Power movement in the Caribbean, and the popularity of dub poetry internationally, has motivated Caribbean writers to experiment with the use of nation language in their writing.<sup>17</sup> Brathwaite asserts that "African culture not only crossed the Atlantic, it crossed, survived and creatively adapted itself to its new environment" (192). This crossing of culture has been extended to an understanding of the cultural retentions of Caribbean descendants of Indian indentured labourers, such as Sam Selvon, whose ancestors crossed the

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<sup>15</sup> The Sunday paper edition of *The Gleaner*, a daily newspaper published by Gleaner Company Ltd. based in Kingston, Jamaica. *The Gleaner* is the oldest continuously published newspaper in the Western Hemisphere having been published continuously from 13 September 1834 to present.

<sup>16</sup> See Pollard, Velma. *Dread Talk: The Language of the Rastafari*. McGill-Queen's UP, 2000; Hodge, Merle. "The Language of Earl Lovelace." *Anthurium A Caribbean Studies Journal*, vol. 4, no. 2, July 2006, doi:10.33596/anth.80; and Etherington, Ben. "On Scanning Louise Bennett Seriously." *Journal of West Indian Literature*, vol. 23, no. 1–2, *Journal of West Indian Literature*, 2015, pp. 19–34; and Lalla, Barbara, et al. *Caribbean Literary Discourse: Voice and Cultural Identity in the Anglophone Caribbean*. U of Alabama P, 2014 for further studies on nation language in Caribbean literature.

<sup>17</sup> For elaborations on the relationship between Black Power and dub poetry, see Morris, Mervyn "A Note on Dub Poetry," *Wasafiri* 13, no. 26 (1997): 66–69; and "Dub Poetry?," *Caribbean Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (1997): 1–10; Meeks, Brian. "Reading the Seventies in a Different Style: Dub, Poetry, and the Urgency of Message." *Small Axe* 23.1 (2019): 112–33; Dilger, Gerhard. "Only a revolution can bring about a solution." *Us/Them*. Brill, 1992. 249–55; Chambers, Eddie. "The Jamaican 1970s and Its Influence on the Making of Black Britain." *Small Axe* 23.1 (2019): 134–49. For an study of early performance poetry across the anglophone Caribbean, see also Julie Pearn, "Poetry as a Performing Art in the English-Speaking Caribbean" (PhD diss., University of Sheffield, 1985).

*Kala Pani* as opposed to the Black Atlantic. *Kala Pani* refers to the concept commonly used to describe "the 'black waters,' the 'forbidden' sea between India and the Americas" (Misrahi Barak 18). Bearing the presence of Indo-Caribbean peoples in mind, one is then forced to amend Brathwaite's historicizing of nation language in the Caribbean and insist that the language of many Caribbean people, regardless of their respective ancestries, moved from a "purely African [and Indo-Aryan] form to a form that was African [and Indo-Aryan], but which was adapting to the new environment and to the cultural imperatives of the European languages" (qtd. in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 281).<sup>18</sup> The language mobilized in "As Man," then, is one which bears the impact of multiple forced and coerced migrations to the Caribbean. It is an exemplar of what Glissant, in his elaborations on nation language, has called a forced poetics, a poetics that "emerges from this opposition between a *langue* [sic] that one uses and a *langage* that one needs" (237). Put differently, it is the strategic language used by disenfranchised peoples in order to engender an intimacy outside of, or at the very least parallel to, the colonial languages which may foreclose relationality, as a result of how the language of imperial colonization has been used historically and contemporaneously to enforce structures of domination and subordination. Consequently, my prioritizing of nation language in "As Man" is informed by a desire to stage the ongoing creolizing negotiations of varied histories of arrival, racination, and creolization through an intimate diction.

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<sup>18</sup> Examples of the languages formed in the new environment of the Caribbean include Caribbean Hindustani, based on Bhojpuri and Awadhi, and spoken predominantly in Guyana, Trinidad, and Suriname; Papiamentu, a Spanish Creole language with admixtures of Portuguese and Dutch, spoken in Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao; Kreyòl, influenced by Spanish, English, Portuguese, Taino, and other West African languages, spoken in Haiti; Jamaican Patois, whose words are mostly African in origin, primarily from Twi (a dialect of Akan), but also contains influences from English, Spanish, Portuguese, Hindi, Arawak as well as Scottish and Irish dialects; among other English, Spanish, and French based creole languages spoken throughout the Caribbean.

The poems in "As Man" explore Selvon's move from the United Kingdom to Western Canada, and the role that Clarke played in aiding him. This suite, as well the letters on which they are based, offer a representation of what Michael Bucknor has called the "virtual transnational community of affective alliance that provided the solidarity, support, and improvisational collaboration that gave [Caribbean diasporic writers in the late twentieth century opportunities] ... for economic sustenance, even as they preserved their humanity and agency in the economy of cultural production" (52). They demonstrate the affective affiliations and friendship sought out by both writers as a means to better navigate social, political, and economic life in the diaspora.<sup>19</sup> The form of the letter in relation to Caribbean friendship and masculinities is explored by David Scott, who argues:

[T]he letter is potentially the literary embodiment of a quality of relationship that might be called, simply, friendship. As a way of keeping company with special others, the letter seems to me uniquely able to disclose, or, less passively, to enact, some of the relational sentiments and virtues we commonly think of as internal to friendship: among them (and in no particular order), affection, loyalty, indulgence, sympathy, complementarity, tolerance, equality, stability, candor, respect, truthfulness, liberality, trustworthiness. In this sense, more than any other literary form, I believe, the letter has the capacity to honor friendship—to give friendship its measure and its due. (7-8)

The poems aim to imitate the form of the letter through its inclusion of elements of letter writing: location, date, and time of writing. Moreover, the relationship between the two men is further exemplified in the epistolary form through the arrangement of the poems themselves which signal the "relational sentiments and virtues we commonly think of as internal to friendship" (8).

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<sup>19</sup> In this instance, the invocation of affect refers to Leela Gandhi's *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* where affective affiliations refer to transnational friendships and "crosscultural collaboration" (6).

Additionally, this suite of poems serve to expand our understanding of Canada's relationship to Caribbean diasporic cultural production, shifting away from the established narratives that foreground migration to the UK and subsequent movements to the United States as central to the development of Caribbean literature. Moreover, among the most important revelations in these poems are the deep love and affection both men had for each other as well as the possibilities for performing Caribbean masculinities rooted in humour, kinship, shared understanding and compassion they make available through their exchanges.<sup>20</sup> Through their affective epistolary practices, Clarke and Selvon engender a counter-discursive text to hegemonic masculinity in the Caribbean, which is often characterized by a lack of sentimentality as well as exaggerated performances of patriarchal power, misogyny, and homophobia.

"As Man" is interested in how homosocial bonds inform masculine performances. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who popularized homosociality in critical discourse, defines these relations as "social bonds between persons of the same sex," which can be characterized as a mutual desire or recognition of the other that serves as "the affective or social force...that shapes an important relationship" (1-2). As I have argued elsewhere, masculinity within homosocial encounters is positioned as vulnerable because of its inherent performativity.<sup>21</sup> As Brenda Boudreau asserts, "if masculinity is a display...it is also vulnerable to being revealed as false; if it can be worn, it can

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<sup>20</sup> Kris Singh's doctoral project *Caribbean Immigrants in Relationship: Tracing the Transnational Connections between Austin Clarke and Samuel Selvon* provides a detailed critical study of the correspondence between these writers and argues that through their personal relationship and literary production, "Clarke and Selvon investigate how social reality is encoded, inscribed, and naturalized while also suggesting the transformative potential of the social practices of Caribbean immigrants" ("Abstract"). See also, in a special issue of *The Puritan* dedicated to Austin Clarke's legacy, "'Bread like peas!': The Gastronomical Dialogue of Austin Clarke and Sam Selvon" wherein Singh considers the role of food in Selvon and Clarke's correspondence.

<sup>21</sup> See Bogle, Cornel. "The Spatial Politics of Homosociality in Austin Clarke's *In This City*." *Studies in Canadian Literature*, vol. 43, no. 1, Mar. 2019, for an elaboration of masculinities, homosociality, and spatiality in Austin Clarke's fiction.

also be stripped away, demonstrating the tenuousness of masculinity" (qtd. in Sargent 7). Homosocial bonds, like those in this suite of poems based on Selvon and Clarke's letters, necessitate performative gestures, as Diana Sargent notes: "the more closely men associate, the more they are apt to express a hatred and fear of homosexuality; male homosociality seems to require extreme homophobia" (11). "As Man" presents and probes these nuances of masculine performance as affected by homosociality in order to highlight the ways in which lived experiences of Caribbean masculinities are far more fluid than hegemonic constructions of Caribbean masculinity intimates.<sup>22</sup>

## Conclusion

This doctoral project is appended with explanatory notes that clarify culturally specific terms that may not be immediately accessible to non-Anglophone Caribbean audiences. Additionally, this dissertation concludes with a brief biographical sketch, a convention of dissertations featuring creative writing in North America. This sketch, as well as the reading bibliography which precedes it, offers context to some of the inspirations and motivations for my writing; together the two also function as paratextual cues for hermeneutical approaches that may be taken by readers. This thesis is informed by many of the fields I have already outlined, but it

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<sup>22</sup> For critical elaborations on Caribbean masculinities, see Bucknor, Michael A. "On Caribbean Masculinities." *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* 10.2 (2013): 1-4; "Dangerous Crossings: Caribbean Masculinities and the Politics of Challenging Gendered Borderlines." *Journal of West Indian Literature* (2012): vii-xxx; "Staging seduction: Masculine Performance or the Art of Sex in Colin Channer's Reggae Romance *Waiting in Vain?*." *Interventions* 6.1 (2004): 67-81; Bucknor, Michael A., and Conrad James. "'Cock Mouth Kill Cock': Language, Power and Sexual Intimacy in Constructions of Caribbean Masculinities." *Caribbean Quarterly* (2014): 1-7; Reddock, Rhoda. "Indo-Caribbean Masculinities and Indo-Caribbean Feminisms: Where Are We Now?." *Indo-Caribbean Feminist Thought* (2016): 263-82; Cummings, Ronald. "Jamaican female masculinities: Nanny of the Maroons and the genealogy of the man-Royal." *Journal of West Indian Literature* (2012): 129-54; and Smith, Craig A. "Scenes of Trauma: Violent Rites, Migration, and the Performance of Afro-Caribbean Masculinities" (PhD diss., University of Florida, 2010).

also operates within the field of creative writing research/studies as an exemplar of *research into creative writing*, that is "a mode of academic work that involves investigating the history, traditions and theoretical frameworks... of particular forms of art practice"; and *research through creative writing*, "a process of making pieces of creative writing and reflecting consciously on an element of technical expertise" (Webb 13). The writing of this project necessitated inquiry into the traditions, aesthetics, and techniques associated with Caribbean literary practice, Caribbean Canadian poetics, Canadian conceptualism, the haiku, microfiction, prose poetry, found poetry, and imagist poetics. The findings of my research are evident in my poetry's craft and techniques. Additionally, this doctoral project demonstrates the process of *research through creative writing* by reflecting on the themes and technical approaches used in this collection within this introduction where I have delineated the influences and craft concerns of my work. My goal is that this thesis can be a site of multiple affects for readers and a useful document for other creative writers in the field of creative writing research/studies, who can model the approaches I demonstrate here. *As Man* contributes to knowledge about creative practice within Canada and the Caribbean and provides new ways of understanding the lyrical subject, queer Jamaican identity, diasporic negotiations of belonging, literary friendships, cross-cultural intimacies, and figures of import in both Caribbean and Caribbean Canadian diasporic literary traditions.

## Imagining Leaving

[We] become our home-selves most in places away from that home – like my middle class Jamaican friends who having migrated to places in the United States like Ohio found the sudden ability to speak a Caribbean dialect they had never dared speak in their very proper houses, or even like the man I met years ago in Toronto, who had lived there for over twenty years, dismissed the possibility of ever going back to Jamaica, 'Me' he said, "Mi naah guh back deh? No sah! Mi naah tell nuh lie. Mi hate Jamaica, Mi bitter it. Me'd a nevah guh back!" And in a voice that had firmly rooted itself in a country, he was declaring his exile from it. Impossible, I thought, you've already taken the island with you.

— Kei Miller, "But in Glasgow, There are Plantains"<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Miller, Kei. "But in Glasgow there are plantains." *International Journal of Scottish Literature* vol. 4, 2008.

## **Late Winter Epistle**

*after Claudia Emerson*

I told you I was relieved when the old  
furnace refused another winter, when I

wouldn't have to bear another season of  
arms, legs going numb, cold air

surviving the constant reach for the blanket chest.  
you thought it would have outlived the locusts,

push itself through one last mild, shallow winter.  
but now, we grow accustomed to the billing-purr

of electric lightning; warmth's new origin.

## **While You Were Away**

*for Frente*

I inspected the tiny knick-knacks scattered throughout the house.  
The porcelain figurine of a mother with a baby in her arms  
wrapped in a white blanket, the blue and white ceramic hat  
with a small hairline crack, and the humpty dumpty doorstops.

I tended to the deaf cat. Snuck from behind so she wouldn't  
notice me traipsing towards her with the insulin needle.  
I held onto her gently-tightly and whispered calming words  
all the while fighting the urge to sneeze.

I raided your fridge (as you instructed me to) and helped myself  
to the gourmet cheeses, craft beers, cured meats, decadent  
dried apricots, and occasional raspberry sorbet.

I looked through your records and played Blondie's  
*Parallel Lines* while I laid on the bleached ivory carpet  
staring at the sloped ceiling and its exposed beams.

I went into your office and rubbed the spines of books  
I'll never read. I noticed the small corner nook  
where you stored the tender notes you wrote  
to your wife before she passed.

I went out every morning to clear snow from the front  
sidewalk and throw salt onto the walkway. And it was

there that I informed your fretful neighbour that I'd  
been cat-sitting while you were away.

## **Unfinished**

you called me into the dark room  
where a bat sat on the sideboard.

you had let it fall where it wanted,  
for you didn't want to kill.

so I flung open the window,  
walked towards and spoke, urged it,  
striking the ground beneath.

## **Imagining Leaving**

*after Colin Robinson*

At the tourist shop I show my friend the souvenirs worth buying: rum cream, cold-pressed coconut oil, cookbooks, colourful paintings, wood carvings, leather sandals, and local coffee. She asks if I will buy something to take back to the cold country, and I say no, this has been my life. Walking out of the shop onto stepping stones, we laugh at the impossibility of actually returning to any place we once called home, the resentments we always carry; the conflicts left unresolved upon leaving; and the invisible breach between who you are seen to be (foreigner) versus who you actually are (citizen) — we appropriate the law of diminishing returns, redefining it as the widening gaps between the years that you can bear the journey back home. Turning the corner we see teenage boys, one twisting himself, angling to take a photo of the two of them together. My friend and I share a knowing glance and she offers to take their photo, tells them to get close to each other, which they do.

It's then I remember that time my ex tried to kiss me at the park (how afraid I was then) and how I pushed him away. I wonder if the times have changed in the three years it's taken me to come back, or if I just lacked the courage they have. At their age all I could do imagine was leaving, but

they have put their trust in imagining themselves here.

## **Edmonton Dub**

how far had I come to be here now surrounded  
by all kinds of white

taxis just starting the night promise safe passage  
through the darkest white

the life I find upon landing made promises  
it could never keep

from land of wood and water, I now  
on the turtle's back struggling to sleep

## **After Louise Bennett's "Jamaica Elevate"**

Biff, independence!

Buff, IMF!

Baps, see neoliberalism drop pon we!

## For My Friend Who Calls

to share the news of her impending suicide  
only to hear that the line is busy,  
I am a bastard betraying her  
choosing not to hear her final words, again.

Calling back minutes later,  
ready fi nyam mi  
I hear not a voice of despair  
but a cross woman cussin' me out  
bout how I inconsiderate,  
chatting up some man  
making late night plans  
instead ah listening  
as her head take her far far away.

But I pay her no mind as  
she cuss and trace till har  
head find it way back and we move  
into our usual rhythm of susu,  
wondering *when since Keisha*  
*and Crystal tun friend again?*  
and *which man Tanya ah*  
*hol' down dis' month?*

In the space between  
laughter and whispers

she start to forget herself in  
the stories of someone else.

## **A Niagara Landscape**

at port dalhousie we follow  
our reflections  
in the pallid lake

weighing the promise  
of freedom 'gainst the  
vast stretches of stolen land

## **Meditation On Blue**

*after Olive Senior*

the blue haze of tobacco smoke  
blue house with white shutters  
blue with cold

things looked blue  
argued until he was blue in the face  
then disappeared

the blue barrel of the gun  
their blueing fingers  
and the deep blue sea

## **Say you were**

a black woman in jamaica during the 1980s. you just married a white man, despite all the warnings by your family that you an ‘im nuh mek from di

same claat. you love him. his family is kind. so kind that his cousin invites you to stay at her house in kingston one weekend while she and her family

go on vacation to their cottage on the north coast. your husband is away at seminary. the country is in the middle of a politically motivated civil war.

so you say yes to the kind kin that offers you her house uptown, where things are supposed to be ‘safe’. when you get to their house they are

already gone. the key is left under a potted plant. you settle into the house and take a nap. you hear someone knocking on the grill. they shout the

name of your cousin-in-law’s husband. you look out the slit of the window facing the front yard. you see three men with guns trying to break in. a

police siren goes off in the distance and scares the men. after that weekend, when you’re back in your own house in the area that isn’t as

‘safe’ your husband calls the landline. he says his cousins fled the country to miami. he says he heard that his cousin’s husband received threats

because of his political activism. at this point you stop listening to your husband giving you the details, why they made you go to the house even

though they knew you would not be safe. you wonder why they even needed someone to stay at the house at all, why not just flee without

putting someone else in danger. the answers to these questions will evade you for thirty years until when, in the middle of a pandemic, you confront

the cousin in miami. at the time it happens, you don't desire answers. you already know why, though later in your life you begin to forget. just like

you did the memory of the first time you met your husband's cousins, and they thought you were the maid.

## **Bioluminescence**

summer nights peenie wallies

shatter sleep's sweet silence

pealing long songs of light

## Simeon

Simeon walks towards the closed door. He takes his time, slowly balancing the tray in his hands. He is practicing what he'll say over and over. "Aunty Marie" he says in his head, wondering why he even bothers to call her aunty. He wonders why bother with this pretending like we are kin. He's at the age where this kind of reverence for elders appears suspect, a sign of giving into some kind of authority that doesn't make sense. He understands why he has to be nice to his parents, his teachers, etc. But his mother's friend? Some church lady? His sister? All this seems unnecessary. He thinks, this is the fault of colonialism really, this faux respect for authority. And for what? But he never says these things out loud. He thinks that by whispering under his breath, by ranting on reddit, by keeping it to himself, he's being a survivor. He's going to survive this place and then he can burn it down, all of it, the rules, the demands, everything. So for now he waits, he practices so he doesn't have to spend longer than he needs to. He can just get it out then leave. "Aunty Marie," he says aloud finally as he knocks on the door. "Simeon, is that you? Yes dear, hol' on a minute"

"Yes, mommy just send me to give you some dinner. She says you don't need to join us, you can eat in here if it more comfortable. It's just some beef soup and some water crackers on the side" She opens the door and with a strained whisper says "oh thank you dear, I don't know if I can eat this much but I will see"

"Just hold on, I going to get the water, don't close the door yet Aunty"

## Kingston Haiku

in decrepit towns  
poincianas chandelier  
streets during summer nights

the mountains I grew up with  
were bookends  
making sure I was held tight

it's been four years now  
since I found pewees  
bathing in my kitchen sink

## Now Let's Say

you were a black girl in kingston during the 1960s. your country is newly independent, but this means very little for your life beyond there being a new flag. you're too young to even notice there was an old flag to begin with. your father, who at this time still lives with your mother, takes you to

school on his bicycle every morning. one evening he tells your mother he is leaving for england. he tells her about a recruitment advertisement for tradesmen like him. he says it will be good for the family. he tells your mother he will be able to better provide for you if he can earn a living

wage. he says he will go first then send for you and your mother. before you know it, he's gone on a ship. he writes letters every now and then. he tells your mother to prepare documents for immigration, get passport-sized photos taken, and wait. he stops writing. he stays in england his entire life

and starts a new family. his new wife is a friend of your mother from jamaica. his wife calls your mother, filled with guilt, to apologize for her sins. he returns to jamaica for special occasions. he walks you down the aisle. his wife sends you a wedding gift: a set of towels you never use. he

sends a card for christmas and your birthday. when you have your first child he sends you a letter with £50. when you have your second child, he sends nothing. when your son asks if we can visit him, you say he has never invited us. when he dies, your closest cousin tells you that you

should go to the funeral in england. you say no, you can't afford the trip. this is not a priority for you. you have never been to england. he leaves nothing for you in his will. in a drawer in your house in jamaica you have a copy of his funeral program given to you by your cousin. to the side of

the program is a wooden coin box in the shape of a heart that your father made for your mother when they were together. on the top of the box is an inscription that you run your finger over whenever you come across it. it reads: aw + em, forever in love.

## **Fractioning**

*after Jamaica Kincaid's The Autobiography of my Mother*

half of the tree was alive

half of it was dead

I would rather be all

dead or all alive

but never half of one

and half of the other

perhaps half the world feels that way

half clothed

half-empty

tilted half open

halfway across

halfway there

## **In This City**

for a man of his age he remains in pretty good shape. he was never exceptionally handsome, but in his sixties, he still goes around the city looking like billy dee williams with the swagger of flavor flav.

he doesn't necessarily have the game that he used to, but he still manages to turn heads. it's mostly the young black men on church street who holler at their elder with the occasional "yass daddy". he

enjoys this attention. when he had just arrived in this city, he never walked anywhere, for he preferred to drive around, surrendering to the discretion of tinted windows. he justified this by reminding

himself of how visibility back home almost cost him his life. he thought back to walking the streets of port antonio after school one day and encountering a group of boys who thought his body was a

piece of paper. they believed that if they applied enough pressure, he could be crumpled up and thrown away. now in this city, where he has lived for over thirty years, he has resolved to walk this street every day to remind himself that there is always a way to open up and smooth out the wrinkles of your life.

## **After The Fight**

The smoke detector goes off and I rush to the burning pot.

He leans against the refrigerator watching me pour water,

still bitter about what I had said this morning.

## **A Form Where Form Shall Not Hold**

**Jamaica is** one of that group called "The Antilles" and, although by no means the largest, is nevertheless certainly the island of most consequence to Great Britain

**Jamaica is** merely intended to gratify

**Jamaica is** 150 miles long by 55 broad, and contains about 4,000,000 of acres

**Jamaica is**, generally speaking, extremely hot, throughout the whole year

**Jamaica, is**, notwithstanding, well acquainted with the colonies in the Caribbean Sea

**Jamaica is** ridiculed for having treated of a *distemper* (as they call the poison of serpents) that never occurs there

**Jamaica is** British in virtue of conquest, Barbados is British in virtue of settlement

**Jamaica is** much the hardest and the most beautiful, and is easily distinguishable

**Jamaica is** sugar, rum, ginger, cocoa, coffee, pimento, several kinds of woods, some medicinal drugs and tobacco

**Jamaica is** rather unfavourable

**Jamaica is** such that generalisations about the level of living in respect of the whole population could be quite misleading

**Jamaica is** comprised of Her Majesty, a Senate and a House of Representatives

**Jamaica is** unspoiled; and unchanged — except for the better

**Jamaica is** called brick-riculd

**Jamaica is** unquestionably an object of equally deep interest to persons, in other respects, of very different views - persons who are ranged on opposite sides of politics even at the present time

**Jamaica is** unhealthy, and many will be sick and die before you can bring ' em to England

**Jamaica is** the most highly cultivated and most productive colony in the American archipelago

**Jamaica is** like most third world countries in that respect

**Jamaica is** designed to protect the child and punish the parents for its neglect

**Jamaica is** rapidly increasing and is said to be responsible for the lessening in numbers of the smaller birds

**Jamaica is** a lush tropical place offering intense adventure amidst one of the most tangled cultures on the face of the earth

**Jamaica is** an island nation and a close neighbor

**Jamaica is** considered to have had relative success in developing

**Jamaica is** a genre of revival religion

**Jamaica is** in the Caribbean block which comprises the Bahamas, Barbados, Canada

**Jamaica is** a small island, its capital, Kingston, plays a bigger part in the lives of Jamaicans than perhaps London does

**Jamaica is** extremely well connected to the USA and Canada

**Jamaica is** one of the most popular destinations of visitors to the Caribbean

**Jamaica is** like a warm, green garden

**Jamaica is** a patriarchal country where top positions are held by men

**Jamaica is** not a place where one would normally expect to find a modern milk

**Jamaica is** also developing in other important directions

**Jamaica is** essentially depersonalized

**Jamaica is** fortunate

**Jamaica is** truly unbelievable to an outsider

**Jamaica is** considered to have had relative success

**Jamaica is** good, but

**Jamaica is** experiencing one of the highest rates of deforestation in the world

**Jamaica is** one of the small number of countries that have attained a life expectancy nearly matching the rich lands

**Jamaica is** a lonely place

**Jamaica is** a country that appeals to one's imagination

**Jamaica is** a country with a traditional use of cannabis, dating back already many generations

**Jamaica is** inhabited by 17 native species of frogs and three introduced species

**Jamaica is** really a destination for the Americans

**Jamaica is** red with the blood of innocents who are daily slaughtered by babylon

**Jamaica is** rich in contradictions

**Jamaica is** an efficient and necessary scavenger

**Jamaica is** well documented

**Jamaica is** approaching the limits of its population's ability to reproduce the social structures and relations needed for social stability

**Jamaica is** described as everyone's idea of a tropical paradise

**Jamaica is** not a new phenomenon

**Jamaica is** high, with room for improvement

**Jamaica is** Black, and the Black elite control the government

**Jamaica is** a plural society

**Jamaica is** also viewed as a Creole society

**Jamaica is** due to reaction with meteoric water

**Jamaica is**, indeed, a difficult one

**Jamaica is** a destination for the senses

**Jamaica is** rugged and mountainous

**Jamaica is** not surprising

## Carla

When Carla was nine, she was sent to live with her grandmother in May Pen. She spent her life before this in Kingston, off Ellison Road in a house rented by her mother and uncle. She remembers going to Ellison Road primary. She remembers her favorite teacher, Ms. Damply encouraging her to read. She remembers playing dandy shandy on the road after school with other children. She remembers the girl across the road whose name she can't remember. She remembers the corner shop, which was really just someone's house.

She remembers her mother sending her to the shop and having to scream with her small mouth: "Missa Allen, me want six icy mint, two egg, and one pound a flour." She remembers her mother telling her she needed to stop playing on the road. She remembers asking her mother why she can no longer play on the road and her mother telling her to just listen to her and stop talk back to big people.

She remembers seeing the green flags nailed against the trees, the young men from down the road coming to her mother telling her *a we in charge ah di place now yuh hear*. She remembers Miss Marcia house going up in flames one night, and Miss Marcia husband's body being found. She remembers the smell of burning flesh. She remembers the smell of sticky sweaty flesh. She remembers her uncle in her bed.

She remembers her mother telling her "this place is not safe anymore for you." She remembers her grandmother meeting them downtown and her mother telling her grandmother that she got through to go work at the hotel in Curaçao. She remembers her grandmother putting her on her lap on the bus to May Pen, and the look of her mother's face as it faded into the background.

## **Friend of a Friend**

He circles around us with six cups of coffee.

His manic energy, up close in the flesh.

He writes jacked jokey letters to lighthearted friends in exile telling rodeo stories.

He compares himself to a Van Gogh, best seen with sentimental eyes.

## Metamorphoses

The last erection was five months before my  
Nineteenth birthday. When I peed, a mixture

Of semen, blood and urine often sputtered out  
Slowly. Walking from class to class at the

University, the sweat between my thighs turned  
From the usual humid-sticky to a gummed-tangle

Of fluids resulting from involuntary emissions;  
The side-effects of an antidepressant prescribed to

Ease the intrusions of thoughts. My psychiatrist —  
Who when I first saw her told me my depression

And obsessive-compulsions could be solved by  
Diet, exercise, and finding a relationship —

Relented and prescribed me this medication  
With a heavy disappointed sigh after

Her regime failed to yield any results for me  
Beyond leading me to: pass out from low blood

Sugar because I starve myself; get robbed while  
Out for an evening jog; and impulsively get

Into a relationship with a friend of a friend who  
I dumped a month later after realizing we had

Nothing in common. When I first got the pills, I  
Was relieved, mostly because I didn't have to feel

That I wasn't doing enough to sweat, thin, and  
Love myself out of my ailments. I wasn't one

Of those people that thought antidepressants  
Made you weak, I wanted them desperately to

End the thoughts, to wake up without the  
Suffocating stream of worry and ruminations.

At first, I researched the medication; found  
Out it had the common side effects: dry mouth,

Drowsiness, dizziness, and the not so common  
Ones: low blood pressure, rapid heart rate,

Urinary retention, and electrocardiogram change.  
These were mild enough symptoms to me, and who

Was I to complain when I finally got the pill  
that would steady the pendulum of my mind.

A month after taking them, my testes became  
Tender all the time, and it became impossible to

Pee freely. And yet, I said nothing. I continued  
Taking them, enduring silent pain, even

Though I had little reprieve from my thoughts.  
When I looked up my symptoms + the name of

The medication, I read scientific papers from  
The 1980s about how it was used in the USSR

To treat equine urospermia (the presence of urine  
In the seminal fluid) and hemospermia (the presence

Of blood in ejaculate). I learned that 36% of all  
Cases of ejaculatory dysfunction in stallions

Involved urospermia. This was not enough  
To stop me from taking the pill. I did not

Want to have biological children, so this too  
Was manageable in my view, if there was a

Chance I would have mental relief. I also discovered  
That before the advent of selective serotonin

Reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) the medication I took  
was as a standard antidepressant. However,

Since the 1990s, it has no longer been prescribed

As commonly, because of its severe side-effects,

And the fact that it was Better suited for  
Treatment of horses than humans.

Around this time, I read a short story by a  
Brazilian writer, João Ximenes Braga, titled

"The Woman Who Slept With a Horse"  
Where a woman, Andréa, visits an Umbanda

Terreiro and encounters Exu Tranca-Rua,  
Also known as Mr. T.R. When he asks

Andréa why she chose to visit the terreiro  
She responds, "well, I'm a little lost, you

Know? Things at work are pretty good  
But my love life..." Immediately Mr. T. R.

Gives her instructions to perform a ritual to  
Attract a man into her life. Later at a bar

She encounters him but he does not  
Acknowledge her. Her friend explains:

"Oh sometimes the horses don't remember...  
'Horse' is what they call the medium, the

Guy who embodies the spirit. They don't  
Always remember what they did afterward,

Not even the people they talked to." After  
Reading this, I pretended my mind was a vessel

For the spirit of an ill horse waiting to be  
Restored by those pills. I envisioned that one

Day the horse would gain the strength to leave  
Me, and I would enter a state of deep forgetting.

## Walking A Pace

Walking a pace much slower than the couple in front of me because I sprained my ankle last week when my foot clipped out of the pedal during spin class and I was too embarrassed to tell the instructor so I kept going even though the pain increased as each new techno remix of Rihanna and Calvin Harris' "We found love in a hopeless place" blared through the speakers along with a kaleidoscope of seizure-inducing lights.

Walking a pace across the bridge to visit Emma who I haven't seen since she blew up at me outside of the Lonely Authoritarian on Whyte Ave when I told her she wasn't very kind to her ex-boyfriend Roger when she told him that he wasn't good enough when really it was her that didn't feel like she was good enough.

Walking a pace until I come to a stop and look over at the river wondering why it is that they have suicide barriers at the other bridge, but none here, and how the absence of the suicide barriers here triggers intrusive thoughts that maybe this would be good place to commit suicide.

Walking a pace on the trail at the other side of the bridge trying not to get mud all over the new sneakers I got from the outlet mall last week with Roger who had texted me a while back saying he didn't want the breakup to ruin our friendship and that he would be down to hang out with me sometime.

Walking at a pace when a cyclist dashing through the trail rings their bell at me but I only hear it very faintly because I turned my earphone volume up in order to hear more clearly my friend Connie's cover of Bob Marley's "Redemption Song" which she sent to me over messenger — as a .wav file which I had to go and learn how to convert to mp3 so that I could listen to it on my janky mp3 player that I've had since Grade 10 — and insisted I give her feedback on, even though I told her that maybe as a white woman this wouldn't be the most appropriate song for her to do a cover of for her *Songs About Me, Songs About Us* album about being friend dumped

over email by another white woman (Hannah), because it's still a song about slavery even though she changes the lyrics from "Old pirates, yes, they rob I / sold I to the merchant ships" to "Oh pyrex yes you rob I / used it to make cinnamon breadsticks".

## Ring The Alarm

My first memory of an obsessive-compulsive  
Thought was in grade three. I asked my

Teacher if I could use the washroom, and  
She said what teachers taught to advocate for

The use of the Queen's English always said,  
"Of course you *can*, but that is not the question"

I must have rolled my eyes and corrected myself  
"*May* I use the bathroom" and was sent on my

Way. I walked to the bathroom, pass the hedges  
where my sister told me that prepubescent boys

Tried to take off her panties when she was eight.  
In no rush to return to class, I used the washroom

And took the long way back. I watched another  
class put on their cricket gear before heading onto

the pitch. I sat on a bench under the *lignum vitae*  
and threw rocks at the fence separating the school

From the hospital. I tried to angle the rocks so  
That they would fit perfectly through the

Crevices of the chain-link fence, and I could feel  
Satisfied with my skilled precision. Feeling

Accomplished, I returned to my classroom,  
No one having noticed or worried about my

Extended absence. Moments after returning  
An alarm goes off, and our teacher instructs

Us to make an orderly line and march onto  
The field. We follow the instructions. Out on

The field, our principal addresses us. In her hand  
Is a half-burnt roll of toilet paper. She shouts

"Someone today thought they would put everyone  
In danger! Someone thought today was a

Day to wreak havoc on our school! Mrs. Griffiths  
Was walking to the kindergarten and smelled

Something burning in the boys' bathroom! If  
It weren't for her, we would have not caught it

In time and the whole school could have burnt  
Down! And then, even with the alarm going off,

We had students not following the precautions  
And safety measures that would protect them and

The rest of the school population....Whoever  
Set this toilet paper on fire will be handed over

To the authorities for reckless endangerment!"  
All I needed was her to say the boys' bathroom

For my thoughts to begin, I wondered, 'did I  
Accidentally light it on fire... but what would I

Have lit it with? ... It's definitely me, they are  
Going to say that they saw me hanging around

That area.... No but I couldn't have... I definitely  
Did this and did not notice.... It's all my fault"

With each thought I grew more convinced that  
I was to blame. That I would be turned into the

Police. That I put everyone in danger. No reasoning  
Could help me out of the hole of guilt I dug for

Myself. I had convinced myself I did this, even though  
It was impossible. There I had my first panic attack

And fainted. When approached by teachers, they  
Assumed I had an asthma attack from inhaling the

Smoky toilet paper and I was taken away to rest

In the classroom. Later when everyone poured back

Into the room, my friend leaned over and told me

"There was no real fire. It was just a drill to show

Us what would happened if we lit a fire at school"

On the board my teacher began to write:

*FIRE EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS*

*WEEK BEGINS TODAY.*

Natty Oms

I only now understand why it is that people lie about their past,  
why they say they are one thing other than the thing they really are,  
why they invent a self that bears no resemblance to who they really  
are, why anyone would want to feel as if he or she belongs to  
nothing, comes from no one, just fell out of the sky, whole.

— Jamaica Kincaid, *My Brother*<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Kincaid, Jamaica. *My Brother*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998, pp. 12-13.

# Nativity ooms



[redacted]  
among

[redacted]  
lovers strolling

[redacted]  
In the dark capital a  
tourist

[redacted] turns

[redacted] to the arms

of

[redacted]  
a poet in sorrow;

[redacted]  
the sad custodian of

[redacted]  
midnight:

[redacted] : gloom.

here

random

accents wander

and

the wind

lifts

the air.

here

, your

life

could be

right.

nagging

you

is this  
little tune

a

thing

o  
miracles

I arrive without my

family

The phone doesn't ring

these last five years

i  
carri

a burden

I can make no sense of  
that

hassle,  
of  
performing  
faking      unspeaking.

life slides by

My living is a  
making

I'm  
the

pal, brother  
slave  
t o

Capitalist  
careerists.

swimming  
i n

commodity.

Everyone,  
is

trying to prophesy  
these day  
s

The glint and gleam  
are preferable  
simpler than  
a land of  
needles, n pills.

Many prefer

Labor and Capital

To

sex

A single man, I long for  
a miracle

enough for one.

we're certain to

fable says

: embrace vice

not

perfect ing

Inner progress

All isolation stems from this.

sensibilities

out of tune with

reason

[Redacted text]

The world already  
is

Unappealing

The whites

will be the death  
of us!  
the bastards

I don't know why you're shocked.

in my day

we didn't

arrange exodus.

Comfort for us

you find

sitting

in a nice

tomb.

Now all

live to breathe.

their

freedom

in squalor.

“There is no

space

there, : here.

to

drift

we cannot know

What's poetry

alone

in

Niagara

once again

anxious.

all alone.

i

want to

stop

and

cool down in the snow

Forget it,

it hurts.

Like

no  
thing

I know

fuck

love

men are assholes,

How do you stand it?

tonight

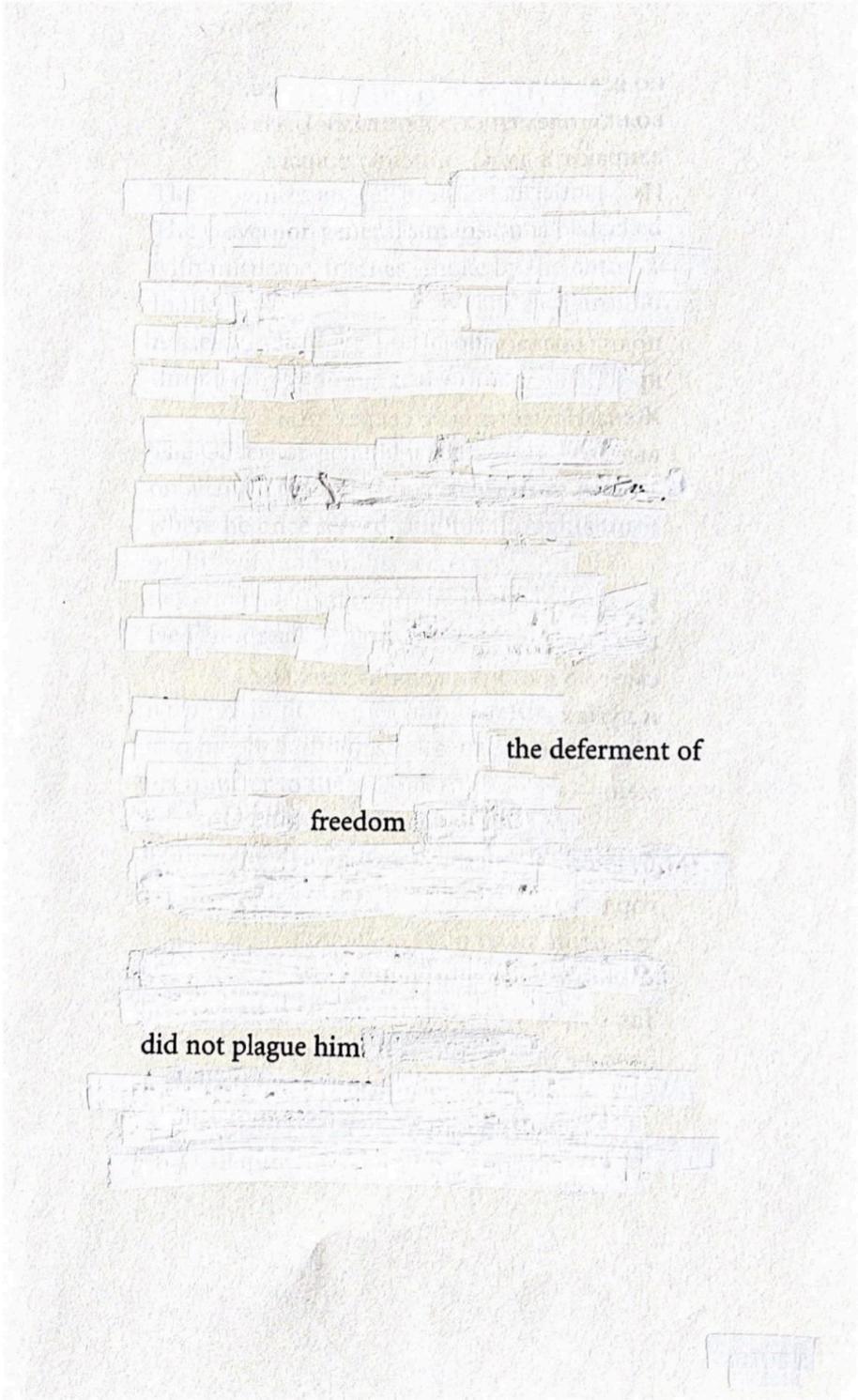
What else is there to do?

Sing

?

walk

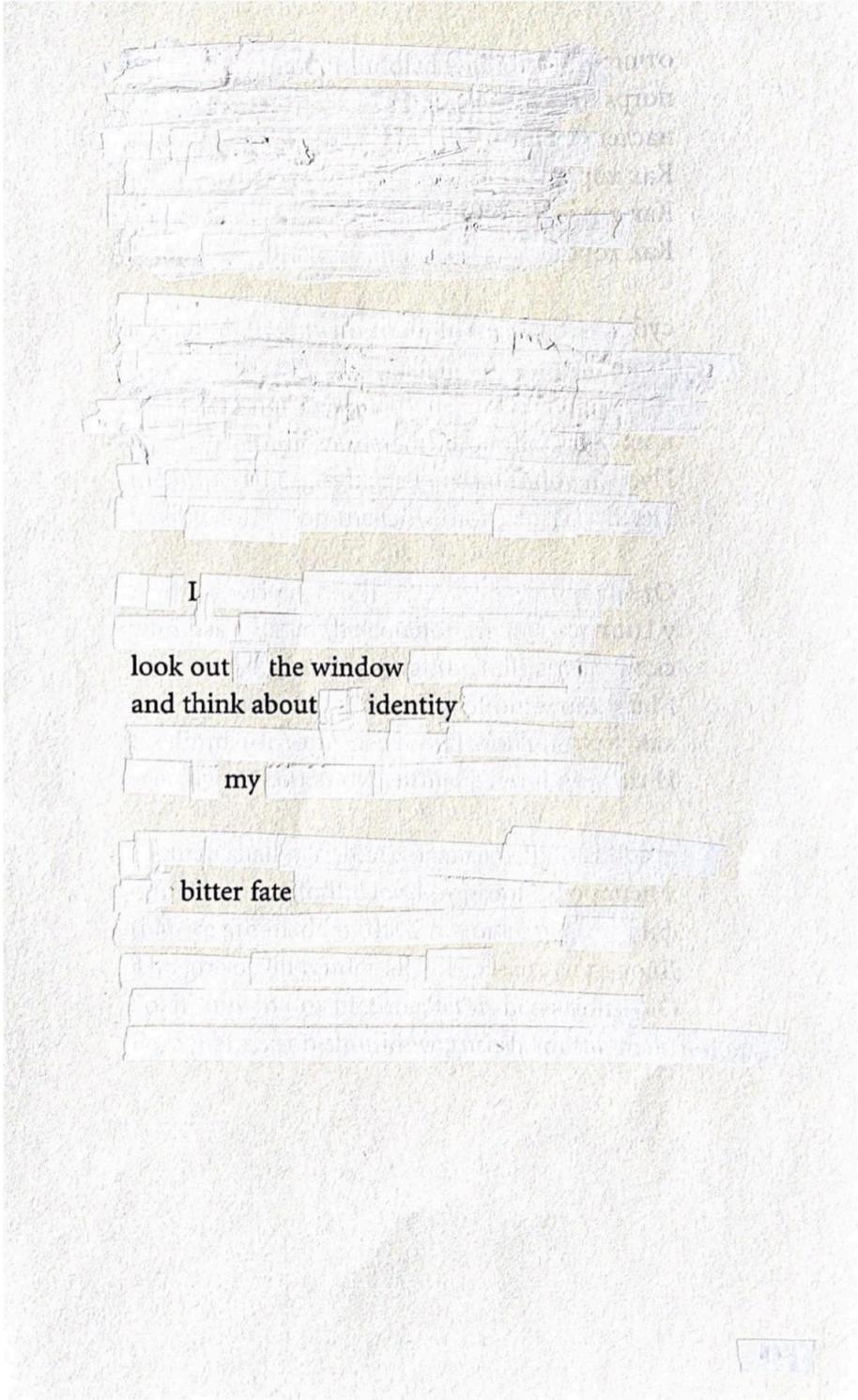
swallow the sky.



the deferment of

freedom

did not plague him:



[redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted]

frail [redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted]

voices [redacted]  
[redacted]  
yell out [redacted]

[redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted]

the visitors, [redacted]

[redacted]  
gossip [redacted]  
in silence ... [redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted]

I watch  
over the

fire

The faint light

breaking

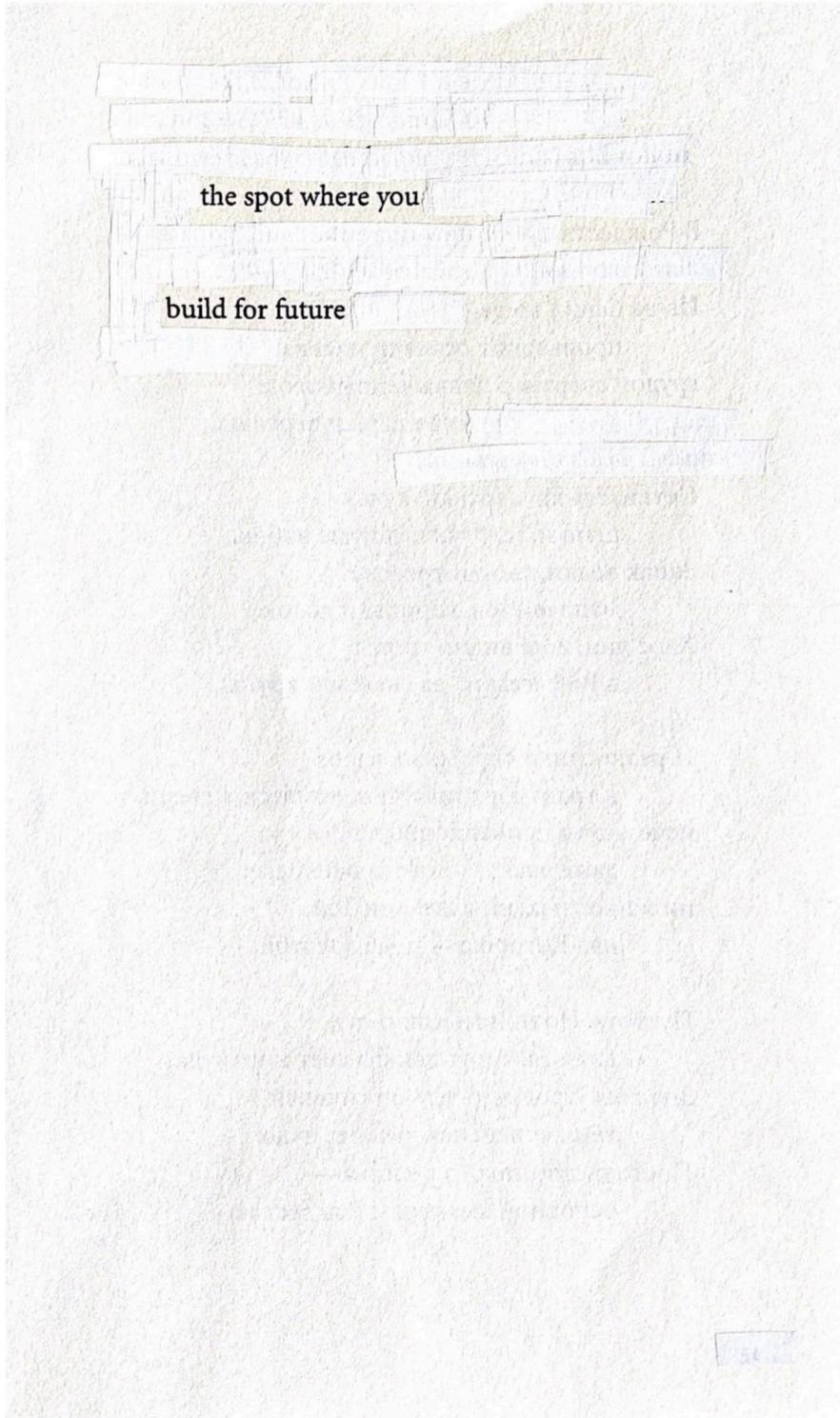
remnants of the  
way.

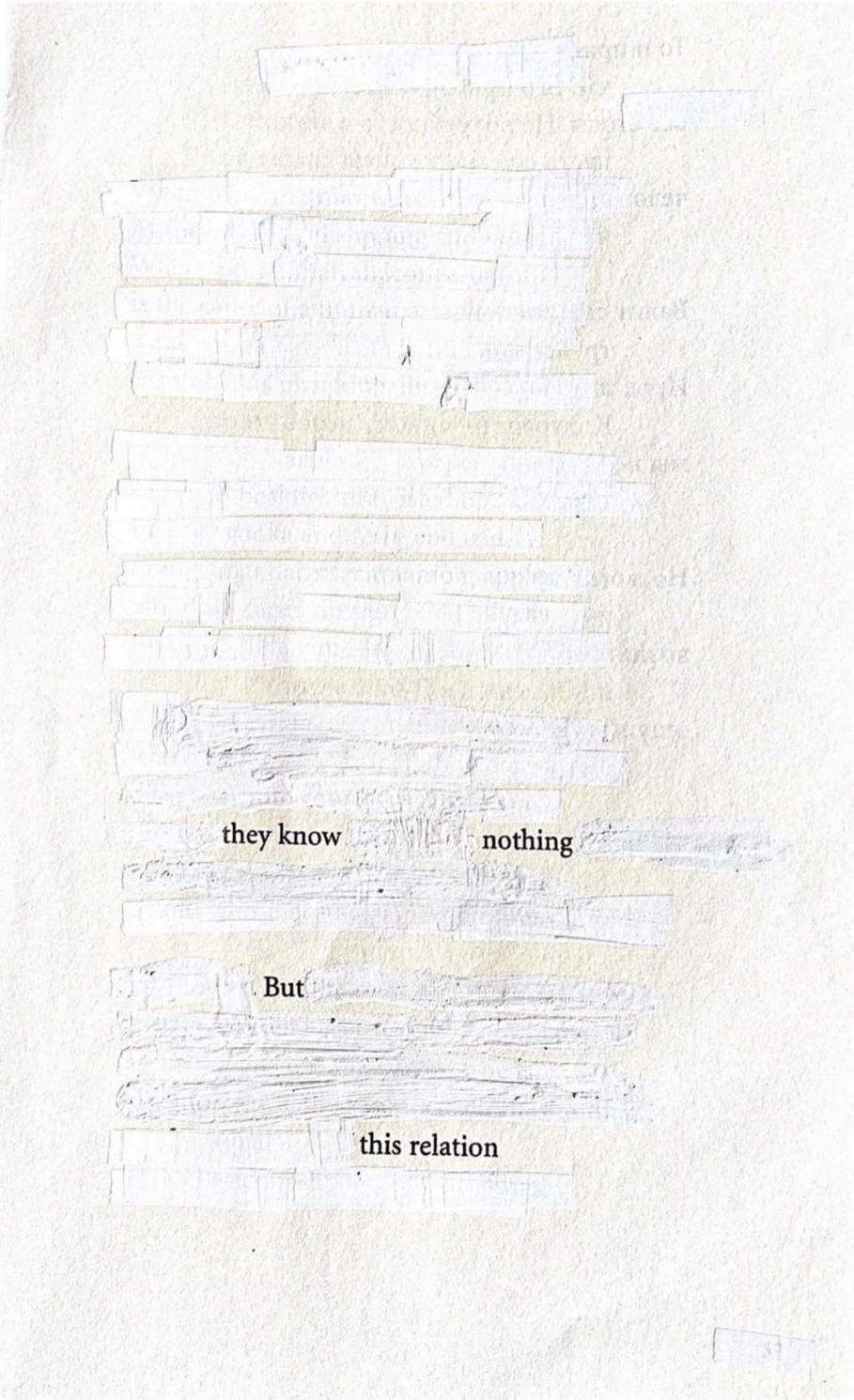
in that café

The

music ebbs, and

no wind blows.

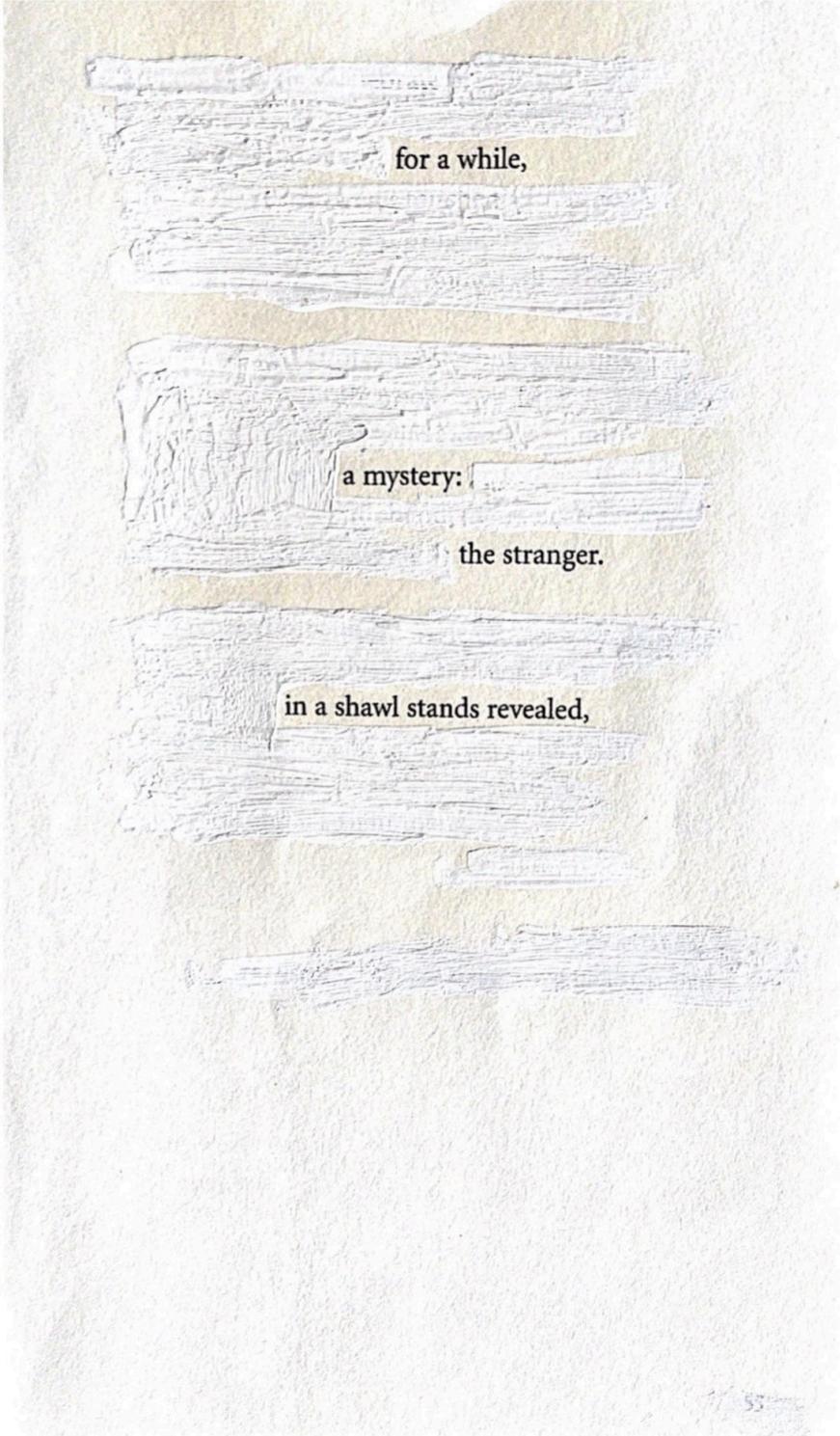




they know nothing

But

this relation



for a while,

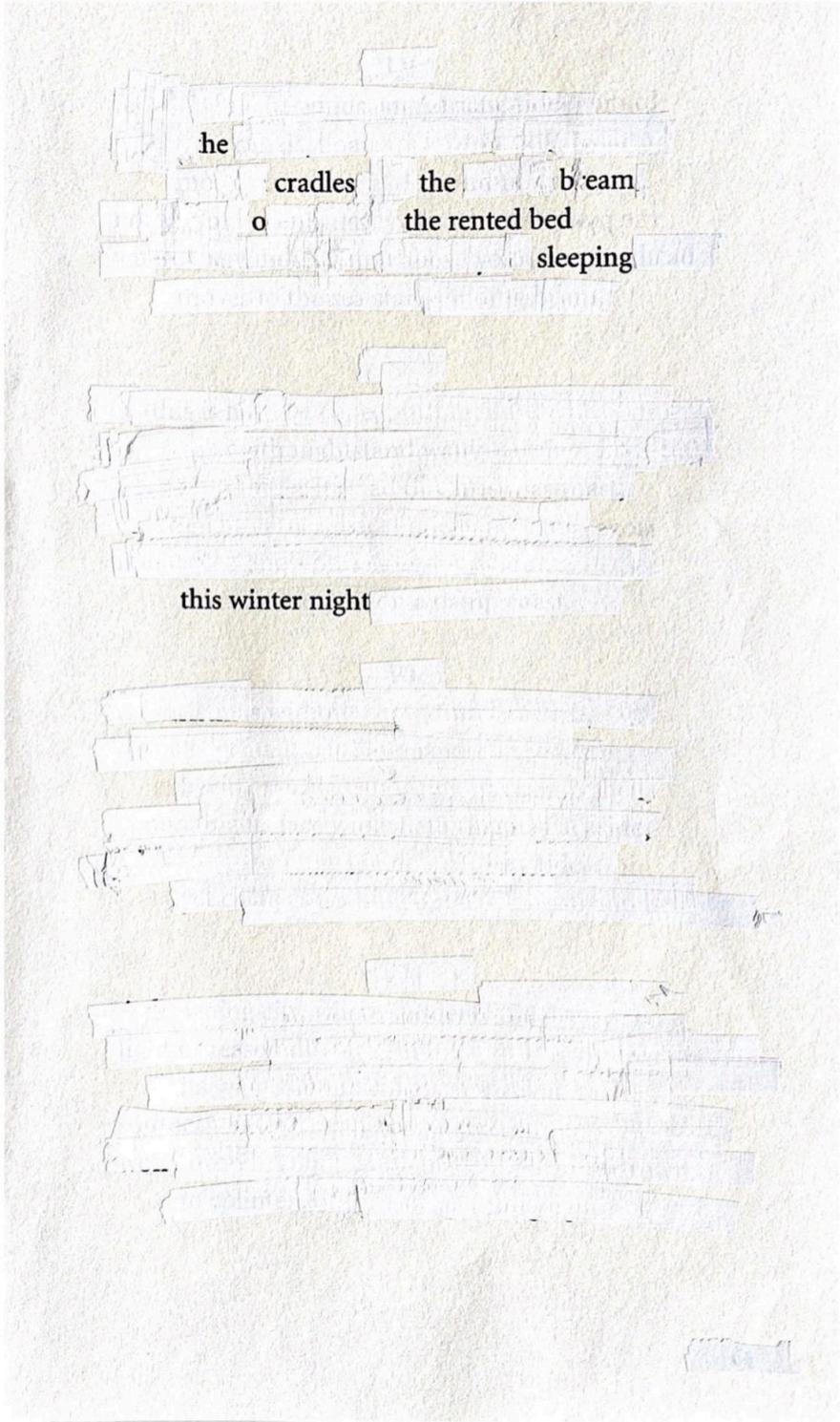
a mystery:

the stranger.

in a shawl stands revealed,

take three elderly women,

a nameless lodger, a nobody, in



The

nation

voted

the nightmare

i

n

Look up:

at the edge of

St. Mark's

a

naked

body

robs us blind.

outside

Whiteness multiplies

through the wall I hear

someone learning

our names

and

DEREK WALCOTT

you catch yourself

like refugee

on the street,

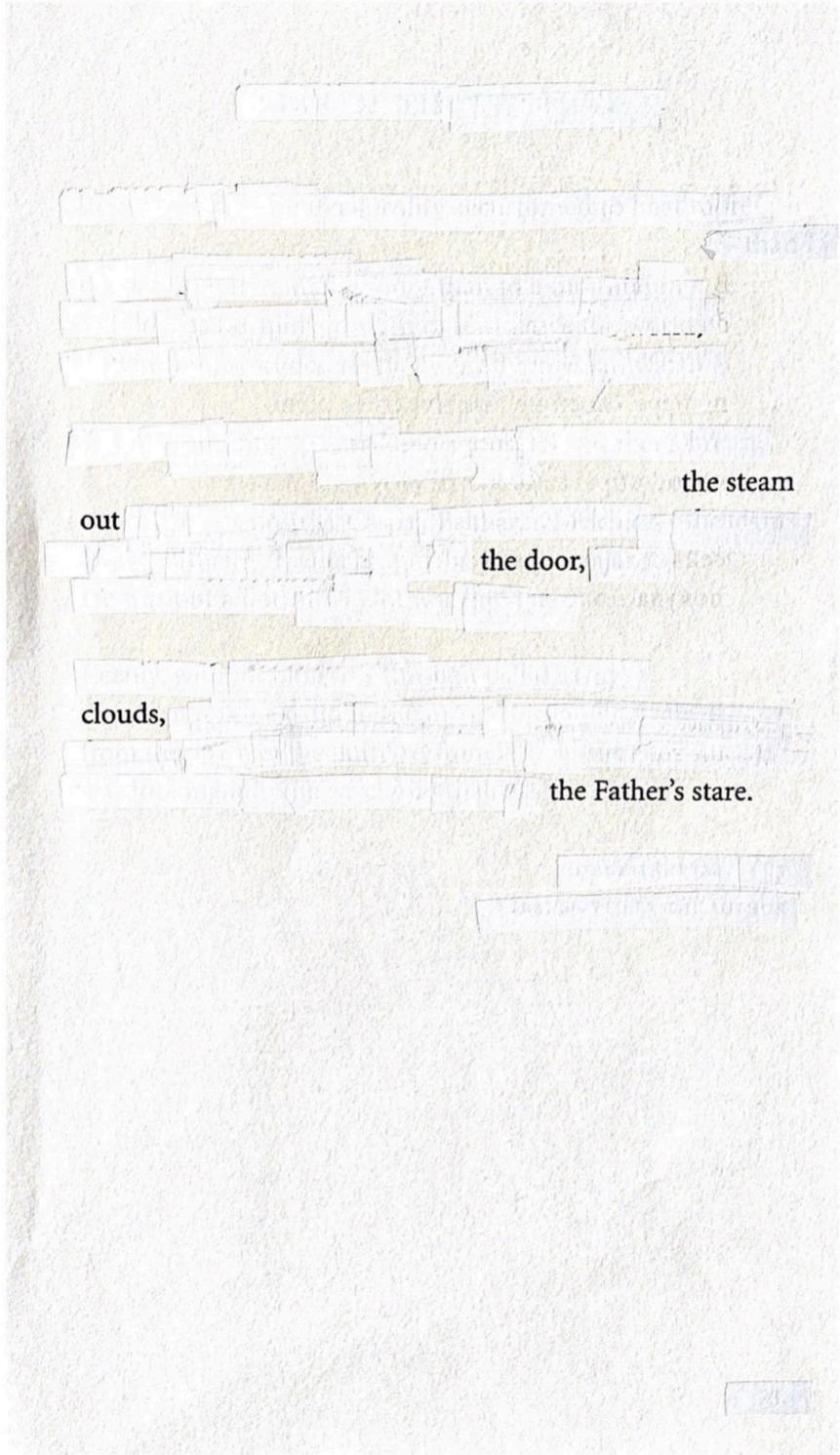
pocket slapping,

hot air.

schlepping along

groaning

for a little



out the steam  
the door,  
clouds,  
the Father's stare.

LIGHT

no one knew

a fire

would

glow

beyond that

enclave—to

light

the earth

Imagine

the cold.

Imagine

night

imagine,

your face

Imagine

caravans

on the star;

Imagine

darkness, and

homeless,

the  
home.

crowded

a

affair;

a threesome

s c

rewing,

Above their encampment, the sky

had no place to go,

wise men

have all become

drifte

r s

midnight passerby

s

you peer

at

while others grow

the smallest  
half wish

you

would

suck my breast s,

get toys,

play with

below.

Grow

firm.

mount

freely

Grow

flesh

for you

Grow accustomed to

[redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted]

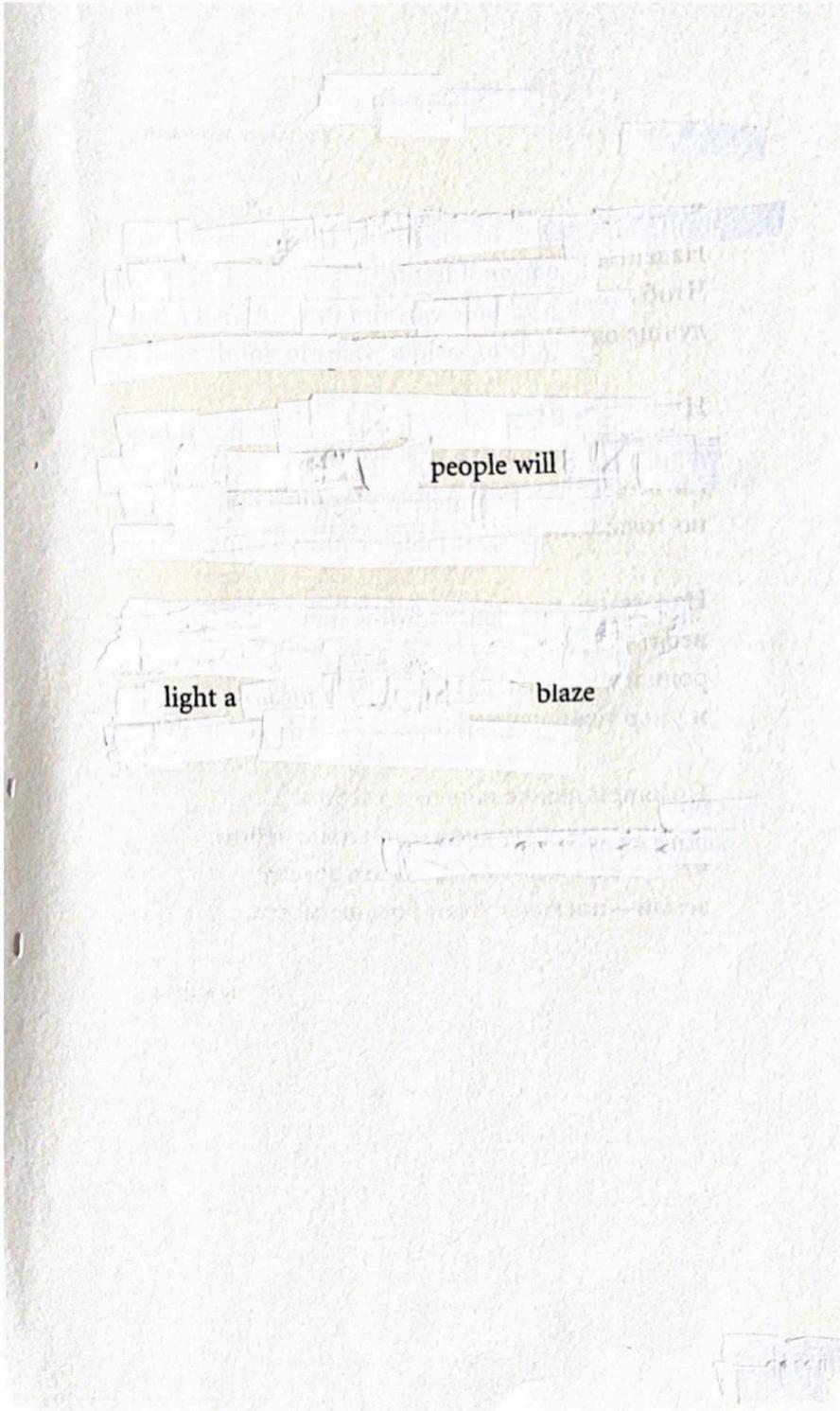
the treasured

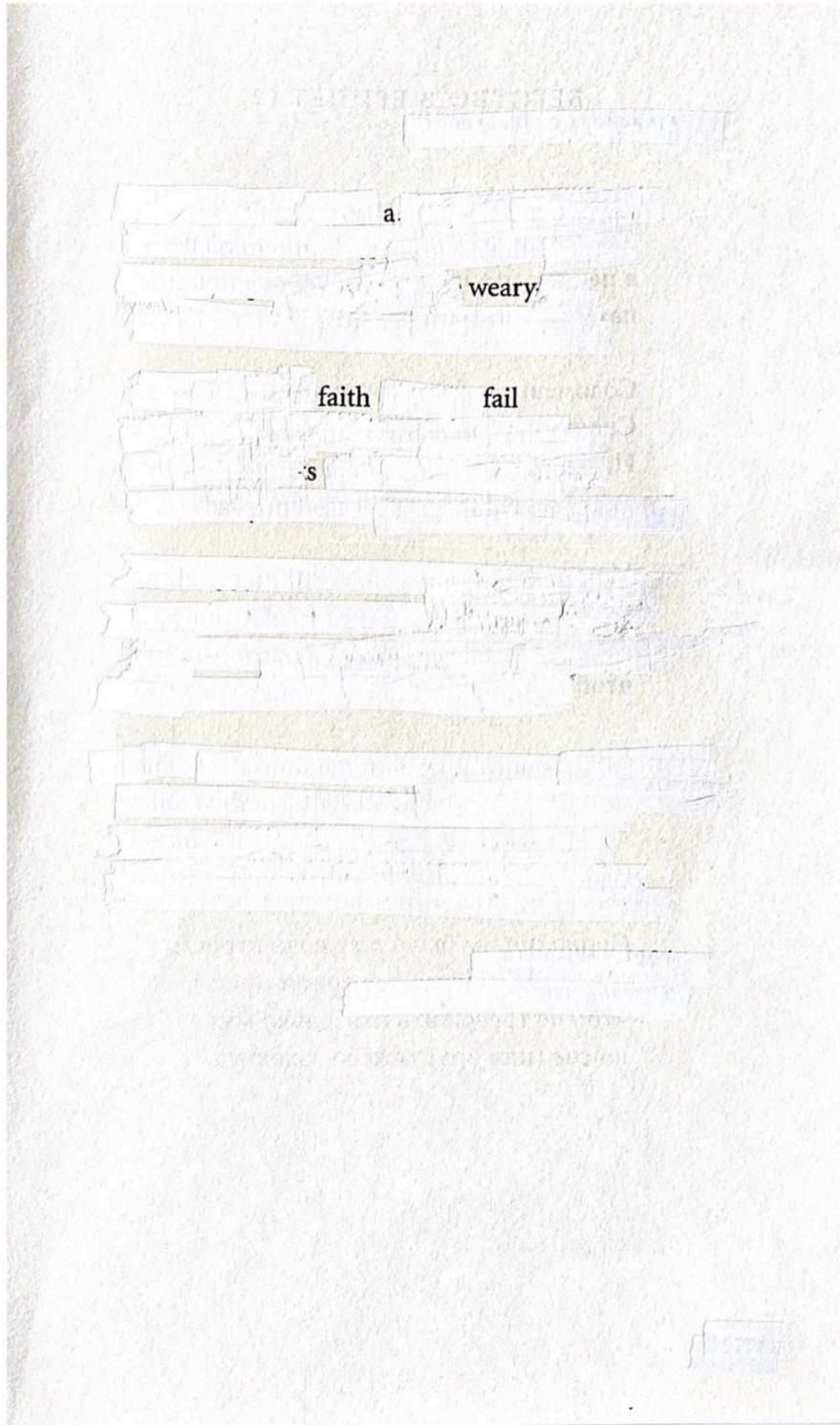
lit

e

[redacted]  
[redacted]

[redacted]  
[redacted]





[redacted]

[redacted]

the threesome

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] groaned

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

That night,  
like a

[redacted] far-off  
mule.

[redacted]

he looked

But did not speak.

As Man

We were different writers, different minds, different bodies moving through the world. You would always sign your emails to me "As Man," but, in all honesty, I rarely saw myself in the men you invoked. But all the same, I recognized in your writings those characters who understood themselves to be fugitives from conventional masculinity, unwilling or else unable to live up to prescribed ideals and roles.

— David Chariandy "As Man"<sup>25</sup>

Sometimes I look back on all the years I spend in Brit'n...and I surprise that so many years gone by. Looking at things in general, life really hard for the boys in London. This is a lonely, miserable city, if it was that we didn't get together now and then to talk about things back home, we would suffer like hell.

— Samuel Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Chariandy, David. "As Man." *Luminous Ink: Writers on Writing in Canada*. Cormorant Books, 2018, p. 47.

<sup>26</sup> Selvon, Samuel. *The Lonely Londoners*. Longman, 1956, p. 130.

**Dundee, Scotland**

**November 9, 1976**

You wuddun believe I tun  
Writer-In-Residence up here  
eating haggis and drinking scotch,  
the real malt from the highlands

You not doing suh bad,  
I hear of five-six mansions  
in various parts of Canada,  
and that you does invite  
the Mayor of Toronto for pigtail and rice.

I want things go good wit me too  
I want go West, get a fix-up for Alberta, or B.C.  
I don't want stay in Brit'n no more,  
it is sinking and I want to swim.

**London, England**

**October 10, 1977**

Now you finish your latest tome  
I hope you will have time  
to reply to the letter I write from Scotland  
'round a' year ago.

It never too late to make amends.  
You can make it by getting me a work in Canada,  
as I's bound for Calgary soon-soon.

You need not fear my presence,  
I will be thousands of miles  
from your stomping ground.  
Dat country big enough for the two o' we.

**Toronto, Canada**

**October 11, 1977 (11.45 am)**

You mus be vex as shite with me for not answering back  
but I have to tell yuh man, I was busy as shite fighting a  
political campaign for my rass-hole life.

Now, if you could give me aa'ddress in Alberta or Calgary  
or where the shite you emigrading to,  
I could line up something for you the moment yuh land.  
It ain't too late, it never rass-hole too late.

**London, England**

**October 15, 1977 (6 a.m.)**

Boy I forgive you —

if you go West you must spread the fame of your friend,  
tell everybody what a fine fellow he is, 'part from his literary genius.  
Tell them I not coming as no kind o' passage, but that I coming to LIVE  
in Canada. I lucky if I hear from you again by doomsday please God.

**Toronto, Canada**

**October 21, 1977 (1 pm)**

Who yuh trying to fool  
saying you were up at six o'clock in the morning,  
all of a sudden the son of a bitch Sam Selvon  
find both hand and mout!

I goin' out to Calgary in November and  
will arrange for you to make some easy and fairly good bread,  
help yuh buy a piece of saltfish and a roti. I working in the  
wings on your behalf, yuh bitch.

**London, England**

**November 5, 1977**

I warn you to keep out of Western Canada,  
and now you write 'bout you gone tour Calgary,  
you lucky I 'ent come right now and  
tek over the East while you is gone.

Though, if the real reason you gone West  
is to spread word that Selvon coming  
that my brother is different.

**London, England**

**November 27, 1977**

We having delay as the house  
don' sell yet. We intend to leave once it sell  
and will tell you when that come to pass.

Meantime, keep spreading word of your brother  
who is bound.

**London, England**

**December 13, 1977**

I get a picture of you and the caption read  
'another look at alienation'. I must say  
from the neck down you look sharp.

So far t'appears we may leave by February  
to come down your way.

**London, England**

**January 22, 1978**

Sir, you cannot say you have not been warned —  
threatened — with my intention to be in your part of the  
world. My plans are lock, stock, and barrel, so I hope you  
raise no protest 'pon impending invasion.

Don't worry I 'ent takin nothin from you.

I don't want the cake. Only a slice.

**London, England**

**February 25, 1978**

I assuming your long silence means you busting  
your arse fixing things up for my arrival.

Keep up the good work.

**Calgary, Canada**

**April 9, 1978**

Do drop a line and let me know how things are.

**Calgary, Canada**

**January 23, 1979**

While true-true writers writing to the bone,  
I jus looking for a work. I can't do no writing  
'less some bread coming in. The wife kicking up  
rarse cah she got a job and I don't.

This fucking c.v. always turn out to be a joke —  
everybody want to know why and when  
I have all dem credentials. Nex' time I apply  
anywhere I just going to go like a coolie man  
who is a landed immigrant.

I don't know what unnuh out dere in di East  
complaining 'bout cold. Out here we got a thing  
call chinook and every morning sun shining no  
arse, and the sky blue. Dey say it soon get brutal,  
but now is calm praise God. The boys skating, sledding,  
and grumbling.

If you come Calgary, buy me some drinks.  
Surprise me.

**Calgary, Canada**

**June 8, 1979**

I use to work a place where I cut news clippings  
till one day I left my scissors and reach for a blade  
next ting I know is blood all over,  
so I start write letters to the editor instead.

**Toronto, Canada**

**June 20, 1980**

Me see you gone all the way out there to  
the kiss-me-arse Wess — tek train, tek canoe  
tek plane and walk pon foot

spread yuhself cross white man country  
like a hand o' banana.

**Calgary, Canada**

**August 12, 1980**

Two big literary giants sitting down,  
one in the East, one in the West,  
getting down to the serious business of  
"creating literature." All we need now is  
to tek over the prairies and we soon have  
this country wrap-up.

I going to the race on Saturday, and will only bet on  
Dark Horses, to remind me of you.

## Notes

pg. 34

*Late Winter Epistle*: An allusion to the late American poet Claudia Emerson's *Late Wife* (2005).

pg. 37

*Colin Robinson*: The late Colin Robinson was a social justice advocate, newspaper columnist, and poet from Trinidad and Tobago whose advocacy focused on LGBT+ issues, HIV policy, and health and gender justice. This poem and the section's title is inspired in part by Robinson's August 21, 2017 column in *The Trinidad Guardian Newspaper* titled "Imagining Leaving".

pg. 39

*Louise Bennett*: Louise Simone Bennett-Coverley or Miss Lou was a Jamaican poet, folklorist, writer, and educator. Bennett worked, through poetry and song, to preserve Jamaican cultural heritage, and establish the validity of local creole languages for literary expression. Her poem "Jamaica Elevate" first appeared in *Selected Poems* (Sangster's Books, 1982, p. 113).

pg. 41

*A Niagara Landscape*: An allusion to the Canadian poet Archibald Lampman's "A Niagara Landscape" in *The Poems of Archibald Lampman*, edited by Duncan Campbell Scott (Morang, 1900, p. 272)

*Port Dalhousie*: a community in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada known for its waterfront.

"weighing the promise of freedom...": This line is taken from Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008). The original line from Hartman's memoir is "as if he were weighing the promise of freedom against the vast stretches of stolen land" (11-12).

pg. 42

*Meditation on Blue*: An allusion to the Jamaican-Canadian poet Olive Senior's poems "Meditation on Yellow" and "Meditation on Red" from her 1994 collection *Gardening in the Tropics*.

pg. 43

*You an 'im nuh mek / from di same claat*: Jamaican translation of the English-language idiom "not cut from the same cloth".

pg. 45

*Peenie Wallies*: Alternatively spelled 'peenie wally'. The Jamaican term for a firefly; specifically a bioluminescent click beetle.

pg. 47

*Poincianas*: Alternatively termed ‘royal poinciana,’ ‘flamboyant,’ ‘flame of the forest’, and ‘flame tree’. A flowering plant native to Madagascar. It is known for its fern-like leaves and flamboyant display of orange-red flowers over summer in tropical regions.

*Pewees*: Medium-sized insect-eating birds that are generally charcoal-grey with wing bars and live in wooded areas. There are fifteen different species of the pewee, many residing in the Caribbean and Latin America, and two species endemic to North America.

pg. 50

*Fractioning*: A found poem taken from passages containing "half" in Jamaica Kincaid’s *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996).

pg. 51

*Port Antonio*: The capital of the parish of Portland on the northeastern coast of Jamaica.

pg. 53

*Jamaica is*: Each line in the poem is taken from varied source texts which contain the phrase "Jamaica is". Many of the sources are colonial and modern travelogues, speeches, and reports. Others include academic studies, and travel brochures. The sources of the quotes are, in order of appearance: Senior, Bernard Martin. *Jamaica, as it Was, as it Is, and as it May Be: Comprising Interesting Topics for Absent Proprietors, Merchants, and Valuable Hints to Persons Intending to Emigrate to the Island*. United Kingdom, n.p, 1835; Renny, Robert. *An History of Jamaica: With*

*Observations of the Climate, Scenery, Trade, Productions, Negroes, Slave Trade.* Cawthorn, 1807; Rampini, Charles Joseph Gallari. *Letters from Jamaica: The Land of Streams and Woods.* Edmonston and Douglas, 1873; Browne, Howe P. *Jamaica Under the Apprenticeship System.* J. Andrews, 1838; Dancer, Thomas. *A Rowland for an Oliver: or a Jamaica review of the Edinburgh Reviewers.* John Lunan, 1809; *A Historical Geography of the British Colonies.* Clarendon P, 1890; *The Cyclopædia of Commerce; Comprising a Code of Commercial Law, Practice, Customs, & Information, and Exhibiting the Present State of Commerce.* J. M. Richardson, 1819; *An Universal History, from the Earliest Account of Time.* T. Osborne, 1764; Russell, John Russell. "Speech, May 7, 1841 on Sugar Duties" 1841; Economic Survey, Jamaica. Jamaica, The Unit., 1971; Phillips, Fred. *Commonwealth Caribbean Constitutional Law.* Taylor & Francis, 2013; *Jamaica, British West Indies.* Tourist Trade Development Board of Jamaica, n.p, 1952; Gurney, Joseph John. *Reconciliation, Respectfully Recommended to All Parties in the Colony of Jamaica. A Letter Addressed to the Planters.* G. Wightman, 1840; *Proposals for Carrying on an Effectual War in America, Against the French and Spaniards.* John Nutt, 1702; Stewart, John. *A View of the Past and Present State of the Island of Jamaica: With Remarks on the Moral and Physical Condition of the Slaves, and on the Abolition of Slavery in the Colonies.* Oliver & Boyd, 1823; Beel, Tommy. *My Glitch: Personal Experiences during Recovery from a Brain Injury.* AuthorHouse, 2007; Brodber, Erna. *Abandonment of Children in Jamaica.* Jamaica, Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1974; Jeffrey-Smith, May. *Bird-watching in Jamaica.* Jamaica, Bolivar Press, 1972; DeMers, John. *Authentic Recipes from Jamaica.* Tuttle Pub., 2012; Gritzner, Janet H.. *Jamaica.* Facts On File, Inc., 2009; Kim, Namsuk. *The impact of remittances on labor supply: the case of Jamaica.*

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pg. 65

*Walking a pace*: A line taken from Christine Stewart's *Treaty 6 Deixis* (TalonBooks, 2018, p. 6).

pg. 71

*Natty*: Term associated with Rastafari denoting hair that is unstraightened, uncombed, or matted, as in dreadlocks.

*Oms*: Plural of Om. A syllable of spiritual and religious significance, considered the most sacred mantra in Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism. It appears at the beginning and end of most Sanskrit recitations, prayers, and texts.

pg. 116

*As Man*: The correspondences between Austin Clarke and Sam Selvon that comprise this section were sourced from Austin Clarke's *A Passage Back Home: A Personal Reminiscence of Samuel Selvon* (Exile Editions, 1994) and Fonds RC0031 - Austin Clarke fonds at McMaster University's William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections.

pg. 132

*Coolie*: In *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture* (U of Chicago P, 2013), Gaiutra Bahadur provides an etymology of the word 'coolie,' writing that "'Coolie' comes from the Tamil word kuli, meaning wages or hire. Gradually, the word took on the broader meaning of someone paid to do menial work. When, after the enslaved were emancipated in the 1830s, the British began to rustle up replacement workers for plantations worldwide, this was the epithet they used for the indentured laborers they enlisted.... [D]uring the indenture era and beyond, "coolie" became an ethnic slur, a reminder to Indians of menial origins and a subtle challenge to their claim to belong" (xx - xxi). While accepted as an ethnic slur, some descendents of indentured labourers in

the Caribbean have worked towards reclaiming "the word coolie, to invest it with pride and subvert the old stigma.... insisting that there was no shame in origins as indentured laborers" (xxi).

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### **Biographical Sketch**

Cornel Bogle was born and raised in Kingston, Jamaica. They received a BA (First Class Honours) in Literatures in English from the University of the West Indies, Mona, and an MA in English from the University of Alberta. Cornel's research interests include Caribbean and Black Canadian Literatures, Postcolonial Studies, and Creative Writing (Poetry). Moreover, their teaching interests include Film Studies, Masculinities Studies, Diaspora Studies, Composition, and Auto/biography Studies. Cornel's critical and creative writing has been published in the *Journal of West Indian Literature*, *Canadian Literature*, *Studies in Canadian Literature*, *sx salon*, *Moko Magazine*, and *Pree: Caribbean Writing*.