

**POETRY AND THE CANADIAN PUBLIC SPHERE: THE PUBLIC
INTELLECTUAL ENGAGEMENT OF PAULINE JOHNSON, DOROTHY
LIVESAY, AND DIONNE BRAND**

SHAUNA LANCIT

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the roles of Pauline Johnson, Dorothy Livesay, and Dionne Brand in the evolution of the public sphere in Canada, arguing that each of these writers has functioned as what we now call a “public intellectual.” Taking their careers as exemplary, I show that the Canadian context has been particularly conducive to the ability of women poets to fulfill this social function. In attending closely to the role of the public sphere in their poetry I offer a new lens through which to understand some of their significant poems. In situating these poets in their material and historical contexts I also offer an explanation of why Canadian women writers, and poets in particular, have been unexpectedly well situated to appear as public intellectuals. Beginning with a genealogy of the public intellectual, I show the significance of this figure in the Canadian context. I demonstrate that institutional responses to Canada’s unique challenges in establishing and sustaining a public sphere have had wide-ranging effects on opportunities for artists and intellectuals to shape that sphere. These include the amplification of the voices of women poets relative to a purely market-based public sphere. I situate Johnson, Livesay, and Brand in their material and discursive contexts in order to make sense of the ways in which they figure the public sphere in their poetry, and the ways in which they use both their poetry and other forms of cultural production to encourage political and cultural change. Using an Arendtian view of the public, I argue that poetry has been an ideal site for building and maintaining a Canadian public sphere.

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Contents

Abstract ii

Acknowledgements iii

Table of Contents iv

Introduction: Canadian Women Poets as Public Intellectuals 1

The Origins and Current Use of the Term “Public Intellectual” 2

Current Canadian Scholarship 6

Legislating Nothing 8

Prehistory of the Public Intellectual: Two Trajectories of Thinking About the

Relationship Between the Intellectual and the Public 11

Poetry and the Canadian Public Sphere 23

Gender and the Canadian Public Intellectual 27

Structure of the Dissertation 30

Chapter 1. Pauline Johnson 37

Introduction 38

Outside the Mermaid Inn: Johnson’s Cultural Field 42

“People of Dramatic Intelligences”: Johnson’s Racial Melodrama 50

A Natural Poet: Johnson’s Semiotic field 57

“They Never Think How They Would Feel”: “A Cry from an Indian Wife” 63

“What a Public You Have” 75

Johnson the Dreyfusard: “Give Us Barabbas” 78

Conclusion 88

Chapter 2. Dorothy Livesay 90

Introduction 90

The Public, Modernism, and the Massey Commission 94

Radio Broadcasting, the CBC and Other Publics of Modernist Canada 98

Livesay’s Publics 102

Livesay as Imagist 103

Livesay as Marxist and the Invention of the Documentary Poem 111

1. Livesay as Marxist 111

2. Livesay as Documentarian 120

The CBC Talks: Livesay as a Thinking Housewife 133

“She Cannot Think Alone”: The Limits of the Thinking Housewife 146

Counterpublics of the Housewife 151

Chapter 3. Dionne Brand 155

Introduction 155

No Language is Neutral: Coming Out as Inventory 162

“No Basis for Consensus”: Brand and the Politics of the Canadian Public Sphere 180

An Inventory of These Small Years 190

The Privation of the Literary Prize 191

An Inventory of Despair: Mourning the Loss of a Public 198

Conclusion 209

Afterword 211

Works Cited 218

Introduction: Canadian Women Poets as Public Intellectuals

How, and in what contexts, do poets function as public intellectuals? Are there institutions in Canada that have allowed poets to serve this function? Have women been particularly well placed to take advantage of the potential of poetry to speak to, to create, public life in Canada? These are some of the key questions of this dissertation.

I ask them in a scholarly moment when they feel highly relevant. I finish this dissertation in the midst of rich conversations about an issue that was less prominent in Canadian critical discourse when I began. Throughout academia, and in public life, the idea of the public intellectual is gaining momentum as an area of inquiry. Although the rise of any theory is always multiply determined, my sense is that the question of the public intellectual has gained urgency because of the many crises that academics find themselves facing. As universities realign their purposes amidst great economic and political change, individual intellectuals are called upon to examine their political function, both within and outside the academy. Tenured academics with a commitment to some version of the university as a force for enabling and preserving intellectual engagement as a public good are explicitly making the case for the intellectual as a public figure. In Canada, funding bodies such as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council have begun to describe their relevance in terms such as “community engagement,” and “outcomes and impacts” (“Home Page”). In a Canadian context, this change has likely had an influence on the number of projects that are concerned with the engagement and public impact of the intellectual. As well, those scholars who find

themselves without access to funding or secure employment in the academy can look to the model of the public intellectual as an alternative source of identity (and perhaps even income). This project emerges from a historical moment in which the question of the public intellectual in Canada, as internationally, could hardly feel more pressing.

The Origins and Current Use of the Term “Public Intellectual”

The term “public intellectual” was brought into widespread circulation by Russell Jacoby’s *The Last Intellectuals* (1987), in which he acknowledges the origin of the term in the work of C. Wright Mills (117). Jacoby argues that the twin forces of gentrification and the absorption of New Left intellectuals into the academy had effectively eliminated the cultural role of the public intellectual, which he sees as having originated in the French intellectual response to the Dreyfus affair (107). Somewhat ironically, Jacoby’s argument, which I discuss at length later in this introduction, inspired a slew of responses that sought to affirm and analyze a number of figures as public intellectuals, and a number of sites as conducive to public intellectual work. The figure of the public intellectual has become highly compelling, both in academia and the popular press. The term has come to be used by journalists to establish the relevance of contemporary figures, and is sometimes inflected with the discourse of celebrity. For example, in 2008 *Foreign Policy* magazine published a list of what it considered to be the top 100 public intellectuals, then subjected the list to an online competition to further rank the competitors (“Top 100”).

Within academic contexts the term has had a parallel appeal. The Modern Language Association's International Bibliography shows it surging in popularity between the late 1990s and the present moment. Interest in public intellectuals spans the social sciences and humanities; much new scholarship on the topic continues in Jacoby's tradition of imagining a masculine writer of clear, accessible, discursive prose. Recent publications such as *Public Intellectuals and International Affairs: Essays on Public Thinkers and Political Projects* (Navari 2013), and *The Public Intellectual in Canada* (Wiseman 2013) either represent women's voices as an extreme minority, or exclude them entirely. While editors note and theorize reasons for this exclusion, they fail to mention what is to my mind the most significant factor: that Jacoby's definition of the public intellectual and conceptions of the figure that follow in his footsteps begin from terms that are already highly gendered. For the purposes of this dissertation, one of the most significant of these terms is genre. In keeping my focus on poetry, I mobilize the question of the public intellectual in a way that contests this dominant understanding of the term.

What is perhaps the most prominent recent book on the subject, Richard A. Posner's *Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline* (2001), takes its definition of the term largely from Jacoby and, like Jacoby, links the decline in the American public intellectual to the rise of academic security and ivory tower-ism. Other recent writing on the theme addresses some of the larger concerns of this dissertation. One book focuses on the public intellectual as a figure that embodies the hope that surrounded Barack Obama's 2008 campaign for president of the United States (Faflack and Haslam 2013), another on

globalization's impact on the intellectual project (Kennedy 2015). A significant contribution to the field (Melzer et al. 2003) defines the contemporary project of the intellectual as one of "detached attachment" (4), and considers this stance uniquely modern. This seeming contradiction between attachment and detachment appears as a tension in various ways in the careers of the three poets that I examine in this dissertation. My own following account of this tension explains it as a dialectic between interest and disinterest that necessarily grounds the work of public intellectuals. Although our understanding of the public intellectual assumes the intellectual as a politically committed, interested figure, it is my contention that both interest and disinterest are necessary elements of political engagement within a properly public sphere.

The rise of the term "public intellectual" allows many contemporary writers to ask timely and significant questions about the changing nature of public life and the relationship of the intellectual to these changes. There are many tensions in the ways in which this term is being used, and no overarching consensus about its meaning. While Melzer's diagnosis of the intellectual as a modern figure practicing detached attachment is close to my own understanding, he positions the intellectual in relation to the traditional spheres of philosophy and politics, whereas my project introduces a third term, poetry. I imagine the poets I look at as public intellectuals who are constituted by relationships to the traditional work of philosophy, politics, and poetry. I view these poets as both engaging and attempting to reshape their respective, historically specific publics through the use of poetry. This view is influenced by Hannah Arendt's understanding of the public as

founded on intersubjective speech and action. Referring to the public as a “space of appearance,” Arendt argues:

The space of appearance comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action, and therefore predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm and the various forms of government, that is, the various forms in which the public realm can be organized. (199)

I understand poetry as having the potential to be one such space.

An additional way in which I depart from many conceptions of the public intellectual is also linked to my interest in creative writers, and in poets in particular. Instead of following Jacoby’s lead in defining the work of the public intellectual, and then wondering where all the women are, I begin by asking how and in what capacities women have always functioned as public intellectuals in Canada. I share this perspective with much of the contemporary scholarship on public intellectuals in Canada; in fact my project has emerged in the context of an exciting interdisciplinary moment in which many critics are recognizing Canadian women writers, both past and present, as public intellectuals. Although I began this project in advance of much of the scholarship I will outline, I see it as part of both a zeitgeist and a profoundly collaborative approach from which I have benefited.

Current Canadian Scholarship

In the Canadian context specifically, discussions of the public intellectual have taken on a decidedly feminist bent. As is true for the poets I attend to in this study, my own thought has emerged in the context of a larger community. My analysis of the relationships between gender, genre, and nation, as well as my thinking about what makes for public discourse and intellectual discourse, are part of this larger conversation. They are intended not only to analyze the historical conditions that have enabled women poets to be regarded as speaking to the public, but also to remind us that the public functions of poetry are still present and possible.

Two recent conferences at Mount Allison University have brought together various thinkers on the subject of the Canadian literary public intellectual, broadly defined. One is the October 2014 conference *Discourse and Dynamics: Canadian Women as Public Intellectuals*. Some questions raised there reflect my own thought in this dissertation. The issue of the definition of the public intellectual, and the way in which that figure is gendered, pervades the panel descriptions (“Conference Program”). One panel, featuring Dionne Brand, provided her the opportunity to think about ways in which the term public intellectual applies to her. What she had to say on the matter confirms my account of her work in my third chapter. She expresses unease with the term, while acknowledging that there is a productive overlap between it and her understanding of her own political project. She defends the notion of complicated writing as public writing, clarifying that such writing is necessary in order to represent the complicated subjectivity that is the

basis of the public that she assumes (“Discourse”). This does not put her at odds with the apparent goals of the conference, which include a desire to use, expand, and challenge the notion of the public intellectual.

One as-yet-unpublished paper given at this conference, Carole Gerson’s “Pauline Johnson as Public Intellectual,” converges significantly with one of the chapters of this dissertation. As do I, Gerson notes that literary renown has been especially significant to the construction of the female public intellectual in Canada (“Pauline Johnson as Public Intellectual” 2). Another claim that Gerson makes in this paper is that the way in which we receive Johnson has everything to do with how we, as contemporary scholars, choose to construct her (4). Both Gerson and I see much to gain from reading Johnson as a literary public intellectual and activist. I read Gerson’s paper after writing my own chapter, but my thinking about Johnson is so informed by her earlier work that I am not surprised to find significant congruity between the ways in which she constructs Johnson as a public intellectual and the ways in which I do.

The other Mount Allison conference that promoted Canadian discussion of the literary public intellectual, entitled *Public Poetics: Critical Issues in Canadian Poetry and Poetics*, took place in 2012, and resulted in the publication of its proceedings in a book of the same name in 2015. Although the editors do not explicitly frame their questions through the figure of the public intellectual, the issues that the collection addresses are similar to those raised by this dissertation. In their insightful and timely introduction to

the volume, *Public Poetics*, Erin Wunker and Travis V. Mason draw on Michael Warner's *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002), a book that has also influenced my thinking about the public role of poetry, as I explain below. They suggest that lyric speech can have a public function: "we posit that lyric speech has the potential not only to cite specific temporal and geographic events, but also to activate the urgency with which those events are uttered" (3). They read "At the Mermaid Inn," the seminal column that appeared in the Toronto *Globe* in the early 1890s, as a foundational moment in Canadian public poetics, as do I in my examination of Pauline Johnson's historical context. Also echoing some of my claims about the evolution of the public sphere in Canada, they recognize the rise of state support for the arts in the modernist period as formative of the contemporary field in Canada (9). In this introduction, the editors suggest that "a historical trajectory of public poetics in Canada can be traced" (14). I view my dissertation as one such attempt to trace that trajectory.

Legislating Nothing

A final context for the questions central to this project is the longstanding conversation within literary criticism and among poets themselves about the social role of poetry.

While I draw most of my language for thinking about poetry as public intellectual work from theorists from the fields of sociology and political science, I am simultaneously on the grounds of a long literary debate over whether poetry serves a social function or is primarily an aesthetic object. Like most critics who touch on this subject from modernism on, I find the most compelling theories for thinking about this issue to be cross-

disciplinary. Nevertheless, I wish to acknowledge the critical and literary tradition, especially prominent in English literature from the Romantics to the Modernists, which was also concerned with the social role of poetry. It is beyond the scope of this introduction to dwell at length on that tradition. Here I wish to situate my own project in relation to three phrases that have circulated as familiar refrains on the relationship of poetry to politics.

The first is Percy Bysshe Shelley's 1819 argument in "A Defense of Poetry" that "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" (535). Shelley argues that the moral dimension of human life emerges from poetry itself. Although Shelley's claims for the overarching role of the poet sometimes sound overblown to my contemporary ears, I read his central argument in the *Defense* as paralleling what I draw on in my reading of Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958). Although Shelley focuses on the moral and legal aspects of public life, and Arendt on its intersubjective qualities, both argue that poetry is not a secondary or decorative result of public life, but rather calls public capacities themselves into being. In classical terms I might say that for both Shelley and Arendt, poiesis is the basis of praxis. Poets are the "founders of civil society" (Shelley 2).

Another phrase that comes readily to mind in thinking about the public role of poetry in the English literary tradition is W.H. Auden's "poetry makes nothing happen" (1472). Appearing in the context of the poem "In Memory of W.B. Yeats," the line refers to the failure of Yeats's Irish nationalism, as expressed in his poetry, to influence political

events. Yet Auden also says, just a few (less often quoted) lines later, that although poetry may lack the capacity for direct political effect, it “survives, \ A way of happening, a mouth.” To my mind “a way of happening” has a political implication, however poetry’s politics are spoken in a different register than that of rhetoric. Here I defer to Erin Wunker and Travis V. Mason’s recent and deft re-reading of this line (1-2). Far from reading Auden as claiming a space for poetry outside of public life, they argue that “an expansive public poetics is a way of happening that makes the impossible—that nothing outside of our knowing—happen.” (2). This interpretation is very much in line with my own thinking about the roles of poetry and criticism in this project.

My citing of the different political registers of rhetoric and poetry refers to Yeats’ own terse statement on the relationship of the poetic register to the rhetorical register, in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (1918): “We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry” (21). Here poetry is dialogic whereas rhetoric is monologic. Poetry reflects interior complexity, rhetoric attempts to act on others. The poetry I read in this dissertation challenges this distinction. There are elements in each of these three poets’ work that would seem to fall on the “rhetoric” side of Yeats’s divide. Each poet I study attempts to use poetry as a form of public address, and tries to quarrel with imagined others, or political systems; they use poetry to act on the world. Yet each of these poets’ work is pervasively dialogic. In this dissertation I read at length Dionne Brand’s representation of coming out as lesbian in “hard against the soul” as emblematic of the ways in which subjectivity has a political, a rhetorical, force. Her quarrel with

herself is indivisible from her quarrel with others. The same is true of Pauline Johnson and Dorothy Livesay; their poetry reflects the complexities that emerge from the quarrel with oneself, frequently in the same moments in which it quarrels with others. Therefore this dissertation refuses the division between rhetoric and poetry, and interests itself instead in the specific ways in which the poetic register might enable a vision of the political that other forms of rhetoric do not.

Prehistory of the Public Intellectual: Two Trajectories of Thinking about the Relationship between the Intellectual and the Public

Much contemporary scholarship on the public intellectual problematizes the term. Far from denoting a consensus about the role of the public intellectual, the term seems to have become a flashpoint for debates about the nature of the contemporary public sphere, and the relationship of intellectual labour to that sphere. My project is no exception. In identifying poets as public intellectuals in Canada it is important to consider different historical trajectories in intellectuals' relationships to the public sphere, trajectories that precede the category of the public intellectual as inaugurated by Jacoby's conception. Although the nature of the Canadian public is in a state of rapid transformation, it is my impression that these ways of imagining public life have continuing resonance for how we view the political relevance of intellectual and artistic work. What follows is a prehistory of the category of the public intellectual, in which I distinguish two broad trajectories that have characterized theories of the public role of the intellectual.

Although the term “public intellectual” has come into use fairly recently, theories of the role of the intellectual have long been concerned with the relationship of intellectual labour to the public sphere. These theories align, roughly, with two competing claims about the role of the intellectual. The first, which I call the disinterest model, has its origins in Emmanuel Kant’s “What is Enlightenment” (1784). Kant argues that Enlightenment consists of the emergence of freedom of individual thought in men, which is achieved in breaking free of the bonds of intellectual authority. This freedom is always constrained by the institutions to which men owe their loyalty.¹ Kant resolves this apparent contradiction through articulating a split between the private and public functions of men. Significantly for Kant, while intellectual “tutelage” is to be cast off, an individual thinker is bound by his specific location within institutions, a location that Kant labels “domestic.” For example, a clergyman has domestic responsibilities to his congregation not to undermine the teachings of the church from the pulpit (6). The same thinker can, however, question the rules and foundation of the church in the public

¹ I use the terms “men” and “he” in my discussion of Kant in order to accurately convey his gendered discourse, which in my view is essential to his argument.

sphere, through scholarship and writing. In this role, Kant argues, he should enjoy unlimited freedom to use his reason. In this sense Kant suggests a split in the private and public functions of the Enlightenment intellectual, and locates what we would understand as properly intellectual activities in the public realm. Here public intellectual activity is defined as discourse that is divorced from one's individual role within institutional structures. True intellectual freedom is intimately bound with the existence of a public role, free from the duties of the domestic.

This split between the private and the public is key to the disinterest model of the intellectual. In this trajectory, the domestic is associated with personal interest, and the public, which forms its antithesis, is characterized by the absence of the concerns that mark the domestic. This analysis is perhaps most explicitly articulated by Arendt in *The Human Condition*, in which she traces the distinction between the public and the private to the Ancient Greeks. She argues that there is a third realm of human activity, the social, which is characterized by an expansion of individual necessity to group interest, and functions on the model of the household. The public is the sphere of human activity that is divorced from necessity; it is the traditional realm of the political. Significantly for this project, while Arendt believes that politics have become beholden to the social realm, under certain conditions literature preserves the potential of the public. Writing belongs to the social when it reflects an interest in intimacy and the preservation of privacy. For Arendt the novel is the "only entirely social art form" and confessional poetry largely shares the novel's alignment with the social (39). For Arendt the "storyteller" is the

quintessentially public figure who transforms a private experience to a public one, thus developing a common reality (50). The intellectual labour of the writer, as opposed to her emotional labour, is the basis of her public identity. Although, structurally, Arendt's public sphere is shaped by the ideal of universality that informs Kant's work, she dismisses the suggestion that objectivity and neutrality define public activity. Arendt conceives of the public realm as something that both relates and separates individuals (she uses the metaphor of a table) (52). She emphasizes the necessity of pluralism and difference in constituting the public sphere and makes an important distinction between individual subjective location and social membership. Subjective location is necessary to the public sphere, whereas social membership represents private concerns and can never promote the commonality that is the purview of the public.

A third theorist who thinks about the public sphere as a site of disinterest, and whose work is highly relevant to this dissertation, is Jürgen Habermas. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962), Habermas imagines the public sphere as having originated in the specific economic conditions offered by liberal markets (74). Paradigmatically, this sphere emerged from the coffee houses and salons of eighteenth-century England, and was consolidated by bourgeois institutions such as the theatre, museums, novels, and journals. Unlike Arendt, Habermas sees continuity between the interiority developed in the domestic sphere and the culturally reflective capacities that emerged in these new contexts (51). The defining features of his public sphere are “rational-critical debate” (51)

and the “public use of reason” (28). Although he does not maintain the strong opposition between public and private that characterizes Kant and Arendt, Habermas’s belief that reason, debate, and criticism (rather than passion and advocacy) characterize the public sphere leads me to include him as a theorist who represents many of the assumptions and values that underlie imagining the public sphere as a site of disinterest.²

In distinction to the preceding group of theorists, I identify a second line of thought on the role of the intellectual in relationship to public life, one that imagines her as an impassioned and politically committed advocate: as interested. This competing trajectory for imagining the intellectual as a public figure is one that has given us the term “public intellectual.” This model, which I label the “interest” model of the public intellectual, has its origins in left-wing critiques of the social function of the intellectual. A notable precursor of contemporary conceptions of the interested intellectual can be found in Antonio Gramsci. His *Prison Notebooks* (written between 1929 and 1935) offer a

² Although my dissertation does not address his work, another significant theorist whom I would place in this trajectory is Julien Benda, who argues in *La Trahison des Clercs* (1928) that *clerics* (his religiously tinged word for the intellectual class) have historically defended abstract values. With political passions on the rise, the *clerc* has come to be appropriated by the ways of the world, or material interest. He has capitulated to the “intellectual organization of political hatreds” (21) that define the politicization of interest, specifically in his support for both the Fascist and Marxist causes.

different model of the intellectual as belonging to a public: in his sense, the intellectual's ideal formation is aligned with a specific public, a social class. This vision of public alignment is directly opposed to Arendt's conception of the public; in her view, class belongs not to the public realm but rather to the social. Gramsci himself is not interested in a universalized sense of the public but rather in the intellectual's relationship to different, and competing, classes. His discussion of the intellectual begins: "(A)re intellectuals an autonomous and independent social group, or does every social group have its own specialized category of intellectuals?" (5). The answer is that certain types of thinkers are located within their class and function as "organic intellectuals." Organic intellectuals do the intellectual work of expanding their class interests. They exist within every class (except, in Gramsci's context, the peasant class); for example the organic intellectuals of the capitalist class run the state in support of the material interests of capitalists. Although the term "organic intellectual" is often used to describe the activity of politically committed working-class intellectuals, the organic intellectual is an intellectual who is clearly intellectually aligned with the interests of any social class, and who emerges from that class.

Gramsci contrasts this social function of the intellectual with that of the "traditional intellectual," exemplified by the priest, lawyer, notary, teacher, and doctor (14). In Gramsci's context these figures are drawn from the peasantry, and live amongst peasants as aspirational figures and as mediators between the peasant class and the state. Although the class context in contemporary Canada is different, what we may take from this

distinction is that the traditional intellectual performs a function that appears as an independent profession with insular professional goals. The distinction between the traditional intellectual and the organic intellectual is primarily expressed in their relationship to their class interests; however, elsewhere in the notebooks Gramsci makes clear that while every class has its organic intellectuals, intellectuals of the “progressive class” exercise a power of attraction and draw intellectuals of all classes into their fold (60). Therefore a broader definition of an organic intellectual emphasizes that this figure emerges spontaneously from the people not to perform a specific economic function but rather to theorize the social world. For Gramsci, social location enables this theoretical ability. From this point of view, Arendt’s intellectual is enabled by a fantasy of the public as established in Ancient Greece by the exclusion of various social classes (slaves, foreigners, women).

This conception of the public role of the intellectual gained force from the pressures that new social movements, especially the feminist and gay rights movements, placed on the division between the public and private spheres. Some similarity to Gramsci’s idea that the organic intellectual is rooted in a specific location is to be found in Michel Foucault’s distinction between the universal intellectual, who is imagined as speaking for truth and justice, and the specific intellectual who has a local and specialized knowledge. With the movement from the universal intellectual, whose power resides in writing, to the specific intellectual, who may have various forms of local expertise, there is a dispersal of both the capacity to function as an intellectual and the power that is linked to that capacity

(127). Foucault critiques the position of the left intellectual who claims to speak for truth and justice as a manifestation of the universal intellectual (126). Foucault does not fit into either the trajectory of the disinterested or that of the interested intellectual, as he sees both trajectories as grounded in universal claims, as opposed to local knowledge.

It is exactly such a universalizing position that Edward Said claims in *Representations of the Intellectual*, a 1996 book emerging from a series of lectures broadcast on BBC radio. He suggests that the intellectual is always positioned, politically engaged, and wholly marked by her social location. This social location is necessarily one of exile. Using the language of Walter Benjamin, Said says that the intellectual thinks “against the grain,” resulting in resistance to both authority and dogmatism. This tendency ideally aligns the intellectual with social movements. Nevertheless, Said agrees with Benda, Kant and Arendt that the intellectual leans towards universalism. For Said, this universalism comes not from a neutral discursive sphere, as in disinterest theories, but from the very nature of exile. The exile is unsettled, outside of dominant discourses, and consequently possesses “double vision”. This doubling lends itself to universalism. Therefore the intellectual is inherently resistant both to nationalism and to party lines in resistance movements. While Said shares the language of universalism with the theorists discussed earlier, his sense of the universal differs from theirs significantly in that it has nothing to do with disinterest; rather, the specific interested location of the exiled intellectual is the cause of his universal vision. Unlike a universalism dependent on a rarefied and separate sphere of

public discourse, this is a universalism that sits alongside investment in material and social struggles.

Said criticizes those who retreat from social struggle to profit by intellectual work. In doing so he makes a distinction between professionals and amateurs. The professional intellectual is one for whom intellectual work is specialized and leads to academic advancement. The amateur's work is fueled by passion and care; she pursues intellectual labour not as work but as vocation. Said suggests that an attitude of professionalism limits the scope of the intellectual to "technical formalism," and is a threat to the true work of the intellectual, which is to "speak truth to power" (85).³

This conception of an interested intellectual who takes an active and partisan role in public discourse also informs the work of Russell Jacoby, who (as noted above) popularized the term "public intellectual" in his 1987 book *The Last Intellectuals*. Jacoby's understanding of the public intellectual provides many contemporary thinkers with their standard definition of the public intellectual. His analysis is more sociological than philosophical and is overwhelmingly concerned with the circumstances of the

³ Perhaps a Canadian parallel is to be found in Harold Innis, who sees unique Canadian insights as resting on the periphery of empire, and who conceives of a balance of biases as replacing disinterest as the basis of universalism. See Berland, "Nationalism and the Modernist Legacy" (2000).

American public intellectual, although he includes Canada, parenthetically, in his scope (xi). Jacoby mourns a generation of intellectuals that “has failed to appear” (4) among Americans born after approximately 1942, an effect he ascribes largely to the increased openness of colleges and universities after the Second World War (15). The public, for Jacoby, is largely but not entirely a product of the market; in addition to the changing nature of the university, Jacoby cites the restructuring of cities and the resulting end of bohemia as causes of the disappearance of the public intellectual (5). For Jacoby a public intellectual is one who speaks to a general, if educated, audience. Additionally he displays “vigor and clarity” (ix) in his thought and writing. University work is not anathema to the public intellectual, but it should not define his primary intellectual output. He is ideally part of the left, although conservative thinkers who display appropriate vigour may also participate in public intellectual discourse (5).

With the expansion of the universities, this figure is threatened with extinction. The safe haven that university departments have offered for those who otherwise would have been public intellectuals effectively removes their thought from public circulation. Like Said, Jacoby rejects the work of the specific intellectual, identifying the general intellectual with the public intellectual. In addition to a materialist critique of the university’s poaching of the intellectual from public life, Jacoby also makes a rhetorical critique. In his view, Fredric Jameson is particularly egregious in his elevation of textuality over materialism, a fault that Jacoby identifies with the university rather than Jameson’s literary orientation (170).

Jacoby makes a convincing argument about the material evolution of American intellectual work. However, his valuation of clarity and vigour, and his representative figures for the public intellectual, John Dewey, William James, and George Santayana (148), cast the public intellectual as not only male but as almost aggressively masculine. His critique of postmodernism seems grounded in a suspicion of literary thought as much as in his desire for public accessibility. Elsewhere he claims that the Jewish quest for acceptance in America makes Jews shorter-lived as radicals than those who attach to the left out of a fuzzily defined “independence.” Jacoby’s public intellectual is not only interested in public engagement, but is also cast as an “everyman” within a white, masculine, American imaginary.

These two lines of thought, the interest and the disinterest trajectories of thinking about the relationship between the intellectual and the public, constitute much of the theoretical background of this project. In considering the career of Pauline Johnson, I suggest that her identity as a poet-advocate forms one site of her self-fashioning as a public intellectual, one that prefigures the yet-to-emerge interested intellectual. I argue that another, often less attended to, aspect of her intellectual and artistic aspirations is that she understood herself to be a high-art lyric poet and a disinterested public intellectual. In my second chapter I consider Dorothy Livesay’s writing in the context of some of the influential institutions of her time, which were highly concerned with questions of interest and disinterest as they applied to cultural production in Canada. I read Livesay’s

poetry and politics in light of the discourses on interest and disinterest that permeated her world. In my final chapter I turn to the poetry of Dionne Brand, and show that she can be (and has been) understood as a public intellectual operating in the interest mode, and more specifically as a Gramscian organic intellectual. However, I also show that many of the insights developed by Arendt pervade Brand's poetry. I read her poetry as suggesting that she is also invested in securing a site of intellectual production that is protected from economic interest, and that her vision of the public shares much with Arendt's.

Nothing can be further than poetry from a vision of the public intellectual as defined by both political urgency and popular access. Although there have been historical and national contexts in which poetry functioned as a forum for the public intellectual thus defined, Canada from the late nineteenth century until the present day has not been one of them. My understanding of the function of the public, however, sits well with poetry; I see it as one of the best sites we have for imagining public engagement. This understanding emerges from the writing of Arendt, and views the public world as being intersubjectively produced. Poetry, in this understanding, is a site of the production of a public world.⁴

⁴ A Canadian point of reference for my view of poetry as a site of the production of a public world in the Arendtian sense is to be found in Robin Blaser (see, for example "The Fire" and "The Recovery of the Public World" in *The Fire: Collected Essays of Robin Blaser* (2006).

A final work I substantially draw on in this dissertation is Michael Warner's *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002). Like Warner, I see in this political moment opportunities for reading Arendt "against the grain" (60). Like Arendt, Warner argues for a view of the public as a "poetic world-making" (114). He suggests that publics are constituted through poiesis, as opposed to the view that publics are pre-existing bodies that the intellectual must rationally persuade (115). Speaking against the idea of public discourse as rational debate, Warner draws our attention back to the poetic function of public address (146). It is this relationship between the performative functions of language and the production of public life that I draw on in viewing poets as public intellectuals.

Poetry and the Canadian Public Sphere

There is another reason that this project treats poetry as a form of public discourse, which has to do with the specifics of the Canadian public sphere. The proposition that poetry is both marginal and private is the result of multiple literary and material trends over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and has come to seem self-evident to many readers and critics. However, there is an aspect of the Canadian public sphere that works against this proposition. Canadian cultural history has been powerfully shaped by the idea that one of the tasks of government is to facilitate the emergence of a public sphere. This task has been conceived of in multiple ways at different moments in Canadian history, but has remained a consistent force in the development of a uniquely Canadian public, which has grown alongside the strong influences of British, American,

and, increasingly, international culture. This facilitation has included significant state support for poetry, which has been seen to have public utility as a vehicle for nation-building. For this reason it is perhaps easier to make the case for poetry as a public discourse in Canada than it would be for many other nations over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The relationship of state structures to building a public in Canada has been the subject of recent scholarship (Berland, Litt, Hornstein). I engage most extensively with this work in my chapter on Dorothy Livesay, largely because her career overlaps with the modernist period in Canada, which has been seen as a high water mark for government investment in Canadian culture; however, the propositions that the state has had a long-term investment in growing Canadian culture, that a Canadian public sphere follows rather than precedes the building of a state apparatus in Canada, and that state supported institutions have had a uniquely strong influence on public discourse in Canada, are implicit in each of my chapters. I am, throughout this dissertation, concerned with the relationships between particular poets, institutional contexts, and the public sphere.

There are various views to be found on the relationship between state investment in culture and the development of a public sphere in Canada. Jody Berland points out the indebtedness to Harold Innis of post-1950s investment in the public sphere (15). She calls the modernist defence of Canadian culture from encroaching commercialization the “Innis-Massey constellation.” While I appreciate the specificity of the modernist iteration

of this theme, I believe, and show in my discussion of Pauline Johnson's institutional context, that this constellation draws on a longer standing alliance in Canada between high art, cultural defence, and the production of publics. On the other hand, Michael Dorland argues against the idea that the government can produce a public sphere, and suggests that Canadian culture is marked by a collapse of the functions of the social and the public sphere; indeed he claims that state investment in culture has prevented the formation of a genuine public ("Policing"). My own perspective is that the state's heightened investment in culture in Canada has neither assured nor prevented the emergence of a public sphere. Rather, I am interested in the ways in which poets leverage their existing contexts to produce shifting publics. These publics do not always line up neatly with nationalist interests. This disjuncture is perhaps most apparent in Chapter 3, on Dionne Brand, who so fruitfully uses institutions that are intended for nation-building in support of a different vision of the public altogether. In the absence of a large population with significant accumulations of private wealth, state material support provides the opportunity for artists and intellectuals to build public spheres. In Canada the project of facilitating artistic production as a line of defence against external cultural domination has had the effect of producing a thriving literary culture. It is due to this particular cultural history that poetry has been able to serve as a site of socially and politically engaged thought, and of public building, in Canada.

Despite their diversity, my authors do not represent the regions or literary cultures of Canada, but are rather three figures that caught my interest. Most obviously, perhaps, I do

not examine the rich literary cultures of Quebec, and I imagine that similar questions about the relationships between nation, publics, literature, and intellectual production would produce very different insights if addressed to that tradition. Within Canada, I imagine there are also many other community contexts in which literature plays a public role. Even in relation to the authors I discuss, I have chosen to focus on some communities of reception and production at the expense of others. For example, Brand has been quite vocal about the context for her work being international black activist culture; while I acknowledge and attend to this salient fact, my choice to read her in the context of Canada brings other elements of her writing to the fore. Similarly, I wonder how my reading of Johnson's rhetorical strategies would square with a critical reading of her in the context of native rhetorical traditions. My interest in this project, however, is the role of poetry in the evolution of a public sphere in English Canada, mediated by institutions. My ambitions here fall short of coming to overarching conclusions about Canadian culture. Instead, I imagine nation in this project largely in materialist terms, and consider its role in the work of three particular poets.

The careers of these three authors, in addition to being compelling in and of themselves, are very good frames through which a certain picture can appear. Over the course of the late nineteenth, twentieth, and early twenty-first centuries, a certain type of Canadian public sphere came to exist, and then began to wane. At the end of the nineteenth century, as Johnson sought to establish herself as a poet, Canadian intellectuals were concerned with the establishment of Canada as a unique nation. The relationship of this

nation to culture and to institutions was a pressing concern that formed part of a context of her writing. Johnson's self-fashioning as a public intellectual occurred as she found herself in various ways included in, and excluded from, these early iterations of a Canadian public sphere. Dorothy Livesay's career, particularly in its middle phase, was contemporaneous with the rise of both literary modernism and a modern Canadian public sphere. Consequently, I read her public intellectual engagement in the context of the establishment of influential institutions of national culture, including the Canada Council and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). Finally, Dionne Brand's poetry appears in the midst of the dismantling of some of the structures of Canadian cultural nationalism, as the nation-state begins to give way to economic globalization. I read her insistence on political dissensus, and her awareness of the loss of the possibilities of public life, in light of this political moment.

Gender and the Canadian Public Intellectual

The final category through which I frame the public intellectual is gender. I was initially drawn to looking at Canadian women writers as public intellectuals because I was repeatedly struck by the fact that some of Canada's most visible intellectuals on the national stage have been literary women. Why, in a culture that can be, at times, frustratingly anti-intellectual, was I finding a seeming exception to the rule in our literary stars? And why, in a world that recognizes the intellectual contributions of men far more easily than those of women, were these stars so often female? In spite of the fact that women continue to be underrepresented as published authors, and are frequently critically

overlooked, numerous Canadian women writers have achieved remarkable international success. Speculating on the reason for this success led me to want to look more closely at the ways in which literary women have operated and are operating as public intellectuals in Canada. The fact that this should be the case seems to me to be linked to two factors, each of which informs the careers of the women I look at.

The first is that public support of the literary arts in Canada has created space in which women might think. Women have been historically excluded from dominant networks of cultural and intellectual production in Canada that have embraced the values of disinterest and reason. They have frequently been aligned with the private, the affective, and the lyrical, and have been marginalized by this alignment. The Canadian tradition of valuing the arts as tools of nation-building has, however, created a space in which the ostensibly private, affective, and lyrical work of poetry might flourish. Among other things, this dissertation shows the ways in which women have used this space to operate both intellectually and publically. At the same time, they have challenged the associations that come with the terms “public” and “intellectual.” Our image of the public intellectual is often that of Jacoby’s American author of critical essays and books written in clear, accessible, discursive prose. Although at times the three writers that I focus on do operate in that rhetorical vein, they more frequently use the conventions of poetry than those of polemic. Yet they are each highly publicly and intellectually engaged. In Warner’s language, they have used this space to perform the “world-making” (149) work of the public intellectual.

My second motivation for focusing on women writers is my interest in the ways in which women, by virtue of their social position, have experiences of language, of politics, of intellectual work, and of the public sphere that are frequently surprising and counterintuitive. This claim, particularly as it relates to language, has increasingly been critiqued as essentialist and inattentive to differences among women. Yet I believe it represents an insight that continues to offer a useful, although admittedly not all-encompassing, lens through which to read women's writing. Each of the writers I attend to occupies a number of marginal positions, and each can be looked at through the lenses of race, class, sexuality, and a number of other categories in addition to those of gender and nation. I try not to gloss over these differences, but rather to attend to the ways in which they intersect with gender and nation in forming the perspectives that we see in their writing.

Each of these writers, in her own unique way, inhabits what I refer to in Chapter 1 as the "space-off" (de Lauretis 26) of the public of her time. They can be understood, in Barbara Godard's language, as ex-centriques. "(W)ithin the literatures of Canada," Godard argues in an influential 1984 article, "women's writing holds a special place. Since Canadian and Quebec literatures are in themselves expression of colonized peoples, women's writing is a model for our two literatures in general" (57). Her use of the term "colonized" to refer to the marginalization of settler cultures, and of the unitary category of "women's writing," utilizes the political language of a different time and sits uneasily

with my own sensibilities. Yet, I find her claim useful for thinking about the ways in which women have occupied a “space-off” for Canadian literature, and about the ways in which this positioning has echoed the minority status of Canadian literature itself. This parallelism suggests another reason for the visibility of women writers as exemplars of Canada’s literature. For Godard, the decentred position of women makes itself especially evident in relationship to language- a view I share. This is why I find women’s writing, and particularly women’s poetry, a fruitful source in looking at the world-making function of the public intellectual. It is also why my exploration of the view of the public that each of these writers holds is grounded not in their most explicitly public utterances, but instead in a close reading of their poetry.

Structure of the Dissertation

What follows is a brief overview of the three author-focused chapters of this dissertation, and a description of the project’s arc as a whole. The authors were chosen for three reasons: each is a public intellectual insofar as that term can be applied in her time; in each case, their writings show an interest in the dynamics of the public sphere; and all have had careers that illuminate the constitution of the public in their respective eras. This summary leaves out something that will become clear in the project as a whole, which is my strong admiration for and engagement with the unique poetic language of each author. My chapters, I hope, reflect, in a way that an introduction cannot, my desire to dwell in each poet’s respective language, and to read her on her own terms.

Each of these women worked in a variety of genres and media including the radio play, the novel, film, short fiction, literary criticism and polemical writing; a more broadly focused study of their significance as Canadian public intellectuals would encompass this other work. In this study I draw attention to these authors' work in genres outside of poetry both to establish that they are each engaged in a broader public intellectual project, and occasionally in order to illuminate their poetry or to revisit the question of the public intellectual as it applies to each of them. Each of these women also produced a great deal of poetry that is not discussed in this project, although I believe that the arguments I make are not contradicted by but would rather be enhanced by wider study of their larger bodies of poetry. In each chapter my argument focuses on close readings of a limited number of poems. In the chapter on Pauline Johnson I bring sustained attention to two poems, in the Dorothy Livesay chapter I look at six poems, and in the final chapter on Dionne Brand I bring in-depth attention to intertwined work from two of her volumes of poetry. My rationale for this choice is the belief that in the limited scope of a dissertation there is more insight to be gained from a deep reading of a small selection of poetry than from a broader cataloguing of examples of these poets' use of poetry as a means of public engagement.

In the first chapter, I read and contextualize the public intellectual activities of Pauline Johnson. Borrowing a critical term from one of Johnson's contemporaries, I situate her as a "poet-advocate." Despite her enormous popularity, she was excluded from networks of circulation and production that other poets of her time had access to. Contrasting her

with her closest peers, the Confederation poets, I show that her popular appeal was achieved in spite of her lack of acceptance as a highbrow poet, and that her relegation to the popular was a product of race, class, and gender-based exclusions. Through close reading of two of Johnson's poems and of her critical reception, I suggest that her career was constrained by what Terry Goldie has described as the semiotic field within which native figures are representable; I additionally attend to the roles of class and gender in Johnson's case. I see her, however, not as a passive victim of these semiotic limitations, but rather as their canny handler. Paying particular attention to the ways in which her poems stage the experience of empathy, I argue that the exclusions that she encountered left Johnson with a vision of the public that emphasized dissensus, affect, and political interest. This orientation is in sharp contrast to her contemporaries, and contributes to her current critical appeal.

Of particular interest to me in this first chapter, as throughout this project, is the relationship of institutional structures to the making of a public. Johnson was working in the context of a paucity of Canadian institutional support for writers. The supports that existed were informal, transient, incipient, and exclusionary. Left out of networks of production and circulation that constituted the nascent public sphere, Johnson managed to treat the very factors that worked against her inclusion as leverage with which to launch a literary career. For a critic such as myself, who, for generational as much as for political reasons, began this project viewing the public sphere as a product of state-run institutional structures, studying Johnson's career has been a lesson in the extent to which

artists and intellectuals work to create and sustain their own publics out of the materials at hand. I remain a supporter of the eroding institutions that helped to shape me.

Nevertheless, studying Johnson's cultural production, and her self-fashioning as a public intellectual, has provided for both myself and this project a much-needed note of optimism about the capacities of artists to build public life even in the absence of institutional support.

In my second chapter, I turn my attention to Dorothy Livesay and read the evolution of her poetry in relationship with the cultural field in mid-twentieth century Canada. I consider Livesay's poetry in the context of the development of a modernist public sphere, which was enabled by the founding of institutions such as the Canada Council and the CBC. I argue that these institutions bear the traces of a tension between the two ways of thinking about public intellectual engagement that I have labeled the disinterest and the interest trajectories of thought. Within Canada, I argue, both these trajectories are represented in the debates about public institutions that were prominent in the 1930s and 1940s, and that continue today. I read Livesay's early Imagist poetry, and her development of the documentary poem, in the context of these competing discourses. I also re-visit Livesay's work with the CBC with these tensions in mind. I suggest that both sides of this cultural tension are represented in Livesay's work. In this chapter, I am particularly concerned with the ways in which Livesay's writing and political engagement evolve to challenge the division between the public and the private spheres. This perspective anticipates many of the critiques that were yet to be raised by the

feminist and gay liberation movements. As with Johnson, Livesay's marginal status gifts her with a situated knowledge that is highly resonant with contemporary discussions about the nature of the public sphere.

The final chapter of this dissertation focuses on the contemporary cultural field in Canada and its relevance to Dionne Brand's career as a public intellectual, with a primary focus on the role of poetry in that career. I argue that Brand can be fruitfully read as fashioning her own career as that of a public intellectual of the interest trajectory. However, a close reading of two key volumes of her poetry, *No Language is Neutral* (1990) and *Inventory* (2006), suggests a resonance between Brand's view of the public and that of Arendt, who imagines the public as a site of disinterest. The meaning I make of this is that Brand, like Arendt, imagines the public sphere as a "space of appearance" (Arendt 195) in which the freedom from competing *economic* interests allows for a diversity of subject positions to appear. I see Brand's poetry as mourning the loss of a public sphere. She does not think of loss primarily as the erosion of a Canadian national public sphere, but is rather concerned with other, extra-national, sites of the public. Nonetheless, I argue that Brand's view of the role of public life in the production of thought and hope offers a useful perspective on the consequences of the ongoing erosion of the institutions that have anchored the public sphere in Canada.

The tension between the interest and disinterest models of the activity of the public intellectual in Brand's writing career speaks compellingly to some of the ideological questions facing artists and intellectuals in Canada. It is hard to imagine most of the

staunchest defenders of the publicly funded arts and culture institutions in this country explicitly buying into the values of disinterest and quality that subtend these same institutions. The idea that a person or a work of art can be free of interest is anathema to contemporary left understandings of how culture and ideology function, and attempts to call on these values often come across as either willful or naïve defences of the status quo. It is on these grounds that Arendt's view of the public can be, and has been, dismissed. In light of this anticipated objection, it may come across as audacious that I align Brand with this element of Arendt's thought.

Yet it is precisely this alignment in Brand that is so useful, both for understanding contemporary left-wing defences of Canadian cultural institutions, and for understanding Brand's own conception of the public. In imagining the public sphere as a space free from necessity in which the subject can appear in a community of peers, Arendt is imagining the types of intersubjective engagements that become possible when economic concerns are eliminated or excluded. It is a utopian image, and one shared by many Canadian cultural producers. The intersubjective jostling that is imagined is necessarily marked by differences; these do not constitute the interest that is to be excluded. The interest that is placed outside the public in the Massey Commission model is the interest of American capital. Brand would of course extend this exclusion to all capital, and to the interests of the Canadian nation, which is where she departs from the Massey Commission model profoundly.

Although this project does not tell a comprehensive story about Canadian culture, the Canadian public intellectual, or poetry in Canada, my three chapters do form an arc through which I think about the conditions for a public sphere in Canada. I place the Massey Commission and the foundation of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation at the historical centre of this dissertation. On one side of that centre sits Johnson and a relatively underdeveloped public sphere, and on the other, Brand and the despair that accompanies the loss of a public. This account represents a somewhat melancholic trajectory of the public sphere in Canada. Its melancholy is my own, but exists in a larger cultural context of regret over a cultural loss that is ongoing. Nevertheless this project, much like Brand's poetry, sustains a tension between despair and hope. The consistency with which the poets I examine have built publics out of the tools at hand suggests to me that this work is necessarily ongoing. There are contexts that facilitate or impede the production of publics, intellectual engagements, and poetry, but the will towards crafting these seems to me, as to Arendt, to be part of the "human condition" in Canada, as elsewhere.

Chapter 1. Pauline Johnson

Scene, final;

Setting, modern;

House, interior.

Left centre, window open to the west;

Right centre, swing door (showing some exterior

And eastern garden seats where one may rest).

Dramatis Personae,

Two wand'ring spirits

Who speak their lines, then flit across the stage,

Trusting the audience to applaud their merits,

Hoping their failures earn not failure's wage.

Enter

The 'Gentle Reader' with this paper –

Then, warning tinkle of the curtain-bell;

The footlights lower; something like a vapour

Comes to the eyes that westward look farewell;

The rising audience dons its coat and filing

(The 'Gentle Reader' stays until the close);

Then with the customary bowing, smiling,
Exit Miss Poetry and Mr Prose.

—Pauline Johnson,

“Curtain”

Introduction

Pauline Johnson's stock is up. If, as Carole Gerson has argued (“The Most Canadian”), Johnson’s popularity during her lifetime was followed by an erasure from the Canadian canon in its modernist iteration, her subsequent reclamation, which gained force from 1990 on, has been a success. George W. Lyon’s 1990 article “Pauline Johnson: A Reconsideration” called for a re-evaluation of the meaning and value of Johnson’s career in light of contemporary critical concerns. Gerson’s 1998 article “The Most Canadian of All Canadian Poets: Pauline Johnson and the Construction of a National Literature” established the reasons for the decline in Johnson’s literary reputation, arguing for her recuperation in light of changing relationships between popular and elite discourses, as well as changing values regarding gender and race. With the subsequent proliferation of academic writing on Johnson, including Gerson’s own publication, with Veronica Strong-Boag, of both a critical biography of Johnson and a new edition of her collected poetry

and selected prose, Johnson has again become a figure of great interest⁵. For the first time, serious critical interest in Johnson exceeds her popular recognition. As a personality, Johnson has generated interest on the basis of (among other things) her celebrity (Lorraine York), her native self-representation (Daniel Francis, Craig Womack), and her rhetorical strategies (Womack, Mary Elizabeth Leighton, Janice Fiamengo). While my writing of this chapter is evidence of the fact that I believe there is still much to be said about her career, in the last two decades Johnson has been both reconsidered and recuperated. Among the themes that have dominated this reconsideration are her race, her popularity, her status as a performer, her gender, and her value as a poet. Although they have tremendous contemporary appeal, most of these themes have their origins in Johnson's reception during her lifetime. These concerns, even anxieties, over the significance of her appeal have at times overshadowed interest in her poetry.

I intentionally begin this chapter with an economic metaphor; value is a key term in thinking about Johnson's career. I can think of no poet who better encapsulates Pierre Bourdieu's argument that there is an inverse relationship between popular success and

⁵ Although I situate Johnson's reclamation in the context of larger theoretical and disciplinary trends, this reclamation was anything but inevitable. Many critics have fruitfully engaged with Johnson, but Carole Gerson's scholarship (which I don't have space to engage with in anything approaching its entirety) has been a clear impetus behind the current enthusiasm for Johnson, in which this chapter participates.

literary value. As well, in looking at Johnson's career it becomes clear that material constraints were prominent factors in her choice of performance as her dominant mode of literary dissemination. Any analysis of her career that tries to account for her popularity must be at least in part materialist. At the same time, criticism that has challenged the dismissal of her poetry on the basis of its presumed melodrama and lack of literary sophistication has drawn needed, and insightful, attention to her overlooked skill as a rhetorician. In this chapter I draw together what I see as the materialist and the rhetorical trajectories that have emerged in recent discussions of her writing, arguing that she produced unique, rhetorically subtle, poems in a particular material context. I also attempt to correct for the lack of rigorous attention to Johnson's poetry in contemporary criticism, relative to discussions of her prose, her persona, and her performance career.⁶ Comments made in private correspondence, as well as the fact that she began her career and promoted herself as a "poetess," suggest that she understood herself as a poet first and foremost. This self-understanding aligns with my own critical sense of Johnson, which is that her poetry crystalizes and clarifies many of the key concerns of her writing. In particular, it was through close reading of her poetry that her attempts to act as a public intellectual came to appear to me as a central feature of her work.

⁶ One exception to this generalization is the 2000 article "Paddled by Pauline," in which Glenn Willmott draws attention to this relative lack of close reading (especially of lyric poems) in Johnson criticism, and brings such attention to her poem "Shadow River: Muskoka".

In this chapter I argue that Johnson can fruitfully be described as a public intellectual, in that she produced subtle intellectual critique, achieved a high public profile, and attempted to effect political change. In the absence of any models for doing so, she developed her own conception of this role. By 1896, it was evident enough that one critic, John Maclean, coined a term for it: “poet-advocate” (Strong-Boag and Gerson 114). Johnson’s emergence as a public intellectual was tied to her work as a performer. Through theatre she was able to mobilize her audience’s affect, in the interest of political change. This choice ran counter to the views of public and political life that were dominant in her time. In making this argument, I situate Johnson’s choices in the context of the public she found herself in, as well as in the context of her particular economic circumstances; these contexts necessarily overlap, as the nature of the Canadian public in her time had its own implications for Johnson’s economic options.

Turning to Johnson’s literary production, I read two of her poems to show the ways in which she works as an intellectual, in relationship to differing conceptions of the public. In my reading of “A Cry from an Indian Wife,” I argue that her performance poetry created a version of the public that reflected values that diverged from those represented by the Confederation poets, who constituted the Canadian high-art literary establishment in the late nineteenth century. Whereas the Confederation poets operated in an emergent Canadian public that was characterized by the growth of print publication and the values of reason, disinterest and consensus, Johnson’s performances, as well as her poetry,

asserted the value of affect, interest, and dissensus. I suggest that Johnson, as a result of her exclusion from the liberal public-building projects of her time, anticipates many of the critiques of this public that emerge in contemporary political theory. I read this anticipation as an under-recognized intellectual engagement on her part. I then read Johnson's print-based poem "Give Us Barabbas" as an attempt on her part to align herself with intellectual movements that had both larger appeal and universalizing commitments. I show that even as she seeks identification with other "others," she does so in a way that abandons some of the most challenging insights of her pro-native poetry.

Outside the Mermaid Inn: Johnson's Cultural Field

In arguing that Johnson built a career as a public intellectual, I am applying a contemporary term anachronistically in the hope that it will aid in reading her writing and the context of its production. In the introduction to this dissertation I summarized various conceptions of the relationship between the public and intellectuals. Johnson's own career precedes a good number of these conversations about the public. As well, it takes place in a context, nineteenth-century Canada, where the modern public sphere was nascent; as I will show in the following chapter, many of the institutions that formed our contemporary understanding of the Canadian public are products of modernism. Johnson's context involved very informal networks, small-scale literary ventures, reliance on foreign publishers, and a new but growing newspaper industry. Kant's linking of free thought, publicness, and social roles that we might now understand as intellectual in nature had set a precedent for imagining the intellectual as having a public role to play.

As well, there was an understanding of certain activities and professions as intellectual. However, the public intellectual as an established social role did not exist at the beginning of Johnson's career. At the time, the Confederation poets were working towards building a public sphere in Canada and creating contexts within which they might work as intellectuals. Johnson faced a similar challenge. In referring to her as a public intellectual, I am suggesting not that she stepped into a pre-existing category that lines up exactly with our contemporary understandings of the term, but rather that she worked towards inventing her own category of activity in relation to the specific institutions, discourses, and networks around her. In making this case, I build on Strong-Boag and Gerson's argument that Johnson's poetry did in fact have intellectual and philosophical content, despite a critical environment that was at times unreceptive of this content (155).

One of these discursive contexts, which would go on to inform scholarship on Johnson (and at times the lack thereof), is the contrast between elite and popular cultural production, and the association of elite culture with intellectuality. The most visible evidence of Johnson's publicness during her lifetime was her popularity. Lorraine York has shown that Johnson's reception established her as a literary celebrity. This status persisted beyond her lifetime; Vancouverites lined the streets in the thousands to watch her funeral procession, and both her poetry and her persona continued for some time to engage a wide audience. As Gerson has argued ("The Most Canadian"), this popular status was ultimately a factor in her erasure by subsequent modernist canonical revision.

As Gerson has also shown, however, the divisions between high and low art that were to place Johnson on the outskirts of respectable literature following the modernist assessment of her work were not fully operant during her lifetime. Earle Birney's brief and damning assessment of Johnson's writing in 1961—"I don't read her" (Strong-Boag and Gerson 130)—does not reflect the attitude of her contemporaries. The Confederation poets did read her, although this is not to say that she was fully accepted. York suggests that the tension between symbolic and economic capital was active during Johnson's career (8), as do Strong-Boag and Gerson (155). The separation of high and low, elite and popular, disinterest and "advocacy" is not a modernist invention; however, this separation did become heightened in modernist Canada. While there were anxieties about the legitimacy of Johnson's poetic contributions, these anxieties did not result in a thorough devaluation of her work. Johnson's literary celebrity situated her on the margins of elite poetry, but it was not the barrier to critical engagement that it would become for later critics.

I believe that the critical recognition Johnson received in her own time is best understood as a result of the realities of the Canadian public sphere at the time. It would take a consolidation of the means to produce a body of Canadian high art, such as that brought about by the Massey Commission, to support a wide material division between disinterested high art and art marked by advocacy, popularity, and commerce. Although Canadian cultural producers and critics inherited and reproduced the idea of a divide between popular and high art, the critical attention afforded to Johnson in her time

suggests that the material conditions of Canada in the late nineteenth century were inadequate to the task of creating a *class* of producers who could present themselves as untouched by commerce. Some ways in which this class can be created include university teaching careers and both private and government grants. All these were either absent or rare in nineteenth-century Canada. What did exist were government jobs and newspapers, although only the former could be considered a secure source of income. Johnson's employment options would have been more limited than those of her white male contemporaries, and a performance career may well have been the best economic choice for her if she wanted to continue to write. Although they had more economic options than she did, the very fact of having to earn a living may have sensitized Johnson's male contemporaries to the very real material needs that she encountered. Even though some writers were able to keep their writing separate from their commercial activities, a class of producers who conceived of themselves as disinterested artists is hard to imagine in this context. This fact, as well as the size of the Canadian literary community, may account for the fact that Johnson was not, in her time, entirely judged by the values of the field of cultural production.

The fact that Johnson's choices were materially constrained has been addressed by a number of critics. As Sabine Milz has shown, the "practical-material necessities" that Johnson faced were a key determinant of her choice of a performance career (127). George W. Lyon also highlights the role of material necessity in her career (137). In a recent catalogue for a Pauline Johnson exhibit at the Chiefswood National Historic site, it

is reported that even the provenance of her controversial native outfit was materially determined in the most concrete way: Johnson, reluctant to perform at the Imperial Club because she couldn't afford a new dress, was told by Frank Yeigh to wear "something Indian" (Hill 15). Although it is contradicted by other accounts of the origin of Johnson's fanciful native costuming, this suggestion of a material determination for an outfit that has become a critical metonymy for Johnson's performativity encapsulates the ways in which material reality and rhetorical play intertwine in her career.

As Nick Mount has described in *When Canadian Literature Moved to New York* (2005), in the late nineteenth century Canadian writers faced "substantial material impediments to domestic authorship" (12). Among these challenges were:

A publishing industry more intent on reprinting familiar English and American authors than encouraging new Canadian authors; inadequate copyright protection for books first published in Canada; higher postage rates for magazines shipped within Canada than imported into Canada; and, its writers claimed, a readership too preoccupied with economic progress to care about imaginative literature. (12-13)

Mount offers a detailed account of the material pressures that were behind a mass migration of Canadian writers to New York City at the time of Johnson's career. These conditions help explain Johnson's turning to an English publisher in 1895 for the publication of *The White Wampum*, and the fact that she established her domestic career

largely as a performer. Nevertheless, despite considerable barriers, Canada had a thriving popular press by the end of the nineteenth century. Paul Rutherford shows that in the 1890s there was a proliferation of newspapers and journals, which constituted Canada's first mass media (5). Johnson's journalism, appearing in both American and Canadian publications, can be understood as both a material necessity and an attempt to engage with the public that was being established through the growth of the newspaper and journal industry. At this time the Canadian public, as described by Rutherford, was "fragmented and plural, its institutions more autonomous [than ours] and its consensus more troubled" (8). All the institutions that might make up a public sphere were rudimentary when Johnson was writing. This situation allowed not only the proximity between high and low art discussed earlier, but also a great diversity of legitimate public speech.

In the absence of a mature public sphere in this period, one might look at the language and assumptions surrounding attempts to build a public sphere in order to configure dominant assumptions about what the public was, and what the role of the writer was in relation to it. A rich source for this study is the weekly column "At the Mermaid Inn," which ran in the Toronto *Globe* in 1892-1893. This column provided a platform for Wilfred Campbell, Archibald Lampman, and Duncan Campbell Scott to discuss issues

relevant to the building of a Canadian public, both literary and otherwise⁷. Barrie Davies's introduction to the collection of the column in book form emphasizes the columnists' persistent concerns with the lack of national institutions, the consequent lack of national culture, and a Canadian inclination to utilitarianism and anti-intellectualism. He recognizes the link that is drawn in these columns between art, social justice, nation, and the public (xv), and concludes that the "most persistent and crucial concern of 'At the Mermaid Inn' lies in the series of attempts to create an atmosphere in which art and artists could flourish" (xvii). I would add to this that the columnists show an interest in creating not only an artistic but also an intellectual public sphere, established through specific material supports; these are treated as inseparable projects. Lampman links the creation of a public with the development of literature in Canada, calling for the growth of a print and magazine culture (84). Wilfred Campbell (96) is concerned with the encroachment of mass culture, warning against American magazines, popularity, and marketing. Book taxes are repeatedly discussed, and Lampman advocates for the development of a national art gallery (337). All these concerns would continue to dominate discussions of Canadian culture well into the future.

⁷ Although Johnson lacked a seat at the Mermaid Inn, she also published in *The Globe* during the same time period, including her (witty and still resonant) 1892 critical essay "A Strong Race Opinion: On the Indian Girl in Modern Fiction."

“At the Mermaid Inn” documents an attempt to imagine an infrastructure of public life in Canada. The columnists puzzle through the problem of differentiating public speech from mass culture; this problem is sometimes, in true Canadian fashion, figured as differentiating Canadian from American cultural production. At the same time this is not a cold intellectual exercise: the columns are written almost as personal letters to an imagined nation, and the various personalities of the columnists lend interest to their grappling. Even as it calls for the creation of an institutionalized public sphere, the column enacts a drama of discourse among private citizens. The column’s title refers to a seventeenth-century London tavern that attracted English writers such as Ben Jonson, further suggesting the sense of a public intellectual clamour that one might find in such an inn. There are at least two structuring fantasies of the public here: that of the institutional structures to support public intellectual life, and that of a population that can support an impassioned public that gathers outside of state structures.

In this sense I read the dramatic fantasy of “At the Mermaid Inn” as reminiscent of Jürgen Habermas’s conception of the public of eighteenth-century England as emerging jointly from the literal spaces of salons and coffee houses, and the metaphorical space of the circulated journal. He defines this public as one of “private people making use of their reason” in the interests of “rational-critical debate” (51). I see the “Mermaid Inn” column as articulating a vision of the public that is concerned with the creation of institutions that would enable cultural production to thrive, independent of Canadian utilitarianism and American materialism. In the terms that I outlined in my introduction this vision can be

described as a disinterest model of intellectual labour. This is a view I share with D.M. R. Bentley, who argues against critical renderings of the Confederation poets as post- or Northern Romantics. He instead reads the Confederation group as invested in disinterest and high Victorian values, which is exemplified by their embrace of the criticism of Matthew Arnold (20). I also see “At the Mermaid Inn” as performing the type of rational-critical debate that Habermas sees as the foundation of public speech. The public of the Confederation poets, then, is defined by both disinterest and rationality. This understanding of the public stands in contrast with the function of affect and interest in Johnson’s poetry and performance.

“People of Dramatic Intelligences”: Johnson’s Racial Melodrama

While the mobilization of affective response might be understood as present in most poetry, discussions of Johnson’s writing align her with affect to an unusual degree. This is one way in which Johnson has been critically distinguished from the Confederation poets. In his 2004 book, *The Confederation Group of Canadian Poets, 1880-1897*, Bentley unambiguously claims that Johnson was not part of this group (256), despite the more permeable borders that Strong-Boag and Gerson believe to have been in operation at the time (123). This claim stems from his argument that Charles G.D. Roberts played a central role in producing a group identity for the Confederation poets (5). Bentley shows that the timing of Johnson’s publication of her first book of poetry and, perhaps more centrally, the fact that she was a woman, contributed to her exclusion from the Confederation group even in their time. Indeed he places her in sharp contrast to the

Confederation poets, treating her subsequent success and the launch of “At The Mermaid Inn” as two widely divergent products of the Toronto Young Men’s Liberal Club’s January 16, 1892 Canadian Literature Evening, which was the launching ground of her performance career. The language in which Bentley describes this divergence is of interest both because it highlights the two publics that operated in Johnson’s context and because it is so compactly representative of the discourses that dominated her career and that persist to this day. “Johnson was never a part of the Confederation group,” he begins, going on to assert that “her apartness was only emphasized by her decision in the fall of 1892 to wear ‘the costume of an Indian Maiden’ when reciting her poems on Native themes.” By 1893, Johnson was:

[O]n the verge of achieving international recognition of the sort to which no member of the Confederation group ever aspired or could possibly emulate: as the attractive female enactor of the pathos of a race that was supposedly becoming “little more than a memory.” (256-257)

Although the function of Bentley’s voice in this description is somewhat ambiguous to me, given his keen awareness of the sexism that permeated Johnson’s reception I read his voice here as a ventriloquization of the values of the cultural field that Johnson operated in, rather than an endorsement of them. Here, Bentley evokes what Bourdieu describes as a “loser wins” system of literary value. In this system the field of cultural production employs an inverse logic, so that popular and economic success function within a specific cultural arena-say, that of Canadian literary studies from the 1960s onwards - as

indications of a lack of value. Thus Bentley represents the exclusion of Johnson from the valued group of producers, the Confederation poets, as resting on the basis of her relative “international recognition,” while ascribing that exclusion to Johnson’s own decisions. What is missing from this maneuver is any examination of the context in which Johnson decided to employ costume and enaction in the interest of establishing a literary career (the fact that Bentley is attentive to some of this context elsewhere in this study is what leads me to read his voice here as staging rather than participating in the implicit values of the quotation). This context involves exclusions that can be seen as the result of Johnson’s gender, class, and race, which were marginal relative to the social positions of the Confederation poets. This is the ultimate significance of Bentley’s grafting of costume, pathos, feminine attractiveness, and performance onto Johnson’s achievement of “international recognition.” In Johnson’s case, not only does her success work against her valuation on literary grounds, but this devaluation is intrinsically linked to her gender and race, her use of performance as the primary medium of delivery for her poetry, and, as I will examine further, her employment of affect and performance, signified here by the phrase “enactor of...pathos.”

Bentley’s brief description of the relationship between Johnson and the Confederation poets reflects her reception in her own era. There is a consistent bias against the popular, the dramatic, and the emotional that runs through even positive evaluations of her work. This bias, which functioned in tandem with gender and racial biases, coloured Johnson’s critical reception in her time. In the following reading of Hector Charlesworth’s 1895

review of *The White Wampum*, I show these aligned biases to be in operation. They appear in a respected critic's largely positive review of the book, indicating that they were not insurmountable barriers to Johnson being taken seriously as a poet. They did, however, influence which of Johnson's poems were to be valued and read attentively: her "best" poetry was lyric, print-based, and not coloured by excessive affect. This review is exemplary of what Daniel Francis refers to as a "conflicted response" to Johnson's celebrity prior to Canadian literary modernism (14-15).

Charlesworth, Johnson's friend and literary champion, attempts to cast her poetry as belonging to the ranks of highbrow literary print-based poetics that are exemplified by the Confederation poets. His celebration of her as a print-based lyricist is, however, predicated on a dismissal of her performance poems. Here, as well, there is an alignment of her celebrity with her native identity, her dramatization of herself and her work, and her powers of stimulation, or capacity to evoke an affective charge:

Seven ballads of Indian life are set forward as the chief features of the book, and these dealing as they do with dramatic incidents, are necessarily familiar to those readers who have enjoyed Miss Johnson's platform appearances; the sense of novelty and delight comes when we turn over the pages and meet with the introspective lyrics, songs of love and suffering and passion: and these, I think, give Miss Johnson her greatest claim on public attention. The Indian ballads are fresh and stimulating to healthy people with dramatic

intelligences, and there is a fine Mohawk barbarity about them, but the softer lyrics strike a more universal note. (478-479)

Johnson's appeal to affect, rather than to introspection, in her "Indian ballads," which would be familiar to many readers as performance poems, is also aligned with her advocacy of native rights:

Miss Johnson has a large infusion of Mohawk blood herself, and these scenes are realities to her imagination. It is the highest praise of her to say that she makes them realities to the imaginations of her readers also; but this Indian enthusiasm of hers is responsible for the defects of some of these ballads. She is a partisan of the red man; his wrongs burn within her, but in reality one cannot put partisan emotions into poetic bottles with success. They turn what should be dramatic into melodrama, and what should be poetic into a polemic. (479)

Here Johnson's introspective, lyric, disinterested, universal, racially unmarked, and print-based poetry is set against her performed, dramatic, emotional, enthusiastic, particular, native, and partisan poetry; its value is buttressed by this observed duality in Johnson's body of work.⁸ Charlesworth makes this duality explicit in his dismissal of Johnson's

⁸ In *Paddling Her Own Canoe* (149), Strong-Boag and Gerson provide additional examples of a bias against popular narrative forms in Johnson's critical reception, and

native identifications, which he sets against a fetishistic description of the book as a material object:

The title ‘White Wampum,’ and Miss Johnson’s Indian sobriquet, ‘Tekahionwake’—whatever that may mean—add further to the aboriginal atmosphere of the book; but when you open the volume its broad, creamy margins and clear, bright type caress the eye, and you find that the luxurious bibliophile will have something to delight his senses. (478)

Although we cannot know with any certainty Johnson’s own feelings about this split in her literary identity, if we are to believe her private letters, she shared Charlesworth’s denigration of performance and elevation of “real poetry,” if not his anti-native prejudice. In one letter she laments the poetic compromises that are necessary to please public taste: “the public will not listen to lyrics, will not appreciate real poetry, will in fact not have me as an entertainer if I give them nothing but rhythm, cadence, beauty, thought” (Francis 116). In another letter, however, she appears to be resigned to this demand, asserting that she is “willing to consent to anything legitimate, that will mean success in the end.” Success is defined in relation to two motives: travel, and the commitment to

point out a positive relationship between popular narrative forms and public memory. They also note the consistency with which “poetess” as a descriptor of Johnson has been aligned with her European origins, while her stage persona has been linked with her native origins (114).

“stand by my blood and my race” (Strong-Boag and Gerson xvi). Evidently Johnson herself was torn between her identity as a poet, founded in print and high-art European definitions of the term, and her role as a performer, through which she was able to advocate for native people.

Her suggestion that thought stands alongside rhythm, cadence, and beauty in the realm of real poetry indicates that her performances draw on something other than thought. I believe that the implied opposite of thought in this context is affect. The fact that Johnson’s popular appeal was based on her mobilization of affect is supported by Wilfred Campbell’s championing of her in *At the Mermaid Inn* (102, 177).⁹ In contrast to Lampman’s praise of Matthew Arnold (97-98), Campbell prefers Romantic to Victorian poetics. He argues against the philosophical impulse in poetry in favour of the dramatic, imagination, and feeling (102). In so doing he takes a different tack than Charlesworth, valuing what Charlesworth has dismissed as melodrama. Unlike Charlesworth, Campbell ignores Johnson’s advocacy. At the same time, in aligning her with feeling over philosophy he participates in similar evaluative terms. Insofar as Johnson aims to affect her audience emotionally, she is not, for these critics, operating intellectually.

⁹ Campbell generally put himself at odds with the “fraternal system” of the Confederation poets, and also critiqued the idea, held by Roberts, that the chief characteristic of good poetry was “polish.” This standpoint places his promotion of Johnson in the context of tensions within the “core” Confederation group (Bentley 12).

A Natural Poet: Johnson's Semiotic Field

Johnson's critical reception, and its attendant assumptions about affect, thinking, writing, and performance, indicates some of the discursive limits on what she could actually be heard to say in her time. She was caught in a nexus of values and assumptions that formed part of a larger semiotic field. However, she did display considerable agency in her ability to play with these values. Here I enter into a longstanding debate that can be (very schematically) described as a conflict between those who see Johnson as a dupe who represents a capitulation to European fantasies about native women, and those who see her as a rhetorically savvy critic of these same fantasies. I imagine that a larger study of Johnson's rhetoric would reveal that it sits somewhere between these two extremes. Like all of us she could only understand herself through larger discourses that were not of her choosing, but this circumstance does not negate the fact that she often pushed back against what is most limiting in those discourses. That Johnson's writing can be ironic, that her performance persona lends itself to the critical language of performativity, and that she both advocated for native rights and challenged women's roles, are facts that necessarily sit side by side with the facts that she was a committed imperialist, that she advocated for native conversion to Christianity, and that she often used stereotyped phrases and images in her representations of native people, including herself.

I suggest that Johnson's writing is frequently critical of the rhetorical limitations placed on her, and that this critique can only be leveled from within the images she has access to. As with her material choices, Johnson's rhetorical choices depend on her doing the

best she can with what she has on hand. Here, Craig Womack's critical approach sits well with my own observations:

My approach to Native Studies is not to present authors or their subject matter as noble representatives of the so-called Native perspective, [or] as perfect exemplars of feminism...but rather as human beings thinking and making decisions in particular sets of circumstances. (68)

I imagine these circumstances to be not only material, but also discursive. Similarly, Fiamengo's reading of Johnson as a rhetorician points out the "linguistic horizons" within which she operated. I share both these critics' interest in Johnson's capacity as a rhetorician; whereas they attend primarily to prose, I am more concerned with Johnson's poetry, persona, and critical reception, as well as reading her in the context of her literary contemporaries. Mary Elizabeth Leighton comes to similar conclusions about Johnson's representation of the theme of native decline as "strategically positioned" in relation to conventions of representation "in order to underscore Native experiences of land-rights infringements and assimilation policies constructed by the government" (148). This is a convincing reading, given that Johnson explicitly stated, in a private letter to Archibald Kains, that her hope was to "upset the Indian Extermination and Non-education Theory" (Gray 147).¹⁰

¹⁰Johnson also had a poem about residential schools, which was unfortunately never put into print (Strong-Boag and Gerson 148).

I would like to place the rhetorical trajectory in Johnson criticism in the context of Terry Goldie's description of the semiotic system within which nativeness has been representable in Canadian and other postcolonial literatures. Goldie's itemization of a limited number of "standard moves" in the representation of native people describes well the constraints within which Johnson could build a career—and of course these standard moves limit not only how Johnson represented explicitly native subjects, but also how she could represent herself. Goldie expresses reluctance to judge indigenous self-representation, and distinguishes between native writing subjects and representations of the native as the object of writing. Yet Johnson is involved in the production of poems about native people and the production of a persona, both of which could be easily conceived of as literary in nature. Both her poems and her persona are constrained by the semiotic field that Goldie describes.

An element of this field that particularly shapes Johnson's career is orality. Goldie shows that the figure of the native is consistently aligned with orality; this is not an orality defined merely as illiteracy, but as a specific positive quality. Here, beliefs about the musicality of native speech, and representations of native people as natural poets, indicate a metaphysics of presence that has been attached to native people. This is in contrast to a European poetics that, while holding itself apart from the native, also displays a libidinous relationship to fantasies of native presence. Johnson, a native woman with a European literary education, sits in a split relationship to the constructions of orality and

literacy. This split manifests in her pursuit of both a performance and a print career; her mid-performance costume change from native to European dress serves as a visual sign of this split. Her critical reception seems equally informed by this tension: she is devalued to the extent that she departs from lyricism and literacy, yet her popular appeal lies in exactly this departure, which depends on the narrative appeal of the dramatic monologue, the naturalized musicality of her “songs,” and the physical presence of her voice. This naturalization of Johnson’s poetics, and their association with orality, is by no means limited to critics who reject her work, or even to the nineteenth century. It persists, for example, in Marcus Van Steen’s brief 1965 biography, which serves as preface to a collection of her writings. Here he makes explicit what is elsewhere implicit: that Johnson’s poetry is natural, embodied, instinctive, naïve, unintellectual, and, above all, native:

[T]o compare Pauline with her famous cousin is like comparing a carefree, singing child to a bearded philosopher. W.D. Howells was concerned with the details of life, which he dissected with a careful logic. Pauline, on the other hand, experienced life, and sang for the same reasons that she laughed and wept. In her best work, her use of metaphor, her ability to express colour, light and shade, and her use of vivid and compelling imagery, indicate that she owed much to her grandfather, Smoke Johnson, who was a famous orator, known far and wide as “The Mohawk Warbler.” (4-5)

Goldie also points out that native representation in the theatre lends itself to the collapse between actor and role that characterized much of the contemporary reception of Johnson. He argues that theatre is historically a key reference point for the recognition of native people; in Johnson's career the existence of the "stage Indian" acted as such a reference, allowing her popularity. As in the association of natives with orality, this collapse is predicated on a metaphysics of presence that is associated with native speech. The thrill that audiences felt on seeing Johnson's dramatic performances of "Ojistoh," a dramatic monologue spoken in a native woman's voice and containing both violent and sexualized images, was dependent on the fact that the performer was herself a native woman. While audiences surely didn't think she *was* Ojistoh, the authenticity she lent to the character was predicated on the perceived proximity between "'voice' and referent voice" (Goldie 188). At the same time, as Charlesworth's review suggests, Johnson's dramatic monologues are also cast as *too* artificial, melodramatic, and stagy to make for good print poetry. One explanation for this critical judgment is that in the absence of Johnson's physical and vocal presence the poems are read in reference to European critical frameworks. There, the dramatic staging that read as authenticity in a performance setting reads as melodrama; this melodrama is in turn associated with the stage, femininity, and artifice.

Considering her relationship to the semiotic field that Goldie has identified, George W. Lyon argues that "Terry Goldie implicates Pauline Johnson at every turn." Lyon presents a Johnson who, while "not lack[ing] instinct" (144), is seen as an object of consumption

who lacks the agency required for self-representation. The fact that Lyon aligns Johnson with Marilyn Monroe reveals the extent to which his Johnson appears as a figure who is reduced to her own spectacular image. This reading reproduces the metaphysics of presence that Goldie is so careful to critique—it assumes no distance between Johnson as the subject and as the object of representation. To my mind, a better comparison might be made to the scandalously un-earnest Oscar Wilde, whose 1882 lecture tour of Canada suggests itself to me as a precedent for the reception of Johnson’s performance persona as much as the “stage Indian” does. To be fair to Lyon, his article appeared at the forefront of contemporary re-evaluations of Johnson that have increasingly directed attention to Johnson as a performer and rhetorician. The consequent recuperation of Johnson is predicated not only on an identitarian revisitation of the canon—though of course this plays its role— but also on the critique of the metaphysics of presence that spread through English departments concurrently with this revisitation. Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, in particular, drew attention to the performative nature of identity, and politicized irony as the strategy through which identity could be subverted. Although performance and performativity are different, they have become critically linked; this conflation contributes to the fact that Johnson’s performance persona has once again become compelling. Therefore, it is not surprising that she would come to be read more in reference to her performance career and dramatic monologues than in reference to her lyric poetry, which had previously (and briefly) come to critically define her. In this context it is easier to see the ways in which Johnson was not merely manipulated and limited by the semiotic field in which she found herself, but also actively engaged and

manipulated it in order to meet both her material and her political aims. I take the exact opposite stance from Lyon in saying that Goldie's "standard commodities" indeed defined many of Johnson's choices, but it seems more likely to me that she was well aware of their currency: she banked her career on it.

"They Never Think How They Would Feel": "A Cry from an Indian Wife"

In contradistinction to the discourse of "At the Mermaid Inn," and the largely lyrical and meditative poems of its three contributors, Johnson's theatricality allowed her to mobilize her audience's affective response to her poetry in the interest of political influence. If print poetry was not the place for advocacy and affect, theatre could be. In a context in which the theatre was seen as a legitimate site for melodrama and sentiment, Johnson was able to engage with these popular expectations to advocate for native rights. Her sex and race were not, in this context, barriers to her appeal, but rather acted as vehicles of what was most compelling about her. I imagine that audiences came to see Johnson not primarily to think, but to be entertained, and specifically to be entertained by being moved. That they were thinking while being moved was part of how she accomplished her advocacy. One poem that is central to understanding Johnson as a political advocate is "A Cry from an Indian Wife" (*Collected* 14-15). In the following reading I will show that this advocacy is accomplished through an emotional engagement with her audience, which at the same time works as a demand for cognitive change.

“A Cry from an Indian Wife” was written about, and initially appeared in print during, the 1885 Northwest Rebellion. As a contemporary response to this crisis the poem stands out for its representation of a native perspective. It was published in the Toronto-based literary and cultural journal *The Week* in the context of general public support for the military suppression of the rebellion (Strong-Boag and Gerson 101). It reappeared twice in print, including in a revised and final form in *The White Wampum* in 1895; however, performance was its largest mode of circulation (114). This poem follows the writing of her public memorial poem “The Re-interment of Red Jacket” (1884) (*Collected* 10-12) and precedes by a year the poem “‘Brant,’ a Memorial Ode” (1886) (21-22), both of which are explicitly public poems on native themes. “A Cry from an Indian Wife” marks Johnson’s earliest poetic adoption of the voice of a native woman; its initial publication predates her performance career and attendant public persona. At its performances, audiences responded to the poem with both shock (Strong-Boag and Gerson 57) and “a shrinkage of the conscience” (107). The poem is Johnson’s earliest, and perhaps most influential, production as a poet-advocate.

The poem presents the voice of a native wife as she struggles with an ethical dilemma over encouraging or discouraging her husband to go to war against the Anglo-Canadian troops sent west to suppress the rebellion. She moves between imagining the experience of white soldiers and their wives, and abandoning this empathic position in favour of a vision of justice that casts empathy as cowardice and hesitation. Critical reception of the poem has understood it as variously apologetic, conciliatory, and challenging; this

diversity of readings is not unusual in response to Johnson's poetry. Most relevant to my reading of the poem are those of Strong-Boag and Gerson, in *Paddling her Own Canoe*, and Janice Fiamengo, in *The Woman's Page: Journalism and Rhetoric in Early Canada*.

In Strong-Boag and Gerson's reading, the poem appeals to maternal feelings to connect across racial difference (91). The speaker's movement between two incompatible ethical positions is characterized as a "self-interrogating and self-interrupting voice" (149). This self-interruption aligns, in this reading, with the fact that Johnson's own hybrid identity, as well as that of the Métis nation, is undercut by the poem's structuring logic. They describe the poem as "oscillat[ing] across an unresolvable either/or, White/Native dichotomy, its tension underscored by an additional opposition of female and male that represents women as powerless to intervene in masculine warfare" (150). In light of the fact that Johnson's performance persona utilized hybridity as its central trope, I wonder if the oppositional logic of this poem might be motivated by something besides a failure to transcend opposition. I believe that in this poem she is not refusing hybridity, which holds difference in tension, but rather she is refusing colonization, which reduces difference to sameness.

Fiamengo reads the poem as illustrative of Johnson's general commitment to "radical empathy": "Johnson deploys the figure of the 'Indian wife' to underscore the intellectual and emotional effort required for an appropriate empathy." The speaker's process is illustrative, and serves to provide a model of empathy: "Just as the speaker imagines the

grief of white mothers and wives, white listeners must imaginatively enter Native suffering and oppression” (103-104). She reads the contradictions and hesitations of the speaker’s voice as “a demonstration of the difficult but necessary work of cross-cultural understanding” (104).

I agree with Fiamengo that the poem is concerned with the function of empathy, and that the voice of the “Indian wife” is the vehicle through which Johnson makes her argument. Her suggestion that Johnson is, in this poem and elsewhere, concerned with the political function of radical empathy is both convincing and suggestive. I think, however, that Johnson’s illustration of the operation of empathy here is more complex than Fiamengo suggests. Specifically, the fact that the poem ends with irony rather than empathy, and the prominence of contradiction and hesitation, suggest to me a different reading of Johnson’s view of empathy. To further develop Fiamengo’s point that these hesitations serve as demonstrations of the difficulty of cross-cultural understanding, I argue that understanding the nature of this difficulty is central to understanding Johnson’s construction of empathy. In my reading, Johnson demands that her reader distinguish between an empathy based on projection and one that draws on an acknowledgement of difference. We might see this empathy as an ethical alternative to the pity of Duncan Campbell Scott’s 1894 poem “The Onondaga Madonna,” which dooms its object to

extinction. Johnson illustrates that even well-meaning empathy can produce a type of subjective extinction, which she aligns with violence.¹¹

In order to illustrate Johnson's model of empathy in this poem, I find it useful to introduce more specific language regarding the function of empathy. Multiple conversations about empathy, emerging from fields as varied as psychoanalysis, ethics, neurology, and both Romantic and contemporary literary criticism, have rendered the term too polysemic to be used without clarification. In my reading of two unique modes of empathy that are illustrated by Johnson, I will use terms developed by the feminist psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin. In discussing ways in which we see our love object, Benjamin distinguishes between recognition and identification. Recognition involves viewing the other as a "separate and equivalent center of subjectivity" whereas identification takes place when we "identify with the other as an inner representation" (7). While Benjamin thinks that identification is inevitable, she points out its inherent problem:

Viewed from one angle, identification contributes to empathy and the bridging of difference. From another angle, it stands opposed to recognizing

¹¹ Strong-Boag and Gerson argue that Johnson's 1896 poem "The Corn Husker" implicitly challenges "The Onondaga Madonna" in that the native subject exists in the present, not only the past, and that her figured decline is attributed to injustice rather than the inherent failings of native cultures.

the other: the self engaged in identification takes the other as fantasy object, not as an equivalent center of being. In this sense, recognizing the other as like subject constitutes the opposite of identification, which incorporates or assimilates what is other to self. (7-8)

Johnson's poem is concerned with racial difference, and in it projective love easily turns to projective hate: this is one of the risks of empathy in its identificatory mode. The term "identification" in Benjamin's sense is useful to me largely because I think it aptly illustrates the intrapsychic nature of this process in Johnson's poetry. The movement between love and hate for the other in this mode is entirely dependent on internal fantasy and operates independently of the other's subjectivity.¹² Although both Benjamin and Johnson are representing, in very different language, psychic operations, both suggest that these operations have ethical and political implications.

The relationship between empathy and violence is the overt theme of "A Cry from an Indian Wife." The poem represents the voice of an "Indian wife," a choice that, as

¹²Although there are significant differences between Jessica Benjamin and Emmanuel Levinas, one could, if one wanted to, also cast Johnson's critique in his terms.

Benjamin's "recognition" is highly resonant with Levinas's argument that ethics begins with the encounter with the other's face, which prohibits murder, or the reduction of the other to the same.

Strong-Boag and Gerson suggest, erases the specificity of the Riel Rebellion. This collapse of the diversity of Canadian native cultures into one signifier is something that Johnson argues against in her critical essay “A Strong Race Opinion: On the Indian Girl in Modern Fiction” (*Collected* 178). Ironically, the poem illustrates the glossing over of difference that it in other ways implicitly critiques. The speaker begins the poem proudly sending her husband to war, conceiving of the enemy as “game,” and urging her husband to “strike, no matter what the cost.” War is valorized, and the enemy is imagined in dehumanizing terms. She then changes perspective and imagines the enemy as “young and beautiful and good,” blaming war and fate rather than individual soldiers for colonial violence. She casts Anglo-Canadians as well meaning and merely forgetting that the land they settle was inhabited by a native population—their primary mistake is a failure of imagination: “They never think how they would feel today, \ If some great nation came from far away, \ Wresting their country from their hapless braves, \ Giving what they gave us—but wars and graves.” In doing what the colonizer has failed to do, acknowledging the experience of her enemy, the speaker extends her own empathic imagination; as Fiamengo notes, she also strong-arms the reader into following her lead. The speaker moves between these positions throughout the poem, enacting an ethical struggle before, finally, settling on the decision to urge her husband to fight.

The poem might on these grounds be read as a defence of native resistance that is designed to pull an imagined white audience into sympathy with the native speaker; on one level I think this is what it does. But I also think the poem does more than this. It

shows a speaker who attempts to extend empathy to the enemy, but fails. If she is meant as a role model for empathic relations, then she is a rather poor role model. I see her failure as more than just evidence that empathy is hard. I think that her empathy must fail because it is based on identification, when there is in fact significant difference between herself and a white wife and mother. The speaker finally sides with war after concluding that the white wife she is trying to imagine cannot imagine her:

She never thinks of my wild aching breast,
Nor prays for your dark face and eagle crest
Endangered by a thousand rifle balls,
My heart the target if my warrior falls.

At this point her fantasy of identification with white women on the grounds that they are also wives and mothers falls apart. She cannot empathize with the white wife on the grounds that they are alike, because they are not alike in at least one fundamental way: the white wife never has to think of her. Yet, when the speaker finally resolves to urge her husband to go to war, this feels like the wrong conclusion. The poem sets the reader up for this response. It works to seduce an imagined white listener to identify with the white wife, who for much of the poem is presented as an ethical mirror image of the point of view of the speaker. To a reader who has indeed been seduced by such a bid, this ending would seem both abrupt and unethical. In performance, even more so than on the page, the novelty of hearing this poem representing a native woman's point of view might have served to confirm that the speaker is right, her experience has not been

thought of. The poem asks the audience to do two things: to identify with the experience of a native woman, and if they cannot, to imagine her and care about her anyway. In this sense, what is “radical” in Johnson’s radical empathy is that it shows the dangers of empathy in its identificatory mode. The attempt to know the other is fraught with the dangers of projection. While this dynamic may seem benign when the speaker imagines the other in the interest of peace, it can turn: she imagines the other failing to imagine her, so advocates war. In both scenarios the speaker’s empathy is based on a fantasy of what the enemy may think.

Although I have focused on “A Cry from an Indian Wife” because its concern with empathy is overt, my reading of Johnson’s take on the dangers of identification can be amplified by considering another popular “Indian themed” Johnson poem, “The Cattle Thief” (1894) (*Collected* 97). This rousing and highly critical poem depicts a white mob lynching of a Cree cattle thief. Beginning in the third person, in a voice that is largely aligned with the mob’s point of view, it initially sounds much like a boy’s adventure story. The man is described as both “monstrous” and as “game” to be hunted rather than fought. When the mob comes across the thief they are initially disappointed to find a starving man of fifty. However, this reality only momentarily interrupts their fantasy of a vicious warrior, and they kill him. The mob prepares to dismember his body, reasoning: “Let the wolves eat the cursed Indian, he’d have \ treated us the same.” Their actions are predicated on the belief that they know what their victim is and would do. This “knowledge” is in fact the projection of their own monstrous qualities. Ethical action in

this poem is impossible because the mob cannot recognize the enemy, but can only identify with him. The poem, at this point, forces us to confront a native experience of colonization as it gives way to his daughter's dramatic and uncompromising defence, which reads in part:

You say your cattle are not ours, your meat is not
our meat;
When *you* pay for the land you live in, *we* 'll pay
for the meat we eat.

“The Cattle Thief” illustrates the danger of seeing difference only through the lens of fantasy. In presenting a native speaker's unequivocal condemnation of colonization, it may be read as more radical than the equivocation and hesitation of the speaker of “A Cry from an Indian Wife.” However, the fact that the two poems were read alongside each other would have allowed the hesitations of “A Cry from an Indian Wife” to serve a purpose beyond softening the speaker's critique. They could instead have been experienced as an enactment of the failure of recognition. In hearing this poem, a white listener would be invited into the experience of the speaker's failure to fully recognize her. She would also be confronted with the possibility of her own failure of recognition. The speaker of “A Cry from an Indian Wife” serves not only as a model for the process of empathy, but also as an illustration of the ways in which empathy breaks down. The result of this breakdown is that violence based on identification replaces the capacity for

a dialogue between truly differentiated subjects. This process is illustrated in both “A Cry from an Indian Wife” and, more graphically, in “The Cattle Thief.”

Although “A Cry from an Indian Wife” largely circulated as a performance poem, attention to its printed form supports the above reading. Through its use of caesurae the poem formally mimics the failure of recognition that it represents thematically. In the beginning of the poem we find multiple caesurae in the form of dashes, semi-colons, and an exclamation mark. These serve a paratactic function, keeping ideas both separate and connected. The poem’s employment of parataxis operates as a formal echo of the structure of recognition. The speaker begins the poem struggling with the tension between her loyalty to native Canadians, and her imagining of the enemy as “young and beautiful and good.” However, the speaker never encounters the other, and remains stuck in identificatory love, which becomes identificatory hate. When the speaker comes to the conclusion that the other cannot imagine her, and abandons the project of imagining the other, the caesurae disappear. They are replaced by commas, which function more as vocal pauses than as true caesurae. At the same time, the speaker recasts her attempt to hold the other in mind as a hesitation: “coward self I hesitate no more.” Difference, which, like a caesura, both links and separates, ceases to be a value that the speaker aspires to—the speaker “knows” the mind of the other, and the other becomes an enemy

to be fought, without hesitation. The progressive failure to hold difference in tension that is illustrated in the narrative movement of the poem is also enacted formally.¹³

One additional relevant context for Johnson's interest in empathy is her choice of genre.

Strong-Boag and Gerson have commented on the fact that while Johnson's contemporaries Roberts and Lampman were drawn to the sonnet form, she wrote no sonnets. They distinguish Johnson's writing as narrative rather than contemplative:

"Sonnets written by Romantic or Victorian poets tend to be contemplative rather than narrative, whereas Johnson's preferred mode of expression is the dramatic monologue" (139). They argue that her interest in poetic structure is evident, as is her facility with the

¹³ In literary scholarship there is currently what Sophie Ratcliffe has referred to as a "vogue for empathy" (4), and an ongoing debate over the value of literature for instilling the capacity for empathy. My examination of Johnson's modeling of empathy is somewhat outside of the terms of this debate; it is difficult to know the extent to which Johnson's poems were successful in their attempt to affect the views, and ultimately the behaviour, of their intended audience. However, I think that Johnson's poetry has a lot to offer contemporary thinking about the relationship among literature, empathy, and ethics. It seems to me that Johnson's assumption is that her poetry can, in calling on the capacity for empathy, ethically challenge her audience. It also seems to me that Johnson's take on empathy, hinging on imagining the other's difference, challenges a liberal humanist understanding of the relationship between empathy and ethics.

iambic pentameter line, suggesting that the choice of dramatic monologue was a conscious and educated one. To an extent this choice might be explained by the fact that the dramatic monologue lends itself better to performance than do the sonnet and other lyric forms; however, in the case of “A Cry from an Indian Wife” the poem was originally written for print publication. Johnson grew up reading Browning and Tennyson, and their development of the dramatic monologue in iambic pentameter is a clear influence on her writing. One way to understand her affinity for the form is through a critical perspective on it as a “poetry of sympathy” (Langbaum 79). In this sense, Johnson’s concern with empathy has a larger generic context. She exploits this convention both to gain sympathy for subjects who might otherwise lack a sympathetic ear, and to suggest a model of empathy that has radical implications. It is, as discussed earlier, partially on the basis of Johnson’s affinity for the dramatic that she was understood as a popular performer rather than a serious poet. The “contemplative” mode of the Confederation poets allowed their productions to be considered serious intellectual work, whereas Johnson’s “dramatic” mode, alongside her gender and race, meant that her poems were often considered melodrama. What my reading of “A Cry from an Indian Wife” makes evident is not only that Johnson both thinks and argues in her dramatic monologues, but also that she employs a primarily affective rather than primarily cognitive mode of argumentation.

“What a Public You Have”

An adequate account of Pauline Johnson's status as a public intellectual requires some comment on the nature of the public as well the prevailing view of the intellectual in her time. She could not appear as an intellectual within her own context. Nevertheless, as I have shown, she asks difficult questions about the nature of ethics and empathy, questions that can properly be considered intellectual. She takes on the role of a poet-advocate; as such she anticipates more contemporary understandings of the public intellectual as a public, often literary, figure who actively attempts to intervene in political discourse. As Charlesworth's review suggests, Johnson's lyric offerings were critically well-received, but her dramatic and political poetry was relegated to the denigrated role of popular entertainment. Although she was clearly much loved in her time, her critical marginalization might be seen as a precursor to her subsequent exclusion from Malcolm Ross's influential anthology *Poets of the Confederation* (1960). In this light Johnson's exclusion is not simply the result of modernist values, but also reflects values about legitimate intellectual and artistic production already in place in her time. The waning of Johnson's popularity after her death may be explained not only by a shift in cultural values but also by the fact that Canadian high-art poetry gained more material clout by the 1960s than it had in her time. Also relevant is the fact that the public she created for herself had no critical power or significant print record and simply died. While Johnson was remarkably adept at calling a public into being, she lacked the resources to secure that public, which would prove to be ephemeral. What remained was a critical reception that was largely print based, high-art, white, and male. Johnson's exclusion is in many ways the result of a profound under-reading of her actual poems.

For example, in his introduction to *Poets of the Confederation*, Ross approvingly singles Lampman out as both political and intellectual, saying that he “seems to have a social and political insight absent in his fellows” and that “ideas are germinal for him, infecting the tissues of his thought” (xiii). Also approvingly noted is that Lampman is “engaged strenuously in the creation of the self.” These are all credits that I would give to Johnson, and I wonder if, like Birney, Ross did not read her.

Johnson, partly as a consequence of her exclusion from more powerful sites of public discussion, created a public for herself. This could be understood as the task of the public intellectual, who never steps into a public that has been awaiting her arrival. In a letter sent to her when her health was failing, Nellie McClung referred to the circle of support that Johnson had built around herself with the phrase “What a public you have,” going on to link Johnson’s “public” with her evocation of sympathy from her audience, resulting in a sphere of social support (Strong-Boag and Gerson 66). This public was largely performance-based, interested, agonistic¹⁴, and affective, as opposed to the largely print-

¹⁴ I use the term “agonistic” in the sense lent to it by Chantal Mouffe’s critique of a Habermasian, liberal, and consensual model of politics. Mouffe contrasts Habermas’s public sphere, which works towards a leveling consensus, with her preferred imagining of a public sphere founded on contestation and confrontation. Mouffe advocates a radical democracy that is affective, pluralistic, and agonistic in nature. There is a parallel to be made here with my general argument about Johnson’s relationship to dominant

based, disinterested, consensual, and rational public represented by the Confederation poets. Her public reflects the inverse of many of the values of the Habermasian public being constructed in late nineteenth-century Canada. Milz suggests that Johnson “challenged and still challenges the prevalent Eurocentric notion of Canadian literature that is created, published, and consumed in print” (128). I would add that she also poses a challenge to the understandings of both public speech and intellectual production that characterized the dominant Canadian literary culture of her time.

Johnson the Dreyfusard: “Give Us Barabbas”

I have argued that Johnson functioned as a public intellectual in ways that were not legible to the literary and intellectual culture of her time. Although she was popularly well received, her most unique and significant contributions were critically marginalized, and she was excluded from dominant literary networks. In the face of this, she produced her own public, and utilized the options she had available in a fashion that was both materially and rhetorically savvy. Although her career suggests alternative models of the public intellectual, her choices arose not from a fully developed ideological critique of the intellectual culture of her day, but rather from a lack of options.

understandings of public engagement. Johnson represents much of what, Mouffe argues, is excluded by liberal models of the political.

One of Johnson's later poems suggests that she self-consciously conceived of herself as an engaged literary intellectual, and that she wished to exceed the marginalization that characterized her critical reception. "Give Us Barabbas" (*Collected* 129) was published in 1899 in the *Free Press Home Journal*. It was republished with the release of *Canadian Born* in 1903, and has received very little critical attention, having been mentioned in passing by Gerson in the context of Johnson's larger expression of a sense of social justice ("Pauline Johnson's Many Voices" 58). I am drawn to this remarkable poem because its historical context confirms that Johnson conceived of herself as what we would now call a public intellectual. I see this poem as an attempt on her part to adopt a liberal and universalizing conception of the intellectual as a disinterested political advocate. Read in relation to "A Cry from an Indian Wife," this poem is illustrative of how insights into difference are precluded by such an attempt.

"Give Us Barabbas" critiques the French military's anti-Semitic prosecution of Alfred Dreyfus as an alleged spy, and proposes a parallel between the crucifixion of Jesus and the scapegoating of Dreyfus. In writing this poem, Johnson aligns herself with an international movement to defend Dreyfus and, most notably, with Emile Zola's 1898 publication of the open protest letter, *J'accuse*. She also identifies herself with an emergent social category: the intellectual. The term "intellectual" came into widespread use as a noun in response to *J'accuse* and other reactions to the Dreyfus affair; at the time, the qualifier "public" would have been redundant, so interconnected were public advocacy and the intellectual (Posner 20). Although it would be some time after the

Dreyfus affair that the term “intellectual” came into common English usage, Zola, along with other Dreyfusards, created a visible category of literary activity. It does not seem like a far leap from Johnson’s “poet-advocate” to this new understanding of the intellectual. Nor must it have to Johnson; in publishing ““Give Us Barabbas”” in 1899 she seizes on this proximity immediately. Significantly, the poem appeared in print at a point in her career when publication of her work had waned. The decision to publish this poem suggests that she understood that although the emergent category of the intellectual had much in common with her role as poet-advocate, there were significant differences between the two positions, one of which was that the intellectual’s locus of action was print. I understand Johnson’s writing and publication of this poem, working against the formula that had brought her popular success, as an expression of her wish to be taken seriously as an intellectual. The fact that it was initially published in an obscure context, and that it has never received significant critical reading, shows that this goal remained out of reach.

In publishing ““Give Us Barabbas,”” Johnson aligned herself with an international movement in defence of Alfred Dreyfus. However, her poetics and argumentation are uniquely hers. The more recognized American poet Florence Earle Coates’s poem of the same year, “Dreyfus,” reads as a pledge to stand with the man, and mentions anti-Semitism in passing in the phrase “toils of hate.” In contrast, Johnson’s poem not only defends Dreyfus, but also critiques anti-Semitism, and asks the reader to identify with Dreyfus as a Jew. This appeal represents an extension of Johnson’s anti-racist advocacy;

however, the mode and implications of this advocacy are radically different than those of “A Cry from an Indian Wife.”

The central conceit of “Give Us Barabbas” is that the French army’s sacrifice of Dreyfus in the interest of protecting its honour is like the imagined complicity of the Jewish people in the sacrifice of Jesus in the interest of protecting their structures of authority. In her critique of anti-Semitism, Johnson goes straight to the theological heart of the matter: the then-common construction of Jews as responsible for the death of Jesus. The poem avoids any direct mention of the Jews as guilty of deicide, using the language of “multitude,” “mob,” and “populace.” It thus alludes to, without confirming, the popular understanding of Jews as the killers of Jesus. The use of the word Jew in reference to the crucifixion is in fact in reference to Jesus as “a Jew of kingly blood.” Turning to the treatment of Dreyfus by the French, the poem describes the “nation” as echoing the demand “Give us Barabbas, crucify the Jew!” Thus, the Jew in this poem is in the position of Jesus, and the gentile mob is guilty of the sin commonly attributed to the Jews. Further, anti-Semitism is figured as a leprous sore, which aligns its cure with the action of Jesus (Matthew 8: 1-4). The poem performs a rhetorical reversal, wherein the Jew is more Christ-like than the Christian. The ultimate Christian act, in this logic, is identification with Dreyfus. This may not seem so radical from our historical vantage, but it should be remembered that in Johnson’s time the belief that the Jews were responsible for Jesus’s death was commonplace. It was not until after the Holocaust that any Church stated unequivocally that Jews were not to be blamed for the crucifixion: had Mel

Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) played in Johnson's time its anti-Semitism would have been unlikely to stir controversy. Johnson not only portrays Dreyfus as an innocent scapegoat; she places her audience members in the position of needing to identify with him as a Jew if they are to pursue their Christian identities.

The poem can be read as a radical ethical demand, wherein the moral centre of Christianity, taken to its extreme, is displaced in favour of the previously marginal figure of the Jew. This is a different ethical demand than the demand for sympathy that is represented in Coates's poem, and other contemporary defences of Dreyfus. Yet, to return to Jessica Benjamin's terms, the poem achieves identification at the cost of recognition. Not only must the Jew be like a Christian to receive sympathy, he must also become Christ himself. The Jew that a Christian readership identifies with represents no difference, but is rather the radical realization of Christian ethics; Johnson is asking her reader to love his neighbour as his brother. One wonders what this poem might have sounded like had the process of transformation gone in the other direction, and the Christian readership been asked to abandon the Christian basis of their sympathy for Dreyfus. In this poem Johnson makes a strong case for identification with the other, but none for recognition. One outcome of this lack of recognition of Jewish difference can be seen in the final line of the poem, in which the French army is condemned as "unsaved." Johnson's defence of Dreyfus is achieved through his alignment with Christ; the French army is condemned to the extent that it displays qualities that are, in reality, Jewish. While the poem can be read as, and was most likely intended to be, a critique of anti-

Semitism, it implicitly supports the elevation of Christian attributes over Jewish ones. In this poem one never hears from a Jew, not even in the form of an imagined interlocutor as in “A Cry from an Indian Wife.” In “A Cry from an Indian Wife” Johnson opens the space for a critique of identification as a form of colonization; no such space is left in this poem.

This may be because Johnson is in two contradictory positions in writing this poem. It is tempting to read her identification with the Jew as emerging from a shared experience of racial marginalization, and I do think there are reasons to imagine this. However, Johnson’s own Anglican background is another influence on her ethical imagination in this poem. Her relationship to Christianity was complex. For example, in her 1906 article “A Pagan in St. Paul’s Cathedral” (*Collected* 213), she takes on the voice of an outsider to the religion. This position seems to confirm Strong-Boag and Gerson’s reading of “A Cry from an Indian Wife.” They suggest that Johnson’s decision in 1895 to change the final lines of that poem to refer, with both irony and bitterness, to “the white man’s God” “locates the speaker outside of European Christianity”; in their argument this revision is a clarification of Johnson’s own position (150). Certainly the critique of an imperialist faith implied by the poem’s final lines in the 1895 version is at odds with an easy acceptance of suppression of Canada’s native people as the will of God. Even if the speaker is outside of European Christianity, however, the poem itself can easily be read inside of European Christianity; the implied critique may be that the white man’s God would do no such thing. This reading of Johnson’s changed ending is congruent with Johnson’s lesser-

known 1886 poem “A Request” (Johnston 80), which, in that it is responding to the same historical events as “A Cry from an Indian Wife,” can be read as its companion piece. Here, Johnson addresses “the noble society known as ‘The Woman’s Auxiliary of the Missions of the Church of England in Canada,’” and asks them to keep up the good work of their conversion of the Cree and Blackfoot nations. The problem for Johnson here is not that colonization imposes Christianity on native peoples, but that it is not Christian enough in its methods.

In ““Give Us Barabbas”” Johnson highlights her European-Christian sympathies for Dreyfus and downplays the role her native identity might play in her concern with anti-Semitism. There is nothing here to distinguish the poet or the speaker as native, nor does the poem’s understanding of Dreyfus’s Jewishness reflect the insights into the representation of racial difference that can be found in “A Cry from an Indian Wife.” The motivation for this stance may be found in the fact that she is aligning herself with the emergence of an international conception of the public intellectual. This conception can be seen as an heir to Kant’s definition of enlightenment as characterized by the public use of reason. In writing *J’accuse*, Zola links the public use of reason to the role of the writer. This use of reason is in the service of a disinterested defence of Dreyfus; it is precisely because he is not Jewish that Zola’s act can be understood as an act of reason that is both principled and personally unmotivated. Johnson might have recognized a resonance between this position and the poet-advocate identity that she had invented for herself. However, her poet-advocate is grounded in both interest and affect, as opposed to

disinterest and reason. In order to pursue the similarities between her own project and the emergent category of the intellectual, Johnson would have to take on a different position than she had in her “Indian-themed” poetry. This position is (ostensibly) more neutral, more universalizing, and consequently less attentive to difference than that which she takes in her role as poet-advocate.

A marker of this universalizing effort is the shift in voice in this poem. Here, Johnson works against the association of her work with drama and enactment, and departs from dramatic monologue. The voice of this poem is free-floating, neutral, and universal, much like the ideal critical role of the intellectual. Not only is it in the third person, but it also lacks any of the self-interruption that characterizes the speaker of “A Cry from an Indian Wife.” Another formal sign that Johnson may have seen this poem as departing from her performance persona is its iambic pentameter. Johnson uses iambic pentameter in her performance poetry (it is the metre of “A Cry from an Indian Wife”), so this metrical choice is not out of character. However, she also frequently wrote in tetrameter, which, as Strong-Boag and Gerson suggest (139), was easily adapted for performance and sometimes resulted in Johnson being seen as a “balladist.” While she never abandoned the high-art aesthetics that favoured iambic pentameter, and continued to incorporate its use into her performances, she also embraced tetrameter as a mode that would secure the association with popularity and orality that kept her career afloat. The significance of her use of iambic pentameter in “Give Us Barabbas” is not that it is unique for her so much as that it would be difficult to imagine this poem written in a metre that is more

suggestive of orality. Another poet, one who was not so persistently defined in relation to orality, might have been able to take that risk. There seems to be an attempt in this poem to depart from the formal and generic conventions that both allowed and limited Johnson's performance career.

Other elements additionally contribute to the impression of a neutral, public, and authoritative voice in this poem; the function of many of these elements becomes clear when "Give Us Barabbas" is compared to "A Cry from an Indian Wife." For example, the logic of "Give Us Barabbas" is argumentative rather than enactive. Whereas "A Cry from an Indian Wife" performs the affective complexities of empathy, "Give Us Barabbas" makes a reasoned argument in poetic form, building to the accusation of its final lines: "Your army's honour may still be intact, \ Unstained, unsoiled, unspotted,— but unsaved". Both poems are didactic, but "Give us Barabbas" is explicitly so. The employment of allegory in "Give us Barabbas" allows Johnson to avoid the fantasies about presence, authenticity, and expressiveness that "A Cry from an Indian Wife," especially as a performed poem, would have been subject to. Allegory, as figuration that draws explicit attention to itself, is perfectly positioned to maximize the spaces between Johnson, the speaker of the poem, and the subject matter of the poem, and to establish the speaker as a universal and neutral advocate for Dreyfus. Even a technique such as alliteration performs markedly different roles in the two poems. In "A Cry from an Indian Wife" one finds the line "Of white-faced warriors, marching West to quell": its functions are musical and propulsive, adding to the orality of the poem. In contrast, the final line of

“Give Us Barabbas” –“Unstained, unsoiled, unspotted,— but unsaved”—employs alliteration for rhetorical emphasis. Here, it reinforces the metrical regularity of the final line, and its impact is visual as much as it is aural. The overall visual impression of the poem’s blocked and regular stanzas and line lengths additionally contributes to its air of authority and its print-based aesthetics.

Johnson’s publication of “Give Us Barabbas” represents an embrace of the disinterested intellectual after she had established her own unique iteration of the interested intellectual. As an articulation of the intellectual as universal and disinterested came out of France, I think it is likely that Johnson understood it as an entry point to another semiotic field within which she might make herself legible as what we would now call a public intellectual. Her 1894 London visit and her London-based publication of *The White Wampum* with an avant-garde publisher suggest that Europe had on another occasion provided a material alternative to her limited scope as a writer in North America. Perhaps she hoped that Zola’s example had created a similar discursive alternative. Johnson’s speedy publication of “Give Us Barabbas” at a time in her career when her print publication had nearly entirely ceased seems to me to suggest some feeling of urgency in relationship to either the Dreyfus affair or the figure of the intellectual that it birthed. The fact that this poem has languished almost unnoticed is the product of the many barriers there have been to recognizing Johnson’s unique, intellectual, commitments.

Conclusion

Johnson occupies a number of different relationships to the emergent concept of the intellectual, or what we would come to call the “public intellectual.” The degree to which she was, in her time, considered part of the group known in retrospect as the Confederation poets is a matter of debate. What seems clear, however, is that, although she was respected in her time, her success was based on her popularity, and that placed her at odds with the high-art and print-based ethos of the more central members of this group. Although we cannot completely know her motivation in the pursuit of popularity, it was at least in part conditioned by both her need to make money and her marginal position in relation to the literary elite of her time. Her private communications suggest that her desire to effect political change was as central to her career choices as was her love of writing—hence the identifier “poet-advocate.” Along the way, Johnson crafted a vision of public engagement that was at odds with a Habermasian, print-based, consensual, and rational vision of the public that was dominant in late nineteenth-century Canada. I contend that Johnson’s ability to represent and elevate difference, performance, and affect, values that make her very attractive to contemporary theorists, was due to the fact that she had no choice. These are the values that were thrust onto her as a native woman. Her poetic articulation of many of the values that challenge her era’s biases is, in this reading, not due to unique powers of prescient insight on her part, nor is it a sign of a special moral authority to be located in marginalized groups and individuals. Neither is it a wishful critical construction. My understanding of the meaning behind Johnson’s radical and under-recognized intellectual activity is well articulated by Teresa de

Lauretis's importation to feminist theory of the film theory term "space-off." This term is defined as: "the space not visible in the frame but inferable from what the frame makes visible" (26). By virtue of her marginalization, Johnson occupies the space-off of the dominant public of her time and place. The value of reclamatory projects resides not primarily in the re-introduction of figures that have fallen by the critical wayside, but rather in our ability to hear what might not have been heard in their time. The "reconsideration" that Johnson's work continues to inspire shows how productive a figure she is for us in our own moment, in which we excitedly receive her work anew.

Chapter 2. Dorothy Livesay

Because we live in a city within a city—
At war with itself and its factions

—Dorothy Livesay, “Montreal: 1933”

Introduction

Despite Robert Kroetsch’s oft-cited assertion that Canadian literature passed over a modernist period and proceeded directly from Victorianism to postmodernism, the study of Canadian literary modernism has flourished. Recent scholarship has been especially insightful about the unique aesthetics of early twentieth-century women writers, as well as their institutional relationships to the development of modernism in Canada (Brandt and Godard, Irvine, Kelley). In this context Dorothy Livesay has gained increasing recognition as an important, and modernist, writer—recognition that was elusive during the heyday of Canadian modernism in the 1940s and ‘50s.

This chapter focuses on Livesay’s writing in the period from the initial phase of her writing career in the early 1930s until the mid-1950s for two reasons. Firstly, this time span roughly corresponds to the period in which a modernist public sphere was being constructed in Canada through the establishment of national cultural institutions such as

the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (1936), and the Canada Council (1957). Secondly, this period, while encompassing many phases, constitutes the early part of Livesay's career. Her subsequent relationship to the new social movements, including second-wave feminism, that emerged in Canada from the 1960s on, involves an altogether transformed understanding of the public. The theorizing of this turn in Canadian discourse and in Livesay's writing is beyond the scope of this chapter, which therefore looks at three distinct periods within its time frame. The first is Livesay's early Imagist work, which I examine in the context of its appearance in the magazine *Canadian Forum*. The second is her overtly Marxist work, which often appeared in *Masses* magazine, and which I read in the context of Livesay's involvement in agitprop theatre. The third period is what has been frequently, and I argue mistakenly, constructed as Livesay's retreat to family life in the 1950s. Reading a series of talks that Livesay gave on the CBC in this period, I interrogate Livesay's self-presentation as a "housewife," asking, with Livesay, if a housewife can also be a public intellectual.

This work participates in the larger project of redefining Canadian literary modernism, and Livesay's place within it. I am particularly interested, however, in making two intertwined arguments. The first is that our understanding of the public in relation to Canadian literature in general, and to Livesay's work in particular, gains clarity when we look at the institutional structures that were being put into place during the modernist period. The second is that Livesay's ongoing concern with the public develops in the context of these institutions and discourses, and that her articulation of a unique conception of the public

allows us to read some of the assumptions and limitations of the Canadian modernist public.

I will show that two competing intellectual trajectories through which the public has been thought inform the development of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and the Massey Commission (1949-51). These trajectories, which I call the interest and the disinterest models of the public, also appear in Livesay's own career. Her poetry and radio productions, as well as her evolving relationships to various writing communities and institutions, provide the basis of my understanding of the public as central to her sensibility.

I situate these divergent understandings of the public within the larger intellectual history that I outlined in my introduction. To review briefly, I identify two post-Enlightenment tendencies in discussions of the public. One model, I believe the one that is most recognizable to a readership informed by an intellectual field that has been formed since the 1960s, sees the public as a space of competing and unequal interests. In this setting the role of the public intellectual is to appear in an extra-academic setting, and to take, from time to time, a political stance. This is the model that frequently comes to mind in thinking about the intellectual as having a public role. I call this the interest model of the public. It is this model that I believe Brenda Carr Vellino is thinking of when she calls Livesay "one of Canada's foremost public intellectuals" (43); Marvin Gilman suggests something similar in drawing on Gramsci to refer to Livesay as an organic intellectual (25). The

second understanding of the public that I see as informing Canadian modernism is one in which the public exists as a neutral space for the appearance of the individual. The intellectual has a right to take principled positions, but in this model it is crucial that such positions emerge not from personal interest but rather from pure principle. In this model the appearance of interest in the public sphere is an intrusion. Consequently I label this a disinterest model of the public.

The disinterest model has strong resonances with the discourse surrounding the Massey Commission, as well as other forms of dominant modernist aesthetics in Canada. The interest model grounds a strong counter-discourse that can be seen at times in both Livesay's poetry and in CBC programming. In the construction of Canadian modernism this counter-discourse became cast as nativist and anti-modernist, a characterization that has come under considerable scrutiny in recent scholarship. It is also worth noting that even at the time there was considerable awareness of the political biases of the Massey Commission. For example, Margaret Fairley, as discussed by Dean Irvine in *Editing Modernity* (249-257), drew attention to the Massey Report's exclusion of what she saw as a progressive culture represented by writers including Livesay and Pauline Johnson. The binary that was constructed between modernism and anti-modernism in Canada, and between the cosmopolitan and nativist tendency in Canadian writing, was not only used to disparage authors who were devalued by this split, it was also at times embraced as providing an oppositional space. For example, Fairley herself participated in the

construction of progressive Canadian culture as an expression of the native and the anti-modernist.

Livesay's work sits at the intersection of the interest and disinterest models of the public. Her work evolves over the course of the early 1930s to the mid-1950s to represent both sides of this binary, and ultimately to challenge it. This challenge appears generically in the form of the documentary poem, and symbolically in the persona of the housewife.

The Public, Modernism, and the Massey Commission

The Massey Report, issued in 1951, is traditionally seen as a formative text for the development of the institutional structures of Canadian culture. The report built on the establishment of the CBC as a national, funded, force for the promotion of Canadian arts and culture, further expanded the role of the state, and resulted in the establishment of the Canada Council, which is generally seen as a bulwark of progressive Canadian values. The period in which I see Livesay's writing as most influenced by the values that inform the Massey Commission precedes the commission by a matter of decades. Here I use the Massey Commission as shorthand for a discursive field that grounds the commission itself. The commission and its report consolidate a dominant understanding of the public sphere in modernist Canada. It is this understanding that I read here as forming the background of Livesay's early career. In this chapter I will use the term "Massey Commission model" to refer to the elevation of high-modernist values, particularly that of disinterest, as the basis of the public sphere in Canada. This is a uniquely Canadian

iteration of the “disinterest” trajectory in the conception of the public. The Massey Commission enabled the development of a publicly funded national artistic culture; it also reflected a highly conservative and militarized conception of the role of culture in Canada, as it was fundamentally concerned with the project of cultural defence.¹⁵ What has come to appear as the only possible model for Canadian arts funding is in fact a very specific ideological construction. The alignment of modernism, high art, disinterest, and national defence forms the basis of the Massey Commission model.

In her article “Nationalism and the Modernist Legacy: Dialogues with Innis,” Jody Berland examines what she calls the “formative coalition between nationalism and modernism which arose in Canada in the 1950s” (15). Revisiting the scholarly treatment of the Massey Report as a key determinant of Canadian postwar culture, Berland urges us to recognize the multiple fields of power that situate the rhetoric and influence of the Massey Report as a document. She convincingly argues that the rise of a system of state patronage of the arts in Canada in this period is linked to the postwar project of defining and securing Canada’s borders. Longstanding anxieties about the status of Canadian culture in relation to that of the U.S.—or indeed its existence at all—combined with a new

¹⁵ For more on the various narratives surrounding the Massey Commission, see Litt, and Berland and Hornstein. For more on the Commission in the context of Canadian literature, see Irvine in *Editing Modernity*. For a more general perspective on Canadian cultural industries, see Dorland.

zeal for nation building to establish the Canada Council and bolster the CBC. Berland diagnoses this alignment as a uniquely transparent “link between cultural patronage and national defence” (18).

This context favoured a Canadian version of modernism. Modernist aesthetics became aligned with government interests to create a modernism largely defined by a commitment to nation building, characterized by autonomy from market forces, which were seen as implicitly American. The high art valuation of “disinterest” began, in this context, to support the project of building an independent Canadian cultural sphere or, as Berland puts it, the “creation of a public” (17). That this institutional configuration is commonly seen as having called a public into being in Canada is indicative of how powerfully the *type* of public created by postwar cultural policy has influenced our perceptions of what a public is.

Berland reads the model of state support represented by the Canada Council as emerging from nineteenth-century British hostility to emergent social classes, in particular their mixing of art with commercial life (23). The Canada Council, in separating “autonomous” art from the culture industry, echoed a humanist vision of art that Berland attributes to the influence of Matthew Arnold. I would add that this vision of culture as divorced from commercial production makes disinterest one of the foundational values of the arts, placing the artist in the position that Arnold advocates for the critic. As Berland points out, this emphasis on disinterest has dual origins in interwar constructions of

modernist aesthetics and their most salient historical precursor, the British nineteenth century. It might also be situated within a larger historical discussion on the relationships among disinterest, art, the public, and the intellectual.¹⁶

Livesay's early poetry in the Imagist mode can be seen as participating in the aesthetics of disinterest that dominated early discussions of Canadian modernism. As she turns first to overtly politically engaged Marxist writing, and then to documentary poetry, she departs from those aesthetics. This departure resulted in the exclusion of Livesay from early forms of the Canadian modernist canon, which has been the subject of significant feminist scholarship. Exemplarily, Peggy Kelly's "Politics, Gender and New Provinces: Dorothy Livesay and F.R. Scott" convincingly argues that Livesay's exclusion from the 1936 canon-forming anthology *New Provinces: Poems by Several Authors* was both intentional and politically loaded. Based on archival evidence, Kelly reads Livesay's marginalization during the formation of Canadian modernism as motivated by Livesay's

¹⁶ Berland makes a larger argument that the writing of Harold Innis provides a theoretical basis for the form that nationalism took in the Massey Commission. Innis himself grounds his "Footnote to the Massey Report" in the tradition of Julian Benda in distinguishing between nationalism that defends against the culture industry and Benda's "intellectual organization of political hatreds." This is an important context for the seeming contradiction that the Massey Commission model can be invested in both nationalism and disinterest.

relation to male networks of cultural production, the general masculinist critical bias of her time, and her overtly left-wing political commitments. Other recent scholarship on Livesay has occurred in the context of a general reevaluation of the modernist canon, including Dean Irvine's 2008 study *Editing Modernity: Women and Little-Magazine Cultures in Canada, 1916-1956*, and Di Brandt and Barbara Godard's 2009 edited collection of essays, *Wider Boundaries of Daring: the Modernist Impulse in Canadian Women's Poetry*. The publication of *New Provinces* precedes the formation of the Massey Commission by thirteen years, yet I understand both as participating in a consolidation of the Arnoldian vision of the Canadian public that Berland writes about.

If the Canadian public in the wake of the Massey commission came to be defined by disinterest, modernist aesthetics, and the nation, the institutional history of the CBC illuminates some counter-trends in the constitution of a Canadian public sphere. While the CBC has come to appear as perhaps *the* exemplary institution for those who wish to fight the attrition of a public sphere defined by both high art and reasoned neutral discourse, as evidenced by continual struggles over the restructuring of CBC radio programming, looking to the origins of the CBC might help illuminate a persistent counter-narrative, one that enabled Livesay's CBC broadcasts.

Radio Broadcasting, the CBC, and other Publics of Modernist Canada

The history of the CBC has not been nearly as well theorized as that of the Massey Commission and its repercussions. Histories of the CBC have sometimes displayed a

tendency to fold the tensions apparent in the institution into a version of the post-Massey public. Thus, writing in 1969, Frank W. Pears can claim that the Canadian Radio League (CRL), the lobby group that was pivotal in the establishment of the CBC, was interested in high quality broadcasting “free of the limits of commercial success,” and that the League used the language of nationalism to meet this end (441). Here, the pairing of nation and high artistic standards is placed at the centre of the objectives of the Canadian Radio League: a formulation that is taken for granted in 1969, but not entirely supported by the histories of the League’s founders.

1929 saw the issuing of the Aird report, which resulted in a general but unmobilized sentiment of support for the foundation of public national radio in Canada. In this context the CRL formed to accomplish this mobilization, working against the Canadian Association of Broadcasters, a lobby group committed to private ownership in broadcasting. Through a series of dramatic political struggles they succeeded in this aim, eventually establishing the institution of the CBC as a corporation with a board: a public, non-partisan, body. Important allies of the CRL included J.F.B. Livesay, Dorothy Livesay’s father, in his capacity as the General Manager of the Canadian Press (Weir 203), and Vincent Massey, who would go on to lend his name to the Massey Commission.

Michael Nolan’s *Foundations: Alan Plaunt and the Early Days of CBC Radio* provides a compelling history of the ideological context of the CRL and the early CBC, focusing on the figure of Alan Plaunt. Nolan shows that Graham Spry approached Plaunt to assist him

in forming the CRL, which was accomplished in 1930. The League played a large role in the proceedings of the Special Commons Committee on Radio Broadcasting, which occurred in 1932, and eventually succeeded, after the 1935 election, which brought the Liberals to power, in establishing the CBC. An arms-length government-funded broadcaster replaced the former organizing structure, which had consisted of 3 appointees of the R.B. Bennett government, and had been implicated in partisan political programming leading up to the election. Nolan's research shows that the CRL was indeed founded with the intention to bring public broadcasting to Canada, and that the threat of American incursion was, according to Plaunt, a key motivator of this project (74). The CRL's pithy formulation "the state or the United States" (Pears 441) encapsulates the League's nationalist and defensive commitments, and sits easily with the vision of the state that would inform the Massey report.

Despite these similarities, there is much about the political commitments and social networks of Spry and Plaunt that suggests a different model of the public. This more socialist and populist understanding of the public operates as a counter-narrative within CBC programming, giving a context for Dorothy Livesay's eventual inclusion. Spry and Plaunt's networks are marked by a different historical moment than that which calls the Massey Commission model into being. The political terrain of the 1930s incorporated pre-existing notions of Canadian culture as forming a front of national defence against Americanization. The notion of Canadian culture in this context was marked less by high modernism, however, than by various strains of socialism and populism. Nolan documents

that Plaunt was a supporter of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, funding the national office of the CCF (95). Plaunt also financially supported the *Canadian Forum* (a left-wing political and cultural magazine that published Livesay and other prominent writers), the New Canada Movement (a farm based movement that sought a “New Deal” for Canada), and the League for Social Reconstruction (an intellectual Socialist organization founded by Frank Underhill and F.R. Scott). While E. Austin Weir represents Plaunt’s political commitments as liberal left (222), Nolan (basing his argument partly on Graham Spry’s testimony) reads Plaunt’s cultivation of a proximity to the Liberal party as pragmatic. Spry’s own political commitments are less contestable: he was a member of the League for Social Reconstruction, bought the *Canadian Forum*, and ran for office as a CCF candidate. Both men cultivated political and social networks that mixed strains of agrarian and intellectual socialism.

These are the networks in which many of the early programming decisions of the CBC make sense. For example, while the CBC eventually came to be associated with highbrow arts programming, an early success of CBC radio was its “National Farm Radio Forum” (or “Farm Forum”), an outgrowth of the New Canada Movement. Formed on the model of a radio-enabled study group for farmers, its stated objectives were to “present authentic social and economic background material for discussion. . . translate such material into terms that will appeal to the imagination and interest of farm listeners [and to] serve as a link between listening groups spread over a wide area” (“Rewind”). This is a model of

public radio that is rooted in the demographic realities of the CBC's potential audience, as well as a notion of the intellectual potential of rural labourers.

"Farm Forum" sits far from the elitism of its close historical companion the *New Provinces* anthology. However, noting that F.R. Scott at least is a point of overlap between the anthology's masculinist and high modernist biases, and the intellectual socialism of the League for Social Reconstruction, it would be a mistake to consider these as two clearly delineated camps. I see them instead as two discourses that overlap and compete, not least in Livesay's own writing.

Livesay's Publics

It is in this particular ideological context that the tension between a public defined by disinterest and one defined by partisan interest appears in Livesay's writing. That Dorothy Livesay has both a public and a private voice is one of the central truisms of Livesay scholarship; for example the conference proceedings entitled *A Public and a Private Voice: Essays on the Life and Work of Dorothy Livesay* (1988) are organized around this cleavage in Livesay's voice. In this sense my observation that Livesay is interested some of the time in the public capacities of poetry, and some of the time in its private capacities, is not a new one. What I wish to add to the discussion is a linking of Livesay's private and public voices that illuminates an implicit understanding of the public in Livesay's work. This understanding arises out of her historical conditions, yet is surprisingly forward looking.

The dialogue between public and private in Livesay's work evidences an original line of thought about the nature of the poet's public engagement that connects seemingly dissimilar Dorothy Livesays, both at particular moments and in successive stages of her career. In following this line I find continuity despite the seemingly structuring cleavage between the public and the private Livesay. It is also this line that connects the Marxist Livesay of the 1930s to the domestic Livesay of the 1940s and 1950s, to the New Left/feminist Livesay later in her career, and binds Livesay's diverse institutional contexts.

Livesay as Imagist

Livesay's early Imagist writing is frequently treated as a pre-historical irrelevance by critics who are interested in Livesay the engaged writer. If there was a tendency in the 1930s to view Livesay's politicized writing as disappointing relative to her early aesthetic promise, there has been a subsequent neglect of Livesay's early writing in the critical crafting of Livesay as a Marxist and feminist writer. Livesay herself tended towards a redemption narrative whereby the experience of the Depression transformed her into an engaged intellectual, imparting value to her work. Viewing her work through the lens of differing models of the public, and the role of poetry in relation to those models, suggests a different picture of the radical shift that Livesay's poetics underwent in the early 1930s. Her evolving commitments took place not only in the context of the radicalizing material experiences of the 1930s, but also in the context of the debates on the nature of the

emergent Canadian public that I have been outlining. One way this connection might be observed is by looking at some of Livesay's poetry of the early 1930s (defined as before 1933, when she joined the Communist Party) in the context of its original publication.

Green Pitcher and *Signpost*, Livesay's first two volumes of poetry, define the pre-Marxist Livesay. *Green Pitcher*, published in 1928, is reported by Livesay to have been published against her wishes under parental pressure. In *Journey with My Selves* (1991) she writes:

This was a time in youth when I hoped for love and understanding, but instead was encouraged to seek public acclaim. Secretly, I poured out my feelings in my diary and poems. Those poems were such personal expressions it seems strange now to think that they were made public! I did not will it, but I went along with it. (97)

Livesay goes on to describe *Signpost* (1932) as containing the better poems of what she refers to as "the lyric period of my youth." In addition to labeling this poetry lyric, she characterizes it as private; *Signpost* is summarized as emerging from "the intensity of unrequited love." Although earlier in the chapter she mentions the influence of the Imagists on her sensibilities (90), thereby suggesting a poetic lineage, when she comes to discuss her first two published volumes she refers to her work as private, influenced solely by personal experience, and brought to publication through her father's influence.

The accuracy of this account remains somewhat in question. There is archival evidence of Livesay's personal involvement in the publication of her early work. For example, a letter to Hugh Eayrs shows her active pursuit of the publication of *Green Pitcher* ("Letter").¹⁷ The critical treatment of her lyric voice as a *formal* indication of the privacy of her early work might additionally be called into question by contextualizing the appearance of Livesay's early poetry in relation to the two competing models of the public that were represented in the emergent Canadian modernist discourse of the time. A remarkably dense site of this competition is the magazine *Canadian Forum*, where a number of Livesay's poems appeared, some of which were eventually included in *Signpost*.

Canadian Forum, as mentioned earlier, was part of non-communist left political and cultural network, one that would later be rejected by Livesay herself as "pink" (*Right Hand* 176). Here Livesay's poetry is situated, both spatially and figuratively, in the middle of discussions about the role of poetry and the intellectual in the development of a modern Canadian sensibility. The juxtaposition of Livesay's poetry with these debates opens up the potential meaning we might find in this early body of work.

¹⁷ A more thorough investigation of the Livesay family dynamics and their effect on Dorothy Livesay's writing can be found in Martin, and Banting.

“Song for Solomon,” for example, is a poem that in the context of Livesay’s book publication affirms her own contention that her earliest projects were lyric, small, and overwhelmingly private in their speech:

One day’s sorrow

Is not much

When there’s grief

Still to touch:

But one day’s sorrow

Drops a stone

That plunges deep

Through flesh, through bone.

Here Livesay’s simplicity of speech and use of a solitary visual image to communicate emotion draw on her affiliation with the Imagists. While she uses rhyme and metre, her aesthetics are congruent with high-art modernism. Particularly striking, in light of her later poetry, are the restraint and diminutiveness of the voice of this early lyrical Livesay. The expansiveness of Livesay’s documentary voice is absent. The moments of lyric precision that would form a dialectic with the larger historical voice in documentary, as theorized by Livesay herself (“Documentary”), are recognizable here.

The restraint and diminutive scale of this poem suggest particular gendered and political stakes when read in its original context, the June 1931 issue of *Canadian Forum*. This issue contained the second part of F.R. Scott's "New Poems for Old," an essay that encapsulates the "disinterest" strain in Canadian modernism. Arguing for the "divine right of poetry to govern itself" (337), Scott's essay makes the case for the modernist poet as disinterested and universal. This breaking away from the social commitments of poetry was imagined as a repudiation of Victorian sensibilities. That this was a gendered discourse is best exemplified by Scott's deeply sexist "The Canadian Authors Meet" (1945). The sexism of this poem is not incidental, but rather indicative of a high-modernist conflation of and contempt for femininity, interest, and Victorian sensibility. In the perspective of this poem, the cloistering feminine nationalism and imperialism of the Victorian-minded early twentieth-century Canadian consumer of poetry is of a piece with her taste for tea and "zeal for God and King, their earnest thought."

It is significant, then, that Livesay herself was the Canadian female poet singled out in *Canadian Forum* as representing a break with Victorianism. In the January 1932 issue, a series of five poems was published, which ran alongside a profile of her by W.E. Collin titled "Canadian Writers of Today." In this piece the author associates her with the break from Romanticism, the intellectual turn in poetry, and the use of modern speech. She is especially valued for her "dramatic terseness" (140). Collin treats Livesay as representative of contemporary women poets, writing: "Their thoughts and feelings are

exquisite, not general; their art reflects the sensibility of an erudite mind, not (as for example, Mr. T.S. Eliot's poetry) the mood of a generation of men" (140).

This gendered contrast between the sensibility of an isolated mind and the mood of a generation reflects the dynamics of the earlier juxtaposition of Livesay's terse lyric with Scott's expansive critical rhetoric spread over two journal issues. Livesay's privacy and formal constraint allow her to function as an exemplar of all that Scott insists modernist poetry should do. This figuration reflects the dominant modernist idea that high art is, ideally, politically and socially autonomous, unassailable. The privacy of Livesay's lyric exemplifies Scott's argument about the poet's political independence. What we understand as most private—the lyric apolitical voice—is in this articulation the condition of the public freed from private political interest. This tradition does allow for intellectual engagement on the part of the writer; indeed it calls for it. But poetry itself is asked to preserve a place apart from the more material, political discourses that are ever threatening to invade. It seems fitting that a female lyricist, treated as overwhelmingly formal in her concerns, should occupy a symbolic position at the extreme outskirts of this terrain.

One might wonder if the elevation of a female poet such as Livesay as a figure of this unassailable independence omits something of her actual clamorous voice. Was the coming engaged Livesay really nowhere to be seen in this early period? One poem that

suggests otherwise is “The Unbeliever,” which also originally appeared in *Canadian Forum* and was later included in *Signpost*:

What have I done, in not believing
Anything you said;
What have I lost, from lightly taking
Your gifts of wine and bread?

Could I have thought there was something greater
For my heart to gain
By running away untouched, unshackled,
Friends only with sun and rain?

Quiet now in these lonely places
I listen for your voice—
Yet why? When in my heart lay knowledge,
In my own mind, the choice.

Despite Livesay’s framing of the *Signpost* poems as occasioned by personal romantic disappointment, “The Unbeliever” suggests a more intellectual concern. It can easily be read as an expression of the Enlightenment ideal as articulated by Kant in *What is Enlightenment?*, reflecting its values of emergence from tutelage and authority, and freedom of individual thought. With its reference to “gifts of wine and bread,” this

freedom can be read specifically as liberation from religious authority. At the same time, when we take Livesay at face value and read “The Unbeliever” as a heterosexual love poem, it implies the emergence from tutelage along gendered lines as well. Although she doesn’t quite mobilize the bombast necessary to speak to “the mood of a generation of men,” nor is she institutionally positioned to do so if she wishes, we do see her operating intellectually, as well as affectively. It becomes difficult to treat her as a feminine practitioner of the politically irrelevant lyric. The other element of “The Unbeliever” that asks us to read it as a challenge to the received construction of the private, lyric Livesay is her formal choice to write this poem in an adaptation of the ballad stanza. In this choice I see an attachment to traditional poetic conventions that contradicts the reading of early Livesay as formally avant-garde. The use of a form that is not only traditional, but also (imagined as) popular, additionally marks an early, formal, appearance of Livesay’s career-spanning interest in various iterations of “the people.”

These subtleties call into question the construction of Livesay as a writer split between a private and a public voice. Here, on the outskirts of the private Livesay, there is a troubling of that very distinction. Livesay the lyricist is mobilized as a figure for an emergent Canadian modernism that advances a disinterest model of the intellectual, and of the public sphere. As we turn to Livesay’s Marxist years, in which her interest in the public role of poetry is pronounced, she breaks away from this ostensibly private body of work. This rupture may be construed as both a political awakening and a departure from the control of her family. But two conditions of the apparent privacy of Livesay’s early

lyric poetry have frequently been overlooked. One is the extent to which constructions of the public in Canadian modernism were in fact bolstered by the type of speech that we from our historical vantage point have come to view as private. The other is that the circulation of private and public that is a particular hallmark of Livesay's political and poetic sensibility is nascent at this early stage. Livesay's radicalization and reinvention of herself as a poet of the people is in this reading something less than an utter breach. This reading also, as I will show, helps us make sense of her apparent post-Marxist "retreat" from public life in the late '40s and early '50s.

Livesay as Marxist and the Invention of the Documentary Poem

1. Livesay as Marxist

Thinking about Livesay as a public intellectual comes most easily in examining her work between 1933 and 1939. These dates represent the timeline she herself articulated in *Right Hand Left Hand*. 1933 is marked as the year in which approval of her writing by "workers and communists" becomes the standard by which she judges her own work (58), whereas 1939 marks the beginning of a period that she characterizes as one of domestic retreat (278). While my argument in this chapter calls into question the essentially private nature of the work which bookends this period, it is clear that the Livesay of the 1930s was a self-consciously public writer. The way in which Livesay herself conceives of the public role of the writer in this period aligns well with the interest-based model of the public. This public is initially figured as "workers and communists" immediately following her

conversion to Marxism. Livesay describes her own retreat from Marxist politics in the context of a general atmosphere of retreat following the adoption of the Popular Front strategy by the Comintern in 1934, and the Hitler-Stalin Pact (1939) (278). However, following her Marxist period, Livesay continues to be concerned with the public role of poetry. After 1939 she employs the language of the “people” when she highlights the public functions of poetry, for example in *Poems for People* (1947) and “Call My People Home” (1950).

In *Comrades and Critics: Women, Literature, and the Left in 1930s Canada* (2009), Candida Rifkind situates Livesay’s work of this period within what she, in a term borrowed from Ian McKay, refers to as the Third Period of Canadian socialism, characterized by a response to the Depression and the eventual formation of a Popular Front against fascism. Livesay’s writing during this time takes place in the context of her extensive involvement in the left’s collective models of artistic production, including the Progressive Arts Club (PAC), *Masses* magazine, and the Workers’ Experimental Theatre. Rifkind reads the language of “going over,” used by non-working-class writers to describe their cultural affiliation with the working class and their socialist commitments, as enabling a transgression on the part of writers. Part of what this transgression involves is “the writer’s movement from individual to collective subjectivities” (40). Rifkind characterizes the writing enabled by “going over” as both moving towards the political, and challenging an understanding of modernist aesthetics built on liberal disinterest. For Rifkind, the literary left is performing public intellectual work in that it brings together

thought and action: “[t]he literary left envisioned a form of public intellectual labour in which knowledge does not lead to paralysis” (75).

Rifkind’s situation of Livesay’s radical writing of the 1930s clarifies the material and discursive context in which Livesay’s work operated as public speech during this period. She convincingly argues that various historical barriers have prevented critics from understanding much of the significance of Livesay’s Marxist writing. Using Michael Warner’s term, Rifkind situates Livesay’s cultural production within a general alternative public sphere, or a counterpublic, of socialist modernism. I believe that situating Livesay’s writing of this period in the context of a general evolution of her conception of the public, as well as in a more detailed reading of discourses of the public, suggests a different reading. In my view the evolution of Livesay’s conception of the public is structured as a dialectic wherein her early alignment with the public as defined by disinterest is in this period renounced in favour of a socialist conception of the public as defined purely in terms of political interest. Warner’s notion of the counterpublic seems to me to be a more accurate description of Livesay’s eventual resolution of this contradiction through embracing the documentary form and specifically, as I will argue, the medium of radio.

Rifkind’s *Comrades and Critics* and Dean Irvine’s *Editing Modernity* establish that Livesay’s writing during what Irvine refers to as her “extreme leftist years” (47) occurred within complex political networks. Livesay’s writing in this context demonstrates “a shift in her priorities away from the personal pursuits of writing poetry and toward the public

roles of social, political, and cultural action” (Irvine 47). Whereas Livesay’s Imagist writing is often seen as her most purely private work, her committed leftist writing is taken as her most public incarnation. Here, Livesay abandons her position as feminine embodiment of the disinterested lyric poet and turns to a radically interested position. Criticism of her writing during this period as didactic and propagandistic responds to Livesay’s clear conviction that the purpose of poetry is to act in the world, and act specifically in the interests of the working class. It is therefore her interest in a reception by that class and its allies that forms the basis of her aesthetics in this period.

Some of Livesay’s most purely didactic writing was produced in the context of her involvement in the PAC and *Masses* magazine, both of which were communist cultural organs. The long gap between the publication of *Signpost* in 1932 and that of her next book of poetry, *Day and Night*, in 1944 constitutes what is often seen as a long hiatus in Livesay’s career as a poet. Her retreat from poetry for the purely public life of her communist years is a disappointment to some critics, in ways that parallel others’ disappointment with her retreat from public commitment during her “housewife” years. Livesay’s writing immediately following her turn to communist organizing and radical social work upon her return to Canada in 1933 is, indeed, overwhelmingly occupied with social problems understood through a Marxist ideological lens.

Formally, however, Livesay’s radical poetry turns initially to the techniques of experimental theatre that she was exposed to through her involvement in the PAC. Her

mass chants, designed for public performance with a specific relationship to audience, can be seen to form the model for her poetry at this time. This influence explains Livesay's didacticism as not a mere abandonment of poetic sensibility for the art of rhetoric, but rather as a poetics born of a specific understanding of public engagement. In this sense there is a similarity between Livesay's use of performance in this period and Pauline Johnson's performance-based poetry. Livesay's use of public performance and her overt political commitments surely had an influence on how her work of this period was critically understood, as was the case with Johnson's sidelining. The hostile reception of Livesay's work of this time may in part explain her retrospective characterization of the Theatre of Action and the PAC as Brechtian ("Interview") in an attempt to align her aesthetics with a political writer who did not suffer the same marginalization as she did.

As Rifkind notes (131), Brecht was not extensively translated into English at the time; therefore the more likely influences on Canadian agitprop theatre were Brecht's antecedents. This claim is confirmed by Scott Forsyth, who writes that while more experimental developments in European theatre were favourably covered by *Masses*, the Canadian PACs knew little of Brecht (51). I can imagine other possible avenues of a Brechtian influence on Livesay, for example her contact with the poetry of Auden (who was influenced by Brecht), or an undocumented influence through the numerous German-speaking Jewish communists who would have been in Livesay's circle at the time. This is, however, speculation, and the aesthetics of the Canadian PACs were clearly closer to American agitprop aesthetics than to Brecht's experimental style.

Compare, for example, “Struggle,” an unattributed mass chant reproduced in *Right Hand Left Hand* (97-98), to Livesay’s poem “Montreal 1933” (*Collected Poems* 76-77).

“Struggle” includes the instructions that two groups are to be divided on a stage. The groups represent German workers, organizing against fascism, and Canadian workers, responding to, amongst other things, the murder of striking Estevan miners, the imprisonment of communist leaders, and the murder of Nick Zynchuk in an eviction struggle. The chant begins:

Group I

1 Listen, comrades.

All Under the threat of the swastika,

Under the terror of Hitler,

1 Listen, comrades,

All To our voices.

2 Hitler has fine words and slogans

3 Hitler has storm troops and bullets

4 But Hitler has no bread for us

All Bread! Bread! BREAD!

The chant continues its dialogues within the German and the Canadian working classes, creating parallels between “Hitler’s bloody arm” and “Bennett’s iron heel,” culminating in a unified statement by all participants: “Strong and mighty building a world for workers!”

“Montreal: 1933,” in contrast, shows more poetic complexity. Nevertheless, it shares with agitprop an interest in direct address and the staging of a dialogue between voices—interests that would persist with Livesay’s development of the documentary form. Juxtaposition of Montreal unemployment, Archbishop Gauthier’s hypocrisy, Cuba’s deposed strongman Machado, and the murder of Nick Zynchuck, alongside the celebration of the power of the workers, also aligns it thematically with “Struggle.”

Livesay’s direct address of the audience, taking the forms of a chorus (“In Cuba the masses have not blundered!”) and the confrontation of a question (“Why? Why? Why?”), borrows from political theatre the collapse of the traditional space between performer and audience. This writing is theatre not in the sense that it is a staging of multiple voices, but in the sense that it brings an imagined audience into confrontational proximity with the political questions being raised. It resembles epic theatre as described by Walter Benjamin:

Epic theatre takes account of a circumstance which has received too little attention, and which could be described as the filling-in of the orchestra pit.

The abyss which separates the actors from the audience like the dead from the living, the abyss whose silence heightens the sublime in drama and whose

resonance heightens the intoxication of opera—this abyss which, of all the elements of the stage, bears most indelibly the traces of its sacral origins, has increasingly lost its significance. The stage is still elevated. But it no longer rises from an immeasurable depth; it has become a public platform. The didactic play and epic theatre set out to occupy this platform. (22)

In the context of this insight into the function of epic theatre, the didacticism of Livesay's Marxist writing may be read as less naïve than it has sometimes been represented as being. "Montreal: 1933" might be read as performing poetically what Benjamin claims epic theatre achieves. In one section, Livesay writes:

We must remember: Archbishop Gauthier has spoken:

"Let us be glad that no one has died of starvation

In this country." We must remember

A few blocks away the tailor is making a suit

For Cuba's Machado.—He's not left his seclusion.

Soft carpets tell no tales and the hangings

Of deep velvet bear no bloody stains.

In Cuba the masses have not blundered!

In Cuba the masses know their foe!

In Dufferin Square the men talk in low voices,

In Dufferin Square the clenched fist fears the light.

Why? Why? Why?

Was Nick Zynchuck then murdered for nothing?

Have we no answer for the brutal arm?

Because we live in a city within a city—

At war with itself and its factions. (*Collected Poems* 76)

Thematically, the poem treats class and labour both internationally and, in a following section, within the city itself. The poem is crafted to lead the imagined reader to sympathy with the communist politics of the day; the citing of Gauthier and the imagining of Machado's Montreal tailor, as well as the reference to the murder of Nick Zynchuck, are topical references that suggest an international situation that demands an international communist response. The formal techniques are however not merely didactic, but rather didactic in a specifically theatrical way. The dialogism that calls Gauthier's voice into the poem, the staging of Machado's tailor, as in a theatrical scene, and the suggestion of a chorus of voices in the centre of the poem all draw from agitprop theatre. The staging, as in agitprop, culminates in a direct calling of the reader into participation. Livesay's "Why? Why? Why?," which can easily read as naïve, histrionic, and apoetic, performs Benjamin's collapse of the "abyss which separates the actors from the audience like the dead from the living." The presumed audience of the poem is not positioned as a distanced consumer of art but is instead challenged to become part of the production. Quite the opposite of the image of the artist as a disinterested

intellectual, here both the audience and the artist become most public in their political and class-based commitments; this is the demand of the poem.

In turning to Zynchuk's murder, Livesay moves her imagination from the international to the civic. Livesay's "city within a city— \ at war with itself and its factions" is a condensation of the response of the interested intellectual to Arendt's idealized Greek polis. In this formulation there is no private outside world of labour, to be sectioned off in the promotion of a public sphere. The city, "[m]ade by the workers" always bears the marks of class and labour—the private is always at the centre of the public.

2. Livesay as Documentarian

In her 1969 article "The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre," Livesay retrospectively theorizes the genre that she developed in the mid-1930s. She describes the documentary impulse as a "conscious attempt to create a dialectic between the objective facts and the subjective feelings of the poet" (267). She distinguishes the documentary from the epic and narrative traditions in poetry, comparing the documentary poem to John Grierson's film experiments. (Grierson, having coined the term "documentary" in relation to film, produced his first documentary film in 1929. He was instrumental in the establishment of the National Film Board of Canada in 1939, which he headed until 1945, when he resigned amidst accusations of communist sympathies.) The documentary poem is characteristically a performed piece; for Livesay it has a privileged relationship to the medium of radio. It is "valid as lyrical expression but [its] impact is topical-historical,

theoretical and moral” (281). We might conceive of the documentary poem in Livesay’s hands as a hybrid form, reflecting elements of her origins as a lyric poet, her exposure to the didactic techniques of agitprop theatre, and her interest in radio.

A few elements combine to enable this generic creativity on Livesay’s part. With the 1944 publication of the book *Day and Night*, she returned to publishing poetry in book form; poems such as “Day and Night” show a significant aesthetic departure from both her Imagist writing and the more didactic writing that appears in *Masses*. The documentary form comes into its full potential through Livesay’s relationship with CBC radio; her 1949 broadcast of “Call My People Home” and the poem’s subsequent chapbook circulation show a mobilization of radio to address a public in poetically rich, yet accessible, language. Livesay claims that many of her documentary poems—including “Day and Night,” which was not aired on the CBC—were written with an ear for radio broadcast (*Self Completing Tree* 153). Given that “Day and Night” was written in the year before the founding of the CBC, we know that the CBC was not the imagined broadcaster of this particular poem, although the nationalized precursor to the CBC may have been. We do know, however, that Livesay had an ongoing interest in radio, which began around this time, and that this interest developed largely in the context of the establishment and growth of the CBC. Paul Gerard Tiessen and Hildi Froese Tiessen, in their introduction to *Dorothy Livesay and the CBC* (1994), write that:

In radio broadcasting [Livesay] saw a challenge for writers not simply to duplicate well-tried themes and techniques, but to attempt fresh ones. Her

involvement in and assumptions about radio provide insight into ways in which Livesay, like a number of other literary figures of the twentieth century, responded with enthusiasm to new and non-traditional media. (xi)

I want to suggest that the CBC not only provided a forum for Livesay to experiment formally, but that additionally the institutional function of the CBC as a public mass medium was a motivating factor in her development of the documentary form in poetry. Livesay's relationship with radio, both as imagined context and real setting, allowed her to craft a unique public poetry.

An equally important influence on this shift towards documentary in Livesay's writing is her interest in the work of Auden and his contemporaries. A key scene in Livesay's narrative of her development as a writer involves her stumbling upon their work in a bookstore in Greenwich Village (*Right Hand, Left Hand* 153). Livesay singles out Cecil Day-Lewis's 1934 polemic *A Hope for Poetry* as a key text in enabling documentary poetry to emerge as a genre that exceeds the limitations of propaganda.

The theoretical work of *A Hope for Poetry* seems to be a more convincing generic influence on the evolution of Livesay's writing than does the poetry of either Auden or Day-Lewis. In this book, Day-Lewis speaks to a number of contemporary concerns about the role of poetry in a changing public. Participating in a broader cultural discussion about the impact of mass media, he argues for an accessibility of poetry for the common

man as opposed to the flattening effect of mass media. His arguments resonate with those of other modernist critics of mass media. For Day-Lewis, mass media pull the individual away from the personal life upon which the imagination is grounded. As for theorists of the public such as Arendt and Habermas, the possibility of public speech is grounded in the potential for a privacy of experience, which the rise of mass media erodes.

Unlike Arendt and Habermas, Day-Lewis was a poet, and his solution to this problem is not only social, but also formal. Dismissing pure propaganda as antithetical to the aims of poetry, Day-Lewis takes up Yeats's distinction between rhetoric as the quarrel with others and poetry as the quarrel with oneself. He argues that poetry can never be rhetoric, even when it's political. Most relevantly for my reading of Livesay's writing, Day-Lewis describes poetry in which

there is a perpetual interplay of private and public meaning: the inner circle of communication—the poet's conversation with his own arbitrarily isolated social group—is perpetually widening into and becoming identified with the outer circles of his environment; and conversely, the specifically modern data of his environment—the political situation, the psychological states, the scientific creations of twentieth-century man—are again and again used to reflect the inner activities of the poet. Such interchange of personal and (in the widest sense) political imagery, such interaction of personal and political feeling is to be found in poem after poem of the younger writers. (37)

Day-Lewis describes a poetry that is modernist, yet concerned with the circulation between public and private. Far from positing a poetry of pure disinterest as the modernist aim, Day-Lewis identifies and advocates an interaction between the personal and political (or we might say private and public) in poetry.¹⁸ We might see this position as an early incubator of Livesay's documentary aesthetic.

The other significant incubator of Livesay's documentary poem is the growth of CBC radio as a public vehicle in Canada. Livesay's poem "Day and Night" is especially illuminated by reading it in the context of the increasing relevance of Canadian public radio at the time of its writing. Two salient elements of "Day and Night," its dialogism and its interpolation of mass culture, are influenced by and engage with the CBC's model of the Canadian public.

Criticism on "Day and Night" has only marginally recognized radio as the formal and political context of the poem in passing comments, the relevance of which I wish to develop. Pamela McCallum notes that "Day and Night" "bears structural markings of a radio documentary verse" (195). Caren Irr reads what I call the dialogism of Livesay's

¹⁸ Day-Lewis's project is exemplary of Walter Jost's definition of low modernism: "Where the high modernist is in flight from the everyday and ordinary, seeking an epiphany of form by which to purify the language of the tribe, the low modernist provisionally 'shows forth' the everyday" (86).

documentary voice as a “public mosaic,” aligning it with both Canadian multiculturalism and the CBC as a Canadian public voice. I agree with Irr’s general argument, that the documentary genre enables the transformation of Livesay’s representation of a mass voice into that of a public voice: one that is characterized by multiplicity. McCallum’s comment is largely concerned with the formal markings of radio, while Irr’s insight appears at the end of her argument, and is not developed.

I wish to develop these insights into the influence of radio, and specifically the CBC, on Livesay’s writing. It is when she turns to radio as an ideal forum for the circulation of her public voice that the documentary form coalesces. “Day and Night” shows the negotiation of lyric and topical data that Livesay identifies as the backbone of the form, a negotiation that gains meaning when read in the context of Day-Lewis’s argument. Its dialogism reflects her experience with mass chants and agitprop theatre, while its aural quality follows her ongoing interest in the musicality of poetry as well as the fact that she imagined this poem to be read on air. Furthermore, the history of the CBC, specifically its socialist and popular foundation and programming, forms one institutional context of the development of this voice. Although Livesay had ongoing political and aesthetic struggles with the CBC (Tiessen and Tiessen 1988), the fact of the CBC’s existence and broad cultural influence as an ideological alternative to the emerging militarized modernism described by Berland seems to me to be a crucial context for the development of documentary as a form imagined for radio.

“Day and Night” is exemplary of the formal structure of the documentary poem as described by Livesay in that it negotiates in complex ways between the topical and the lyric. Much of this negotiation is formally represented through her use of rhythm and voice. At the same time it can be situated as part of her interest in poetry as public discourse. If we imagine, with Livesay, that this poem was to be read on the radio, we can conceive of “Day and Night” as working as a form of popular education, a poetic parallel of programming such as “Farm Forum.” Alongside the poem’s imagining of the worker as rooted in popular discourses, Livesay integrates voices from mass culture, which places “Day in Night” in opposition to the dominant modernist suspicion of mass culture at the time.

Livesay’s definition of the documentary poem hinges on the dialogue it forms between objective facts and subjective realities. In formal terms, one might think of the documentary poem as putting the traditional concerns of epic and lyric in dialogue with one another. The epic form’s associations with national and historical narrative, as opposed to subjective experience, align it with the pole of objective fact (or, in Day-Lewis’s terms, public meaning). On the other hand, the lyric has been (particularly in its Romantic iteration) concerned with interiority and subjectivity, aligning it with the opposite pole of the documentary poem, that of subjective reality (Day-Lewis’s private meaning).

One of the most distinctive features of “Day and Night” is the multiplicity of voice and rhythm contained in the poem. Moving between multiple metrical modes, Livesay makes surprising choices about how to use voice and rhythm to create a dialogue between the personal and the didactic, alongside the epic and the lyric. Sections of the poem are written in a loose approximation of blank verse, and others in unrhymed trochaic tetrameter, evoking traditional rhythms of epic verse in English as well as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s innovative epic *Song of Hiawatha*. In contrast to these sections, other sections are written in dimeter. The regularity and brevity of these sections formally evoke lyric poetry, as does the fact that it is in this rhythm that the poem makes its most explicit musical reference, to Cole Porter’s “Night and Day.” This interspersing of epic and lyric serves as a formal indication of Livesay’s attempt to create a dialogue between the objective and subjective.¹⁹

One might expect, based on this formal vacillation, that the lyric sections would be concerned with subjectivity, whereas the epic sections would be concerned with public, objective, or historical questions. In this poem, however, which is fundamentally about

¹⁹ Isabella Valancy Crawford’s “Malcolm’s Katie” [1884], which, following in the footsteps of Alfred Lord Tennyson, is structured as an epic interspersed with songs is another precedent for Livesay’s interest in placing epic and lyric into relation with one another. Livesay had a scholarly interest in Crawford, including Tennyson’s influence on Crawford’s poetry (“Tennyson’s Daughter”).

reversals, these poles are reversed. For example, in one of the epic sections, Livesay writes:

Day and night are rising and falling
Night and day shift gears and slip rattling
Down the runway, shot into storerooms
Where only arms and a note-book remember
The record of evil, the sum of commitments.
We move as through sleep's revolving memories
Piling up hatred, stealing the remnants,
Doors forever folding before us—
And where is the recompense, on what agenda
Will you set love down? Who knows of peace?

This section is musical, affectively charged, and concerned with subjective experience. Notably, the subjectivity of this section is communal, not individual, reflecting the larger political values of the poem.

In contrast, the sections that might be initially perceived as lyric in their formal qualities are markedly non-lyrical. For example:

One step forward
Two steps back
Shove the lever
Push it back.

Livesay uses the brevity and regularity of trochaic dimeter to represent the regular and punctuated rhythms of factory labour. Eventually this rhythm repeats as the martial rhythm of proletarian resistance. As for subjective experience, its very possibility seems to be excluded by the overwhelming mechanical force of the rhythm. There is no subject, merely the activity of shoving the lever, pulling it back. The lyricism of these sections is ironized. This irony is further emphasized if we hear in the background of these sections their intertextual reference to Cole Porter's song "Night and Day," its syncopation and swung rhythm highlighting the lack of musicality and subjectivity in the poem's "songs." If the epic sections unexpectedly highlight the personal, transforming it into the communal, the lyric sections serve to represent the historical in their impersonal representation of factory labour and eventual revolution. This reversal of formal expectations is in line with the argument of the poem, which ends:

Day and night
Night and day
Till life is turned
The other way!

This reversal is the central theme of the poem. It is also the central aim of the poem, in that "Day and Night," like agitprop theatre, asks the audience to do something. "Day and Night" functions as a public educational project whose goal is the popularization of Marxist dialectics. The poem is structured by various antitheses, such as day and night,

white and black, love and hate, nature and industry, and body and soul. “Day and night” refers to the rhythm of factory shifts, but also to a general structuring tension that the listener is encouraged to overturn. Among other reversals, the “steel’s whip crack” of factory labour re-appears as the cracking of the conditions of labour under capitalism:

One step forward

Two steps back

Will soon be over:

Hear it crack!

A more overt indicator of this project can be found in Livesay’s reference to Vladimir Lenin’s *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* (1904). A Marxist solution to the labour conditions represented in the poem is suggested both formally and thematically. This commitment draws on both Livesay’s own background in agitprop theatre and her forward-looking hopes for radio as a popular educational forum.²⁰

²⁰Irr also reads the dialectical progression of “Day and Night;” however, I disagree with her conclusions. Irr argues that in “Day and Night,” “finally, for Livesay, the process of multiplying public voices was more important than adhering to particular positive theses” (230). She also argues that Livesay’s interest in dialectics comes out of a general aesthetic interest in oppositional elements. I think that both of these claims ignore the extent to which “Day and Night” is ideologically Marxist. Livesay’s overriding interest in this poem is not in formal opposition, but political transformation. Similarly, the multiple

In “Day and Night,” commercial forms of mass culture add their voices to that of radio. This appearance of mass culture alongside high culture is historically unusual; at the time, modernist aesthetics, liberal nationalism, and leftist cultural critique all displayed an overwhelming suspicion of mass culture. Many thinkers, including Day-Lewis, voiced a fundamental critique of mass media’s leveling effect on culture, as well as its capacity to seduce the audience into a position of passive consumption. In contrast, much of the criticism of “Day and Night” notes its embrace of popular forms. Alongside “Night and Day” by Cole Porter, which Livesay herself confirms as the inspiration for the poem’s title (*The Documentaries* 17), additional popular songs echo through “Day and Night.” McCallum, reading the influence of black culture on the poem, suggests that Livesay’s images evoke the Billie Holiday song “Strange Fruit” (198), while Brenda Carr Vellino hears Louis Armstrong’s “Shadrach” (44). Paul Denham identifies cinema as grounding the technique of the poem, and additionally reads it as containing the language of the comic strip (93). Vellino, identifying both “machine age aesthetics” and popular music as intertexts, suggests that Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927) and Chaplin’s *Modern Times* (1936) (the imagery of which, I agree with Vellino, is uncannily prefigured in “Day and Night”) share a “field of representation” with the poem (49).

voices Irr recognizes are not a mere liberal public clamour, but are rather structured to lead to a revolutionary break, represented as a “crack.”

Livesay's comfort with mass culture, and her ability to see in it potential in excess of the placating function usually ascribed to it by her contemporaries, seems somewhat ahead of its time. It also calls to mind Andreas Huyssen's argument that modernist aesthetics are founded on a categorical distinction between high art and mass culture and that the origin of postmodernism is related to the rejection of that divide. Huyssen specifically reads mass culture as a feminized other to high culture. The alignment of mass culture with consumption and the pleasure principle is insistently figured in feminized terms; this rhetorical feminization correlated with a real exclusion of women from the production of high culture. In light of her exclusion from male modernist culture in Canada, it makes sense that Livesay, despite a Marxism that could dispose her toward a suspicion of mass culture, is able to see in mass culture a potential for public discourse. In turning to public radio Livesay looks to mass culture to be something other than a vehicle for consumption. She imagines it as part of the public sphere.²¹

²¹ Andrew Ross details the evolving relationship in the United States between intellectuals and various iterations of "the masses" and "the people" in the context of the Cold War. Although the Canadian left had, and has, a different set of concerns in relationship to American cultural power, Ross's insights into the relationship between the politics of the Cold War and the attitudes of intellectuals towards popular culture are relevant to Livesay's poetic project as well. Livesay's evolution on the subject of mass culture can be understood as part of the larger cultural trajectory of the Cold War.

Livesay's integration of personal and public voice in the form of the documentary poem received public acclaim with the 1944 publication of *Day and Night* followed by *Poems for People* in 1947, both of which won the Governor General's award. Then, in the wake of the Second World War and her disillusionment with the Communist Party, Livesay, in her own assessment and to the disappointment of many, was derailed by the domestic task of raising her children. Dorothy Livesay the public intellectual became Dorothy Livesay the housewife.

The CBC Talks: Livesay as a Thinking Housewife

The characterization of the late 1940s and much of the 1950s as a period in which Livesay withdrew from public engagement is near universal in commentary on her career. This is the view endorsed by Livesay herself. In her memoir *Journey with My Selves*, the period is treated only briefly, as a time of retreat from public life: "The war and having children changed all my perspectives: from being a participant in the struggle for a better world I became an observer. All community efforts narrowed down to that of the home" (174). Livesay also paints an image of this time as one of retreat in *Right Hand, Left Hand*: "Our solution was to withdraw, settle down to family life on the North Shore" (278). Peter Stevens reflects on women writers' experience of tensions between writing and their domestic labour, while insisting that Livesay herself did not find her domestic role frustrating (54). Although Livesay continued to write while raising children, in the assessment of her literary executor, David Arnason, *Call My People Home* serves as the exception to the rule that her private voice overtook her public voice

in this period: “[d]uring the 1940s and 50s Livesay devoted much of her time to raising her children, and her poetry lost some of its fervour, becoming more private and domestic” (ix).

While I agree with Arnason’s assessment that Livesay’s poetry became less fervent, I question the claim that she retreated from public concerns. Much of her poetry of this period *is* concerned with emotion and the details of domestic life; however, it took the feminist second wave for literary critics to begin to appreciate that domestic concerns might in fact be cast as political, which is to say public, concerns. An attentive reading of some of Livesay’s texts of this period suggests that in many ways Livesay herself, despite her autobiography, was less than certain that her housewifely preoccupations had disqualified her from public speech.

One area where I see overwhelming evidence of this continued interest in the public is in Livesay’s radio scripts, which were prepared for the CBC. *Call My People Home*, first broadcast in 1949, stands out as her most ambitious and successful use of radio as a tool of political education. *If the World Were Mine*, broadcast in 1950 and, like other radio work discussed here, published in *Dorothy Livesay and the CBC* (1994), is a socially engaged radio play on the theme of prejudice. A more marginal but remarkably complex engagement with the public in these years is to be found in two radio broadcasts of the early 1950s, and *Statement for New Year’s Day*. Paul Gerard Tiessen and Hildi Froese Tiessen, in collecting Livesay’s early radio texts, have framed these broadcasts within the

problem of Livesay's literary production during the years in which she had demanding domestic responsibilities.

Livesay in this period clearly struggles with these material tensions. In her writing they also show up as ideological and formal tensions. One of the ways in which she represents and negotiates the conflict between her private and her public self is through her mobilization of the "housewife" figure, so productively read by Paul Tiessen in his recent article "Dorothy Livesay, the 'housewife,' and the Radio in 1951: Modernist Embodiments of Audience." Tiessen, interested in the corporeality of the radio listener, suggests that Livesay's housewife figure offers a counterpoint to intellectual anxieties about the passive consumption of mass media.²² He describes Livesay's housewife as "a citizen passionate about a Canadian cultural agenda, [who] was also a radio listener who asserted the primacy of the self, of the sensate listener in real space" (207). Building on Tiessen's reading, I wish to dwell a little longer on what the citizenship of Livesay's housewife implies. I believe that Livesay's mobilization of the image of the housewife challenges the division between public and private (and alongside this, the binaries of production and consumption, masculine and feminine) in advance of the feminist and gay

²² The focus in this article on embodiment as a challenge to modernist biases calls to mind Michael Warner's call for counterpublic voices that emphasize "embodied sociability, affect, and play" (122).

rights movements, which were to articulate the political operation of this distinction with greater clarity and force.

Tiessen refers us to a series of talks that Livesay prepared in the 1950s for the programme “Critically Speaking.” Here Livesay talks back to the CBC programmers, making programming suggestions from the point of view of a mother, and in her own words, a housewife. “Like most housewives,” she says in one 1951 address, “I am more frequently a daytime than an evening listener. And in looking back over the year’s daytime programs it is impossible not to say: ‘What a good friend the radio was to me’”(10).

The radio, in this account, visits the isolated housewife during her lonely hours, and refrains from judging her unfinished chores. Livesay carefully positions herself as representative of the domestic, feminine, consumer of radio; this is the very figure that looms large for many contemporaneous intellectuals as representative of the pacifying effects of mass media. Contradicting these assumptions about the interests of the housewife, Livesay asks the CBC to block together its highbrow offerings so that they might be more easily found. In a 1952 discussion of CBC dramas she expresses her excitement about a production of A.M. Klein’s *The Second Scroll*.

She is not, however, merely asking for a “higher level” of programming from the CBC, but rather advocates for the CBC to become a truly public and interactive medium. For example, echoing her ongoing concern with documentary, she argues for “actuality

broadcasts” to connect citizens across Canada (12). This desire for access to the CBC as a public medium is expressed in tandem with a desire for the distribution of highbrow art and literature; it is public, but not populist. In these brief talks, Livesay paints a picture of the housewife not as a mere passive consumer but as an engaged participant in a public conversation, indeed as potentially an intellectual.

Are we to take this housewife identification as anything other than ironic given that *Call My People Home* was first broadcast on the CBC just a few years earlier in 1949, and again in 1952? We might keep in mind Livesay’s ongoing struggle with the CBC to get her work on air. Peggy Lynn Kelly shows that Livesay’s literary style, departing from the CBC’s preferred dramatic realism and straight narrative, was a major obstacle in this relationship. Livesay’s housewife may be seen as a pose that allows her to communicate her ideas about public engagement and formal experimentation.

It is through her mobilization of the figure of the housewife that I wish to think about how this public appears in Livesay’s work of this period. In positioning the housewife as the listener who also produces programming for the CBC, she challenges the conception of the domestic, and the feminine, as a passive receptacle of mass media. Livesay seems keenly aware of the limits on women’s intellectual engagement in this time.

Consequently, she uses the image of the housewife to leverage her way into broadcast media, to keep doing what she was already doing in the 1930s and would continue doing

after the rise of second-wave feminism and the New Left: engaging wholeheartedly in public discourse.

To see this leveraging in action, we might look at Livesay's "Statement for New Year's Day," written to be broadcast through the CBC for a European audience on New Year's 1953 (*Dorothy Livesay*). Here, echoing the Massey Commission, she argues for a Canadian arts policy that would provide support for cultural production, suggesting the building of a functional and funded National Arts Council, a working and representative author's association, and the institutional machinery necessary to represent Canada properly to UNESCO.²³ Regretting what she sees as the rugged individualism of Canadians (in comparison to Americans, no less), she argues instead for a "community of interest" (18). Canadians are:

[S]o ruggedly individualistic that we haven't even got a National Arts Council that can function, because it has no funds; we haven't even got an authors' association that embraces all our leading writers! Half of them stay buried in the eastern cities, the other half float away along the Pacific coast! Rarely indeed do they have a chance to communicate with each other, around café tables as writers do in Europe. And finally, we haven't even got a body

²³ The alignment of Livesay's interest in a public arts infrastructure with her socialism might be troubled by her 1979 criticism of funding for individual artists, on the grounds that "it takes away initiative, straps people to a grand welfare plan" (Barber 29).

uniting all the arts and humanities, a national Commission for Unesco. We belong to Unesco but have not set up the internal machinery to make it work.
(18)

Livesay regrets the relative underdevelopment of the Canadian cultural sphere, and this underdevelopment's correlation with a lack of public life in Canada. This lacking public sphere is figured in the above passage, in terms that would be recognizable to Habermas, as the imagined café tables of Europe. Unlike Habermas, she looks to state structures to provide the public sphere that she sees as lacking.

The larger context of these concerns is a humanist argument for the arts as a source of connection in an increasingly alienating world. In taking this stance, Livesay is engaging publicly; she is also foregrounding the public context and public role of the writer. A significance of this rapid movement from housewife to intellectual is that it directly contradicts the opposition between the private and the public that has been central to Kant's and Arendt's understanding of the intellectual. Whereas Kant and Arendt see intellectual work as public, and necessarily sheared from the domestic, Livesay, in these talks, moves in fairly short order from being a housewife to being a writer with opinions on the structuring of arts funding. Doing so, she elides the distinction between the housewife, a vehicle for all that is private, and the intellectual, who is inherently public. Even as she participates in the language of the Massey Commission understanding of the public, she inserts the housewife as a figure who belongs in, or to, the public. Livesay's

housewife refuses the dominant modernist distinction between public and private; this refusal has special significance to contemporary feminist critique. This refusal must also be read, however, in the context of the Cold War. As Arthur Redding has argued, the American front of the Cold War was enacted culturally in part by the “prizing apart the sphere of culture from the sphere of work and organized activism” (8). To cast Redding’s argument in the language of this chapter, the notion of the cultural producer as private, rather than as a public intellectual, had particular force at this time because of the larger cultural forces of the Cold War. Livesay mobilizes the position of perhaps the most private of figures, the housewife, to resist these very forces. Looking at Livesay’s CBC projects from this time may serve to call into question the possibility of a truly private voice for Livesay, suggesting instead that, at least after the 1930s, historical and biographical circumstances may account for the appearance of a private voice, but deeper readings might reveal the public investments of even that voice. This conclusion is hinted at by Jonathan C. Pierce, who suggests that the importance of Livesay as a public poet resides in the *link* she makes between the private and public in her work (23).

For Pierce, however, Livesay’s public constitutes an extension of the concerns of her private work (26). If this were the case, we might be justified in aligning her not with a true public voice but with the social, to use Arendt’s terms. When we look at her speech, however, it becomes evident that this interpretation is not entirely correct; instead, Livesay bridges the vast space between the domestic and the public with the *language* of the social. In addressing arts funding, the role of public broadcasting, and the possibilities

of radio for making connections between communities, Livesay appears to be interested in calling into being a public realm, in Arendt's sense. 1950s Canada may not have had the privileged and neutral space of the polis, but the ideal of an infrastructure of funded institutions that support cultural production by independent artists approaches a fantasy of the polis.

In calling upon the housewife figure, Livesay appears to be drawing domestic concerns into the public realm, only to turn nearly immediately to conversations regarding programming, funding and public policy. It seems likely that Livesay the writer held Livesay the "housewife" at a distance. Given her enduring commitment to a vision of "the people," an inherently public interest, it makes sense to reverse Pierce's argument and attend to the extent to which the private as represented by Livesay appears as an extension of her public concerns.

While Livesay's approach to the public can be said to line up with Arendt's in that it is concerned with an institutional space for discussions that exceed personal material interest, Livesay differs from Arendt in one significant way. Unlike Arendt, for Livesay the domestic is not an abject zone in which the necessities underlying public life are sequestered. Instead it is a politicized realm, affected by and implicated in the public realm. Succinctly, it is not outside of the polis. Put somewhat ahistorically, she demonstrates that "the personal is political." This slogan distills the insights of the movements that would come to radically call into question the division between the

public and the private that Kant and Arendt rely on. It is, however, important to note that this is a very different claim than that of the social, which may be condensed as “the political is personal.” This distinction is, as we will see, of increasing political significance.

In these CBC talks, when the private Livesay is extended into the public sphere it is in the form of a figure. It is through an understanding of the private Livesay as figural rather than expressive that we can most clearly see the cultural relevance of the tremendous fluidity with which the public and private circulate in Livesay’s work. When we read Livesay’s private voice, her “housewife,” as a self-conscious pose created in the service of public concerns, we can understand what appears to be most private in Arendt’s sense, most domestic, as a guise under which Livesay may engage with the public.

One way to situate the complicated circulation of the private and the public in Livesay’s writing is to regard it as reflective of a general cultural and economic shift that would go on to shape our understandings of the political, the public, and the personal. In this framing, Livesay’s circulation of the public and the private in terms that exceed Arendt’s category of the social comes to seem not only prescient, but also inevitable. Arendt’s concern over the rise of the social occurs in the context of the post-war solidification of two trends in political and cultural organization: American consumer culture on the one hand, and the Soviet Union’s bureaucratization of public life on the other. The ultimate victory of the American model, which was already at the time threatening to become a

global structure, should not obscure the commonality Arendt diagnosed in these trends: the creation of mass society at the expense of genuine individual engagement with democratic structures. For Arendt, this problem constituted both a political and a subjective crisis. The rise of the social as the dominant realm in both the Soviet Union and the United States was symptomatic of the abandonment of the projects of individuality and democracy. Truly political concerns no longer appeared; in both systems they came to be replaced by economic ones.

Livesay's prescience in her articulation of the relationship of the personal to the political seems more intuitive than fully theorized. Certainly she had no way of knowing the political insights of the second wave of feminism that were soon to emerge. She did, however, have a keenly attuned understanding of economics and ideology, which could account for her sensitivity to the cultural shifts that were underway. In the 1950s, a movement away from nation towards global trade was already emerging. The establishment of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, forerunner to the World Trade Organization, in 1947, might be seen as the base to the superstructure of CBC's international New Year's Day broadcast.

If Livesay participates in this liberal internationalism in the context of the CBC talks, her understanding of the subjectivity of the housewife as something other than a consumer identity pushes back on the kinds of subjectivity that globalization encourages. There is a tremendous difference between the housewife as a consumer and the housewife as a

situated subjective position. Lynette Hunter provides us with useful vocabulary for discussing the shift in the constitution of the public that globalization is still in the process of establishing. In her 2006 article “Daphne Marlatt’s Poetics: What is an Honest Man? And can there be an Honest Woman?” Hunter addresses the changes in public culture that result from the changing nature of the nation. This article offers a working definition of public culture that accounts well for the way in which Livesay appears as a public writer:

If ‘art’ is the culture of the empowered and relatively-empowered group with special rights which have [sic] the money both to consume and produce, to disseminate and market, and ‘popular culture’ is the culture of people excluded from that empowered group, then ‘public culture’ could be defined as the culture of people at last included in ‘rights,’ including the right to cultural power. (144-145)

Hunter notes that the situation of knowledge is a strategy through which these newcomers may appear in the public realm, and notes that it is the model of situated knowledge that challenges what she calls “the universal/relative split of the liberal social contract.” We might consider Livesay’s housewife as exemplifying this situatedness.

In a historical moment when the increasing exclusion of women from the public was accompanied by a retrenchment of domesticity for women, Livesay appears as a housewife to access the public. But this is not the same as *being* a housewife, wherein

housewife is a rising consumer identity. Hunter's article addresses the significance of this distinction quite forcefully. She argues that the twentieth century has seen a shift from Althusser's Institutional State Apparatuses, those that serve the nation, to Global State Apparatuses (GSAs), which serve the interests of global capital. Nations in general, and Canada in particular, are caught in a tension between protecting individuals against GSAs and enabling GSAs to operate within their borders (144). In this context, partiality and situatedness, which had previously been excluded from public representation and derided as "interest," come to be seen as differences between subjects; these differences acquire political relevance. Hunter warns that there is a crucial distinction to be made between the situated as a politically relevant fact for previously excluded subjects, and the situated as marker of consumer identity and niche marketing. She asserts that:

[P]artiality and the situated in themselves are no guarantee of democratic agency. They employ rhetorical techniques often similar to those used by GSAs to establish representations, which even if they are not representations for the individual in the nation state, are still representations for the consumer in global state structures. (147)

Hunter's distinction is between the representations that enable new subjectivities to enter public discourse (those she calls partial), and the representations that tie difference to the individual's role as consumer (those she calls relative). To cast her analysis in the language of Arendt, one might say that Hunter argues that there is an expanded role for a citizen who is articulated in terms that challenge those of the universal subject in the

public sphere. This is seen in our increasing belief that material previously cast as private is, in fact, infused with the political. The public must come to acknowledge and include elements that have previously been relegated to the private. This is not, however, a total evacuation of the difference between public and private, or, in Arendt's language, the social. *Relative* identities, those that are aligned with corporate economic interests, are in Hunter's model the location of the social, and for Hunter as much as for Arendt they threaten the existence of a genuine public.

Livesay's CBC broadcasts show Livesay leveraging the unthreatening relative subject (the housewife as consumer of radio in her lonely hours) to do the work of the partial subject. This point amplifies my earlier claim that Livesay bridges the space between the domestic and the public with the language of the social. She stages the housewife as a private figure and then embodies that position to recuperate her access to the public sphere.

“She Cannot Think Alone”: The Limits of the Thinking Housewife

Understanding Livesay as leveraging the figure of the housewife in her CBC talks, and keeping in mind the distinction between partial and relative identities that Hunter articulates, may help to square Livesay's apparent embrace of the position of the housewife seen above with the more ambivalent renderings of domesticity seen in her poetry of the same period. Here there is evidence that the experience of the housewife as a *relative* subject is an unpromising basis for participation in a wider, public, discussion.

In “The Three Emilys,” for example, Livesay rejects the notion that the private activities of the housewife connect her to anything outside of the domestic.

“The Three Emilys” was written while Livesay was in the midst of her domestic responsibilities. Originally appearing in *Canadian Forum* in 1953, it is a frequently anthologized poem about which relatively little has been written, perhaps because its manifestly feminist theme is unambiguous. Ann Martin notes, however, that this poem in which Livesay recognizes women writers appears in the context of her dismissal of her own mother as a writer, suggesting that a disavowal of mother as Other is necessary to the establishment of Livesay’s own identity as a writer (39). Written in tribute to Emily Brontë, Emily Dickinson, and Emily Carr, the poem insists on the impoverishment of the domestic. Livesay, in a 1979 interview, states that the driving force behind the writing of “The Three Emilys” was envy of childless women:

When raising the children, although I appreciated being a mother, I didn’t like housework and I felt frustrated because I couldn’t find enough time to write; and we were very hard up during those war years. So I thought, well, at least those women artists were absolutely free from all those ties. I envied them.

(Barber 19)

It is, as Martin understands, precisely because these women were not mothers that Livesay imagines them as artists. The polarization of creative and intellectual capacities with the work of motherhood is later echoed in her poem “The Mother” (1947), where the problem is succinctly summarized: “she cannot think alone” (7).

In “The Three Emilys,” family life keeps the speaker from an experience of the self, which is seen as necessary for the artist. The poem begins with the Emilys as lonely, “uncomforted” figures. While they are historical characters, they are also parts of the speaker who are exiled from her experience of the “whole” that maternity and marriage allow. Ultimately the speaker concludes that she is the one who lacks. The conclusion of the poem reads:

My arteries
Flow the immemorial way
Towards the child, the man;
And only for brief span
Am I an Emily on mountain snows
And one of these.

And so the whole that I possess
Is still much less—
They move triumphant through my head:
I am the one
Uncomforted.

The different applications of the term “uncomforted” through the course of the poem illustrate Livesay’s argument. Initially the three Emilys appear as uncomfortable; this lack

of comfort is linked to their solitude, one that the speaker, who is a wife and mother, does not share. Yet they cry, not to be comforted, but rather to be “set free,” as elements of the speaker herself. Their cries in the third stanza turn to reproach for having been abandoned by the speaker, who is “born to hear their inner storm \ of separate man in woman’s form.” The “inner storm” here is a description of solitude, which is reframed by the poem to be the precondition for creativity rather than a state of lack.

This reading makes sense of the description of inner experience as belonging to “separate man in woman’s form.” In this poem femininity is an impediment to creativity when it functions as a totalizing identity that defines women in relation to children and men. The Emilys represent another option for feminine subjectivity—that of a “form” of a universal subject. Imagining this argument in Hunter’s terms, we might read this as the description of a partial subject. The Emilys’ status as subjects capable of speech is articulated in the phrase “separate man,” while their partiality is conveyed by the qualifier “in woman’s form.” Unlike in Livesay’s CBC talks, in this poem motherhood and marriage are imagined as positioning the speaker outside of this potential, as a relative subject. The social position of a woman placed in relation to “the child, the man” prevents her from accessing creativity, which having been abandoned, abandons the speaker, leaving her “uncomforted.” Livesay’s use of the word “immemorial” condenses the problem of being part of such a whole. This role positions women not as speakers, but, as Arendt might argue, as participants in a labour that is lost in time. “Immemorial” describes something that is so old its origins are lost to memory, but it also suggests the inability to

memorialize, to represent. Immersion in the domestic is opposed to the capacity to represent individual experience. This representation is foundational to both artistic work and public engagement.

These implications are formally supported by the nature of Livesay's use of the conventions of the lyric. The poem represents a return to lyric form for Livesay. "The Three Emilys" is short, and written in the first person singular. Although the poem can be read as topical in that it is feminist, it is primarily concerned with the individual experience of mothering and its negative effect on writing. The epic, public, pole of her documentary poetry is absent. Here the housewife can write, if "only for brief span," but she does so in a private voice; she cannot participate in the dialogue between public and private that Livesay is so adept at creating elsewhere.

In this poem, the private and the public voices of women are set up not as an enriching and transforming dialectic, but rather as an unbridgeable contradiction. The first two stanzas express a central contrast between the Emilys, possessing access to public speech, and the speaker, who lacks their liberty. Unlike the conflict that appears in "Day and Night," this antithesis is not formally resolved through a dialectic transformation; instead it leads to formal confusion. The pattern of rhyming couplets that is established in the two initial stanzas, rather than being resolved, breaks down in the third stanza, becoming erratic. The mixing of dimeter, trimeter and tetrameter in "The Three Emilys" reads as unmotivated, as opposed to the meaningful and organized metrical play of "Day and

Night.” This aspect of the poem can be seen as a struggle with the conventions of the lyric that becomes necessary for Livesay as she “returns” to them, echoing the speaker’s struggle with the “frame” of motherhood. At the same time this disorganization functions as an illustration of the failure of the private lyric, in parallel to the failure of the private voice of the speaker in this poem.

The difference between Livesay’s figurative housewife, who can be both public and intellectual, and the maternal limitation on expression represented in “The Three Emilys” might be understood as a contradiction. It certainly displays her ambivalence about the work of mothering. But I believe it is most fruitfully understood in Hunter’s terms, as well as through my emphasis on Livesay’s CBC “housewife” as figurative. If Livesay’s CBC talks deploy the rhetorical strategy of *appearing* as a housewife in order to bring new, partial, subjectivities to public conversation, “The Three Emilys,” in contrast, represents the limitations inherent in a relativized identification with the housewife. The great irony of this poem is that Livesay, while immersed in the work of being a wife and mother, wrote this poem, which questions the potential of the housewife to write.

Counterpublics of the Housewife

On a final note, I wish to draw connections between Livesay’s movement towards a partial identity in her appearance as a housewife, her development of the documentary form, and Michael Warner’s understanding of the counterpublic. Rifkind suggests that Livesay and other socialist writers of the 1930s formed a counterpublic through their

alternative understandings of public speech and marginal sites of circulation. Arguing for socialist modernism as a counterpublic sphere, Rifkind reads *Masses* as a “venue of stranger-sociability,” which is for Warner a constitutive element of publics, and by extension counterpublics. I instead understand *Masses* as what Warner would call a subpublic. A subpublic imagines the borders of its audience, whereas a counterpublic speech always interpellates an imagined stranger. While I agree with Rifkind that socialist journals such as *Masses* participated in the counterpublics’ project of dislodging disinterest from its dominant role in defining a public, I don’t believe that the circulation of *Masses* suggests an inclusion of the stranger amongst its imagined audience, except perhaps in the form of a potential convert. For Warner “partial non-identity” is an essential element of public, and therefore counterpublic, speech (78). As a self-consciously ideological forum, *Masses* almost by definition imagines firm borders between insiders and outsiders. On the contrary, Warner’s foundational figure of the counterpublic is the marginal eighteenth-century voice of the She-Romps, an indecorous interruption in the larger public circulation of the *Spectator*.²⁴

²⁴ Warner’s understanding of the counterpublic is largely, if implicitly, formed on the model of queerness. In this sense Livesay’s willingness to strike a domestic, feminized pose in her CBC addresses might be indicative of a shift in her own orientation to the public. This is a departure from her earlier orientation to the “heroic masculinity of industrial labour” (Rifkind 47) in her *Masses* writing and the casual homophobia of her 1936 CBC talk “Decadence in Modern Bourgeois Poetry” (*Right Hand* 61).

I do, however, see Livesay's documentary form, and her CBC addresses, as participating in counterpublic strategies. In defining the counterpublic, Warner reads Arendt "against the grain" (60), suggesting the women's movement and queer culture as model cases of the counterpublic. Warner's understanding of how counterpublics turn elements of the Arendtian public on their head is particularly congruent with my reading of Livesay's use of the housewife figure to both enter and challenge a masculinist public. He argues:

Much of the energy currently being derived from Arendt's work by feminist and queer thought lies in the possibility of reading the feminist slogan "The personal is political" with an Arendtian understanding of the political. This entails the working assumption that the conditions of gender and sexuality can be treated not simply as the given necessities of the laboring body but as the occasion for forming publics, elaborating common worlds, making the transposition from shame to honor, from hiddenness to the exchange of viewpoints with generalized others, in such a way that the disclosure of self partakes of freedom. (61)

Livesay, in inserting the housewife into public discourse, in a forum intended for broad circulations defined by stranger-sociability, does just this.²⁵

²⁵ One way in which Livesay's speech is not commensurate with Warner's concept of the counterpublic is in regard to his claim that lyric speech and public speech are mutually negating. He claims that it is "difficult to hybridize these forms without compromising

Livesay's writing from the 1930s to the mid-1950s undergoes a series of transformations. I read these transformations as indicative of a developing understanding of the public on the part of Livesay. This development is visible both formally and thematically, and grounds Livesay's conception of the documentary poem. These changes are not, however, unique to Livesay's evolution as a poet, but are grounded in the material and discursive contexts of Canadian modernism. Livesay's attunement to the public, understood at times as "the workers" or "the people," makes her a particularly fruitful poet through which to read the elaborations of the public sphere during the modernist period in Canada. Eventually, Livesay, influenced by her own situation, turns to strategies of public speech that resonate with Lynette Hunter's description of changes in the way we view the subject in the context of globalization. These same strategies can be seen as articulations of a nascent feminist counterpublic. Livesay's contributions to literary modernism in Canada reveal some of the potentials, and limitations, inherent in the Massey Commission construction of the public. In bringing us to the limits of the disinterest model of the public she gestures towards the emergent postmodern understanding of the public that I discuss in my next chapter.

lyric transcendence" (81) (although he goes on to argue that this is what Walt Whitman accomplishes). Not only does Livesay attempt to hybridize these forms, her hybridity of lyric and public speech forms the basis for what I see as her subversion of a disinterest understanding of the public and her counterpublic speech.

Chapter 3. Dionne Brand

I'm not writing for anyone alive now. I'm writing for there [pointing forward]
and there [pointing back].

—Dionne Brand in interview (Nolan)

But wait, this must come out then. A hidden verb/ takes inventory of those
small years.

—*No Language is Neutral* (31)

She'll gather the nerve endings
Spilled on the streets, she'll count them like rice grains
She'll keep them for when they're needed.

—*Inventory* (30)

Introduction

In 2009 Dionne Brand was named as Toronto's Poet Laureate. As one of her responsibilities in this role, she initiated *Poetry is Public is Poetry*, an ongoing

installation project that “merges poetry with public art in order to claim permanent public space for Canadian poetry on Toronto walkways” (poetryispublic). At the time, the choice of Brand as Poet Laureate seemed to me to be apt because her writing has consistently engaged the subjects of citizenship, cities, and the inherently public role of poetry. At the same time there is a liberal bent to the model of the public that is suggested by the role that seemed at odds with many of Brand’s commitments. On the project website for *Poetry is Public is Poetry*, Brand is quoted: “Poetry beautifies public space, pays respect to the intelligence of the citizenry, gives respite from the grind of daily living and engages the city's humanistic ideals.” Some of these claims seem to be, at least initially, shockingly at odds with much of what I see in her own poetry. However beautiful Brand’s writing is, it does not give me the impression of writing that is primarily concerned with beautifying the world. Often, it appears to me to be interested in anything but respite. Last but not least, it thoroughly challenges many of the ideals that are central to humanism. Paying respect to the intelligence of the citizenry does, however, offer a good description of my understanding of her poetry and its role as her central activity as a public intellectual.

The meaning of this contradiction in Brand’s speech is illuminated by the title of Brand’s project: *Poetry is Public is Poetry*. This phrase suggests to me at least three potential meanings, all of which I believe inform Brand’s work. The first is that poetry belongs to the public: it should be a public and not a private possession. The second is that the public is itself a mode of poetry: that the public might also manifest the beauty, the

poesis, and the intersubjectivity that characterize Brand's understanding of poetry.

Finally, this phrase suggests that poetry is a public: it has the characteristics of a public sphere. It is this third reading of the phrase that helps me make the most sense of the apparent liberal humanism of Brand's claims about poetry. In this reading, poetry serves as a public, in the most ideal sense of the word. Reading or otherwise stumbling across poetry is an encounter with this ideal, through which one might imagine a public that is truly beautiful, respectful, and human.

In this chapter, I make the claim that Dionne Brand's varied career has as a central, unifying theme her self-conscious activity as a public intellectual. The claim that she is a public intellectual is neither new nor counter-intuitive. She has functioned as a public intellectual from the beginning of her literary career. As she has stated (*Perfect*), the impetus behind her writing of poetry has been to participate in social and revolutionary movements. Brand overtly and persistently figures herself as an organic intellectual; a whole dissertation has been devoted to demonstrating just this claim (Wild). This intellectual work has not been confined to poetry, but also includes the writing of essays, novels and short stories; documentary filmmaking; university teaching; and the compilation of oral histories.

Despite, and perhaps because of, the ease with which Brand can be argued to be a public intellectual, there is much to be gained by a close examination of her understanding of what the public is, and what poetry does in relation to that public. Many of the

conclusions that I come to on this point are based on close readings of her poetry and her own extra-poetic statements. The reason for this is that I find Brand to be highly skilled at both explaining her own work and crafting her own image. While I don't always accept her statements at face value, I almost always find them to be thoughtful explications. Alongside this reading of Brand's view of the public, I situate her within her historical moment, during which I see a major shift in the constitution of the public in Canada. While I understand her conception of the public to be at odds with the nation-state, I also believe that she has worked, however critically, in relation to the institutions of Canadian culture throughout her career. This has resulted in significant recognition including her receiving the Governor General's award in poetry for *Land to Light On* (1997), and the 2011 Griffin Poetry Prize for *Ossuaries*; also, in 2006 she was made a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. While remaining profoundly critical of the workings of power both globally and nationally, Brand has not only benefited from but also actively participated in the institutional apparatus of public recognition in Canada, sitting on juries for the Governor General's Award for poetry and the Griffin Poetry Prize.

Over the course of Brand's career there has been a massive change in the nature of the public in Canada and the role that culture plays in building that public. This changing view of the public has been multiply determined; however, most of the factors involved in this historical shift can be broadly described as Canadian manifestations of neo-liberalism. This chapter begins its narrative arc in 1990, in the wake of the passing of the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. It builds upon my previous chapter's outlining of

the origins of Canadian granting bodies and their role in constructing a national public sphere. This project accelerated over the course of the 1960s and 1970s as a left-leaning version of Canadian nationalism gained institutional traction in the arts and in universities. The sub-discipline within which this dissertation is institutionally justified, Canadian literary studies, is beholden to the aforementioned political project. Although there are many justifiable critiques of the nature of the Canadian imaginary that emerged from these institutional structures, these structures succeeded in building the public sphere within which these very critiques could be voiced. The period considered in this chapter is characterized by the dismantling of those same structures.

It is far beyond the scope of this chapter to analyze deeply the effects of this cultural and economic shift, which is at any rate ongoing. The institutional change that I treat in this chapter is symptomatic. I am concerned with the evolution of Canadian arts funding from a model that is concerned with the production of public life to one that is invested in the cultivation and reward of individual talent, which is conceived of as an internationally marketable product. This development is ideologically reflective of the neo-liberal conception of nation. The concrete institutional manifestation of this change that I will point to is the erosion of publicly funded grants and the ascent of the often-private literary prize. I argue that prizes are inherently privatizing, and that instead of supporting the continued existence of Canadian literature, they both reflect and accelerate the dissolution of the Canadian public sphere that produced the literature they reward.

It is in this context that I will read the view of public engagement that is suggested by Dionne Brand's poetry. As in my discussions of Pauline Johnson and Dorothy Livesay, I not only argue that Brand is a public intellectual, but also interrogate the understanding of public life that underlies her work. Focusing on two of her books of poetry, *No Language is Neutral* (1990) and *Inventory* (2006), I argue that the changing nature of public life in Canada finds a parallel in Brand's own career—this can be found both in her engagements with Canadian grant and prize-giving bodies, and in the representation of the public that is to be found in her poetry. These parallels exist despite Brand's understanding of her own public in terms other than those of the nation-state; Brand's imagined public is often civic or transnational. The correlation between larger Canadian understandings of the public and those to be found in Brand's work is, in my analysis, due to two factors. One is the inevitable material location of Brand within Canadian culture, through Canadian grants, prizes, universities, and publishing systems. The other is that the changing conception of the public that we see in Canada is a specific iteration of a larger social and economic trend.

In the interest of tracing a line of thought in Brand's work, I have isolated two texts that represent different moments in Brand's relationship to the possibilities of public life. The first, *No Language is Neutral*, is highly concerned with the relationship between personal and political reality. In my reading of this text, I illustrate that Brand's concern with subjectivity and identity in "Hard Against the Soul" is not fundamentally about private experience but rather enacts the construction of a public wherein the subjective

experiences of black people, women, and lesbians (to name a few salient categories) can appear. It is in this sense like Hannah Arendt's conception of the public as a space of appearance (195) within which the subject can appear as a "who" rather than a "what" (179). The poem serves as a space for the appearance of these subjectivities partly through its potential for deciphering signs that had previously lacked reception. Taking a hint from the title of Brand's later book of poetry, *Inventory*, and Diana Brydon's reading of the significance of this term for that book, I read the poetics of *No Language is Neutral* as a form of inventory, as called for by Antonio Gramsci. Finally, I make connections between this poetic project and Brand's larger engagements as a public intellectual in this period.

The second text that I look at in depth is *Inventory*. I read this long poem as responding to, among other things, the contraction of the public sphere that has been precipitated by neo-liberal policies, both nationally and internationally. In dialogue with Brydon's claim that Brand treats poetry itself as a public sphere, I read this poem through an Arendtian lens. I argue that it condenses and preserves the conditions of public engagement at the same time as the institutional structures that would subtend the public collapse. However, unlike Brydon, I believe that the despair that characterizes much of *Inventory* indicates the fact that poetry *cannot* fulfill the functions of the public sphere. I read the poem's despair as a symptom, and make connections between the poem and rise of the literary prize in Canada, which I suggest is an inherently privatizing system of assigning literary value. Although there is an understandable tendency among critics to read *Inventory* as a

deeply despairing poem, my reading illuminates the act of hope that is represented by the use of the poem as a medium for the preservation of the potential of the public sphere, rather than as its substitute.

No Language is Neutral: *Coming Out as Inventory*

In 1990 Dionne Brand published *No Language is Neutral*, her sixth book of poetry and her first in six years. This publication marked a turning point in Brand's recognition by the Canadian literary establishment. It was brought out by Coach House Press, a publisher with a wider circulation and higher profile than those of her previous publisher; the book went on to be short-listed for the Governor General's award for poetry. Brand had been in the public eye as a documentary filmmaker, a fiction writer and a cultural critic. The enthusiastic reception of *No Language is Neutral* aided her consolidation as a public intellectual and linked this identity intimately to her image as a writer. Further, Coach House Press's reputation for publishing formally innovative poetry supported Brand's reception as a poet. This context served to counteract somewhat the tendency towards critical marginalization that often befalls political poetry in English, as well as poetry by writers whose identities are marked by various forms of difference. Especially in the 1990s, when terms such as "identity politics" and "political correctness" often set the horizon of critical response to writers of colour who spoke about race, the reception of a politically committed black lesbian as an innovative and talented poet was an unlikely event. With the publication *No Language is Neutral*, Brand accomplished just that.

The assumption that there is a contradiction between formally complex poetry and political interest is, as illustrated in my previous chapter, a motivated fiction, and it is a fiction that Brand's poetry disrupts with great force. What I understand from Brand's work is not only that she believes that political poetry can be formally innovative, but also that she believes that poetic form is itself a carrier for political insight that cannot be spoken in any language other than poetry. Brand herself has been quite clear on this point in interviews. In a 2005 interview (Butling 71), she explains that the "declamatory style" of African-American poets was her initial point of reference, but "I needed to be much more aware of the twists and turns of the language that I was working in." Elsewhere (Thesen 353), Brand describes this attention to language as using what Henry Louis Gates Jr. refers to as "Black rhetorical tropes." In so doing she aligns her form with popular black poetics, pushing back on the possibility of reading her poetry as highbrow in contrast to the narrative accessibility of what she refers to as "declamatory" poetry. In these interviews she imagines her use of poetic form as both popular and political, a stance that is at odds with the Arnoldian values that had come to dominate discussions of Canadian literature during and following the Massey Commission. In the same interview, Brand reflects on the relationship between the formal qualities of *No Language is Neutral* and her political commitments, which are imagined to be partially met through poesis:

I've tried to make the world over in the poems, spoken in what my grandmother used to call "womanish language." The structure of the lines came out of the need to say the thing. I wanted to fill every silence with a

word, and every word with a silence. Since there are so many silences to fill and so many words to silence, the poem continues. (353)

In addition, Brand identifies her love of the “unbroken line” as being a formal echo of the context in which she developed her poetic voice (*Perfect* 14). The continuity she found between dance floors, left intellectual thought, manifestos, and poetry all contributed to this voice:

Poetry revealed itself to me as a continuous sentence which could touch on the inseparableness of things, which could combine and recompose these cultural scripts into a heterogeneous discourse that neither denied their conflict nor their entanglement. This realization of the long sentence – the phrase touching and escaping the phrase; the multiple register, multiple tonal, multiple lingual sentence coincided with and was indebted to the political ferment of the sixties and seventies. (16-17)

This explanation of the origin of her sentence structure is supplemented by a claim that the choice of the long poem as her form has its origins in a grief that in the words of Kamau Brathwaite “had to fill up and spill out of the page” (25). The mourning of friends who were killed in Grenada in the course of political events that preceded the 1983 U.S. invasion appears repeatedly in her poetry, as do the generational transmissions of loss caused by the violence of slavery and colonialism. These histories suggest that we read Brand’s use of the term “grief” as deeply political.

Brand articulates several ways in which she imagines her poetry as doing political work, and repeatedly links that work to the formal qualities of her poetry. Throughout this chapter I will discuss a number of ways in which her poetry both acts politically and theorizes models for political action. One of these acts that is prominent in *No Language is Neutral* is the claiming and interrogation of one's own subjectivity, and of the relationship of that subjectivity to the political. Taking my cue from Brydon's insight that the title of Brand's later poem, *Inventory*, refers to the term as it is used by Antonio Gramsci, I read subjectivity in *No Language is Neutral* as being elaborated in Gramscian terms. Brydon tells us that Brand kept an excerpt from *Orientalism*, by Edward Said, on the subject of inventory, pinned above her desk as she wrote. The relevant section reads as follows:

In the Prison Notebooks Gramsci says: "The starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. The only available English translation inexplicably leaves Gramsci's comment at that, whereas in fact Gramsci's Italian text concludes by adding, "therefore it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory.'" (25)

Brydon's reading of *Inventory*, which I will return to in my own consideration of that poem, is that in that text Brand treats poetry itself as a public sphere in which she engages

in a “practice of affective citizenship” (991) that challenges a Habermasian understanding of the public sphere (994). Although, for reasons that will become clear, I don’t believe that Brand’s poetry would ever be considered by herself to be a sufficient public sphere, I am largely convinced by Brydon’s reading of *Inventory* as concerned with affective citizenship and with the public. I see *Inventory* as representing one point on Brand’s trajectory of thinking about the relationship between affect and the public. In *No Language is Neutral*, Brand’s concern with the historicity and political stakes of subjectivity are front and centre. I see the poem’s engagement with identity as a form of Gramscian inventory. Further, I read Brand as positioning poetry not only as an act of inventory, which critically elaborates historical traces, but also as the conscious act of leaving a trace for history.

In the following, I will read the section of *No Language is Neutral* that Brand titles “hard against the soul,” treating it as a poem. There is a strong argument to be made for reading *No Language is Neutral* as a single long poem, so much are the titled sections spoken in relation to one another. Further complicating an attempt to read “hard against the soul” as a standalone poem is the fact that between its first and second sections sit two other sections, comprising the rest of the book, titled “Return” and “no language is neutral.” “Return” is itself comprised of six titled poems, one of which is “return,” which contains two sections that are separated from one another. Given this labyrinthine structure, referring to any one section of this book as a poem is a pragmatic critical fiction: “hard against the soul” might be better thought of as a line of thought. This line of

thought is one in which Brand represents both lesbian erotics and the process of self-examination that is involved in the act of coming out. It is coming out as a subjective act that I am most interested in here, because it usefully serves as a synecdoche for the various acts of inventory that appear in *No Language is Neutral*. This reading of coming out as a synecdoche of inventory has two bases. The first is that coming out to others is an act in which the personal and the political interpenetrate one another. The second is that the personal experience of coming out frequently involves a re-reading, which is at the same time a re-inscription, of one's subjectivity. The idea that the personal experience of coming to recognize oneself as a lesbian has political meaning is largely the product of the feminist and gay rights movements, and I believe that these movements have had an impact on Brand's thinking. On the other hand, an additional trajectory for thinking about the role of coming out in *No Language is Neutral* is that of the Gramscian project of taking an inventory.

One sign of the work of inventory in "hard against the soul" is the repetition of the phrase "this is you girl." This phrase has a layered meaning in the poem. The use of "you" indicates a split in the speaker, who is addressing herself. This split enables, among other things, the work of inventory, as it inaugurates the space in which the speaker can see herself. Before this split, the structure of the speaker's subjectivity had been lived, not reflected on: "even though you never see it." But what is the "this" of the phrase? It indicates the speaker's recognition of landscape as herself; "this" is the Trinidadian landscape. It is a context in which meaning can be made: "this is where you make sense."

“This” also refers to the poem itself: “this is the poem no woman \ ever write for a woman.” Who the speaker is as a “you” is inseparable from these contexts: where she comes from, and the language she uses.

Coming out causes a rift in the speaker to come into being in this poem, allowing a reflection on the conditions of her subjectivity. It is only in coming out that the speaker revisits the landscape of her youth with an interpretive eye. It is the impetus for rereading her own history and understanding the roles of language and ideology in shaping her subjectivity. For example:

It’s true, you spend the years after thirty turning over
the suggestion that you have been an imbecile,
hearing finally all the words that passed you like air,
like so much fun, or all the words that must have
existed while you were listening to others. What
would I want with this sentence you say flinging it
aside...and then again sometimes you were duped,
poems placed deliberately in your way. At eleven, the
strophe of a yellow dress sat me crosslegged in my
sex. It was a boy’s abrupt birthday party. A yellow
dress for a tomboy, the ritual stab of womanly gathers
at the waist. *She look like a boy in a dress*, my big
sister say, a lyric and feminine correction from a

watchful aunt, *don't say that, she look nice and pretty.*

Nice and pretty, laid out to splinter you, so that never,
until it is almost so late as not to matter do you grasp
some part, something missing like a wing, some
fragment of your real self. (49)

Here, a particular form of femininity is imposed in the form of attire and verbal description, both of which are figured in poetic terms. The strophe and the lyric are tools that disguise and splinter the speaker's self-recognition, which can only be found again in the acts of coming out, and of writing a coming out poem. This brings to mind Brand's description of poetry as the necessary tool for countering the "hard gossip" and "fictions" that support racism (*Perfect* 17-18). In this context, gender and sexuality are both instantiated and challenged by poetry; coming out is the act that inaugurates the liberating work of the poem. In this section, we see the "this" that the speaker must recover being lost, becoming "some part, something missing like a wing, some/ fragment of your real self." When "this" is found again, the alienated part of the speaker (which has become a "you"), it is found outside the self, in the speaker's first female lover. Another repeated phrase of the poem is: "Someone said that this is your first lover, you will never want to leave her." In her lover, the speaker is able to find the pieces of herself that have gone missing, establish a relationship with them, and in the space between "you" and "this" conduct an inventory of the conditions that originally splintered them.

In saying “real self” and imagining a self that exists prior to the distorting power of ideology, this section might be read to suggest that Brand’s position on lesbian identity, and by extension identity in general, is essentialist. This fits neither with my general understanding of Brand, nor with the readings articulated by theorists who emphasize her performativity (see, for example, Rinaldo Walcott). I instead understand “some part, something missing like a wing” as the trace that marks the ideological exclusion of lesbian desire from the production of the subject as heterosexual. The speaker finds this part in her lover, but then suggests that she had put it there, that the real source of her desire is the image of an old woman, whom she could become: “I had it in mind that I \ would be an old woman with you. But perhaps I \ always had it in mind simply to be an old woman, \ darkening, somewhere with another old woman.” This “old woman” is a sign of lesbianism, which is imagined as freedom and a “place to go...against gales of masculinity” (47).

This reading is further supported by the final words of both “hard against the soul” and *No Language is Neutral*, in which sex, self-recognition, place, and history are brought into sublimely condensed alignment:

Someone said this is your first lover, you will never
want to leave her. There are saints of this ancestry
too who laugh themselves like jаметtes in the
pleasure of their legs and caress their sex in mirrors.
I have become myself. A woman who looks

at a woman and says, here, I have found you,
in this, I am blackening my way. You ripped the
world raw. It was as if another life exploded in my
face, brightening, so easily the brow of a wing
touching the surf, so easily I saw my own body, that
is, my eyes followed me to myself, touched myself
as a place, another life, terra. They say this place
does not exist, then, my tongue is mythic. I was here
before. (51)

Here the ground, or “terra” that connects the speaker to both her ancestry and the future resides in her own body. This is both an erotic and a political body; the erotic encounter makes the body real, her own, and a “place” that has been returned to her.

In this poem, the act of coming out offers a prototype for the Gramscian project of inventory; in coming out the speaker interrogates the social forces that contributed to her subjectivity, and puts her subjectivity in its historical context. In this sense, coming out is understood not as a personal event, but rather as an act that has political force. There are connections between this understanding of coming out, and the language that Arendt provides for thinking about the nature of the public realm. Cast in this language, in this poem coming out belongs to the public realm because it is a political act aimed at altering the structures of power. Understanding coming out as a political act may seem axiomatic in the West in light of increasingly successful struggles for the rights of sexual minorities,

struggles that have been linked to the presumed political force of outness. The fact that it is political in the Arendtian sense, however, becomes clear when one contrasts Brand's understanding of lesbian identity to one that situates the lesbian subject as negotiating for economic and familial rights within a largely unchanged political system. This second conception would belong to the realm of the social and would lack public, and therefore properly political, relevance.

While Brand's treatment of coming out suggests a project of inventory that attends to the traces of historical processes, she is also interested in the agency that is involved in the willful leaving of a trace. If, in Brand's words, poetry is an act (*Perfect* 27), one way in which it can act is to encapsulate experience for a future audience. If poetry cannot find its public in its moment, it can serve as an archive. The archival purpose of poetry here is not merely melancholic, but profoundly oriented toward the future. This archival function, as well as the role of poetry as a technology of the public, is illustrated in another poem in *No Language is Neutral*, "Blues Spiritual for Mammy Prater." This poem is Brand's response to seeing a photograph of Mammy Prater, a 115-year-old ex-slave. In the poem, Brand imagines Prater as waiting for the right moment to "take a photograph," the ultimate goal of which is to communicate with the poet in the moment of reception. Brand's language plays on the fact that "taking a photograph" can refer to either posing for a picture, or acting as a photographer; in this poem Prater is the author of her own image; the photographer is "superfluous." In my reading, this poem articulates Brand's understanding of writing as a site of power. Writing in this poem is something

that has happened on Prater's body: "the days that she was a mule, left \ their etching on the gait of her legs" (18); here, the body is a site of inscription. As with coming out, taking a subjective inventory can serve as a political act that reads and challenges racist inscription. Brand is interested, however, not only in her agency as a contemporary reader, but in the power that Prater herself holds. Prater is not only a site of inscription, she is an author: "she took care not to lose the signs \ to write in those eyes what her fingers could not script" (19). Prater encapsulates her historical and subjective experience for the purpose of communicating across time to the speaker who comes across the photograph. Unlike the Derridian trace, which indicates the exclusions that mark signification, or Gramsci's trace, which is produced by the deposits of history, here is a theory of the trace as a willful encryption, a type of activist poetics. This is a good description of the specific role of the artist as a public intellectual. The artist records the process of the production of subjectivity in order to leave a trace, to communicate, not least of all, with the future.

I have outlined two historical perspectives on poetry and its relationship to public life that are articulated in *No Language is Neutral*. These perspectives are mirrors of one another—one focuses on the reception and the other on the production of historical traces. The production and reception of traces are thought of as acts, rather than as wholly materially determined and impersonal. Poetry is a medium through which a counterpublic can be constructed. In Brand's poetry, this counter-public plays out across many generations. This historical horizon raises the question of political effect. In a definition

of counterpublic speech that is highly relevant to my reading of Brand's politics, Michael Warner links the political function of public speech to punctual circulation: "In modernity, politics takes much of its character from the temporality of the headline, not the archive" (97); to his mind, action becomes harder to imagine at a longer rhythm. I suggest that while Brand's speech is political, its temporality is not that of ongoing political processes. This is not because it represents a lyricism that stands outside of the temporality of politics, but rather because its politics are revolutionary. Brand, much like Walter Benjamin, is concerned with the "leap in the open air of history" (261) that is the revolutionary break with the past. This leap also characterizes Arendt's conception of the political impulse as paradigmatically revolutionary. Action, which defines public life, allows and demands a break with the historically expected: "The new always happens against the overwhelming odds of statistical laws and their probability, which for all practical, everyday purposes amounts to certainty; the new therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle" (178).

As with Benjamin's messianic Marxism and Arendt's use of the term "miracle," the revolutionary relationship to temporality in Brand's writing is expressed through religious language, specifically through her use of the term "grace." In the following section I examine the significance of grace in *No Language is Neutral*, arguing that its appearance indicates an orientation to a radically new future.

In a 1997 interview, Brand discusses the idea of grace as it appears in the novel *In Another Place Not Here* (1996), a book whose title is taken from the conclusion to the title sequence in *No Language is Neutral*. She offers the following definition of grace:

Respite. A moment like honey, like clarity, a stop, a silence. And for the characters, it's when something ceases. Strife ceases. It's unexpected honey, unexpected silence. It's not redemption because not everything is solved. It's a moment of clarity for which they are utterly grateful. It isn't continuous. It's a moment of sight, of being sightful. (Tehanyi)

Beginning from this definition of grace, my reading of *No Language is Neutral*'s use of the term places it in opposition to the despair that provides the poem's other affective pole. Grace takes the form of an intersubjective encounter—in *No Language is Neutral* this encounter most often appears as lesbian eroticism. Whereas a surface reading might suggest that the book's topical poems provide its political backbone, and that the lyricism of its erotic poems provides a respite from Brand's politics, in my reading, Eros, in its capacity to forge connection and open new possibilities for relating, resides at the heart of Brand's understanding of the political.

Within *No Language in Neutral*, Brand directly addresses the relationship between Eros and politics. In sections VI and VII of "hard against the soul," she articulates her understanding of the poem's eroticism, its "register of the heart." In section VI she suggests that the romantic concerns of the poem may be read as apolitical, a sign that the

ongoing trauma of history has escaped her. In section VII, she answers this imagined accusation with the lines:

Still I must say something here
something that drives this verse into the future,
not where I go loitering in my sleep,
not where the eyes brighten every now and again
on old scores, now I must step sprightly. I dreamless. (43)

In comparison to Brand's usual longer line and use of enjambment, the short line and use of end-stops are startling. The brevity, simplicity, and lyricism of these lines are indeed sprightly. The beginning of the section with the word "still" suggests that lyricism of form and subject matter is an antithesis to the enumeration of despair that it follows; however the word "still" also suggests that the power to act as an antithesis to despair resides in the section's very stillness. Stillness marks the moment in which there is a possibility of a future that is different from the past, a self that is dreamless.

In her use of the term "grace" Brand concatenates eroticism, intersubjectivity, and the potential for radical change. It is for this reason that I read moments of grace in *No Language is Neutral* as representations of Brand's political sensibility.

The links that Brand makes between lyricism, grace, hope, and the political are also indicated in “hard against the soul” by Brand’s movement between the registers of North American English and Trinidadian demotic. This can be seen, for example, in Section II:

I want to wrap myself around you here in this line so
that you will know something, not just that I am dying
in some way but that I did this for some reason. This
grace, you see, come as a surprise and nothing till
now knock on my teeming skull, then, these warm
watery syllables, a woman’s tongue so like a culture,
plunging toward stones not yet formed into flesh,
language not yet made...I want to kiss you deeply,
smell, taste the warm water of your mouth as warm as
your hands. I lucky is grace that gather me up and
forgive my plainness. (36)

The contrast between “I want to wrap myself around you here in this line so \ that you will know something, not just that I am dying \ in some way but that I did this for some reason,” and “I lucky is grace that gather me up and \ forgive my plainness” reflects not only a difference between North American and Trinidadian English, but also a movement from a standard prose sentence to more lyrical rhythm, intonation, sentence structure, and evocativeness. Brand herself has voiced suspicion towards the demotic as a conservative signifier for authenticity (Butling 72). Here I see the demotic as signifying (among other

things) the movement from an isolated speaking voice to an “I” that emerges from an intersubjective encounter. This movement is formally represented as a movement from prose to poetry—a figuration that moves against the post-Romantic understanding of the lyric “I” as an isolate. In this poem the lyric “I” resides in the demotic’s “warm \ watery syllables.” The poetic is a woman’s tongue, which is also a tongue defined by relationality, one that is “so like a culture.” This social context, represented by the female lover, is the “grace” that allows the uniqueness of her lyric voice, forgives her plainness.

The connections that Brand makes between intersubjectivity and historical possibility are reminiscent of the human activity that Arendt labels action and aligns with the public sphere. For Arendt the subject appears only in social relation, and fundamentally through his or her power to act. This is not an agentic subject, one who determines the outcomes of his or her actions, but rather one who can never be the unequivocal author of those outcomes, which are always radically unknowable, and radically relational. Action, for Arendt, has two characteristics that are conditioned by its essential relationality—boundlessness and unpredictability. These are the essential conditions of the public sphere. In my reading, Brand’s representation of the felt experience of “grace” is not a private experience. It is rather a meditation on the necessary conditions of public life. “Grace,” alongside the memorial function of poetry that I called “leaving a trace,” is the second model of public poetics that I find in *No Language is Neutral*. Each of these models is about the role of poetry as a facilitator of intersubjective encounter, either between subjects separated by time, or by subjects inhabiting the same historical moment.

Two somewhat more poetically phrased statements that Brand makes about her poetry support these claims. The first mirrors my reading of Brand's poetry as a form of action that is aimed at radical change, even if that change comes far in the future. Meditating on why she writes poetry in the face of "grudging recognition that the world will not now change in [her] lifetime," she says:

I still write poems because of this line by Derek Walcott, "at the end of this sentence rain will begin."...To me reading that line clarifies what I had taken poetry to be in the beginning: an act which will precipitate other acts, acts that change the very atmosphere. (*Perfect* 27)

This quotation supports my contention that Brand's writing is a form of action as Arendt has used the term. The second quotation, from the same speech given by Brand, clarifies that for Brand poetry's status as an action is part of a project that might create the conditions for meaningful public engagement: it attempts to build a public, but cannot stand in for one. The attempt to stand in for one would in fact deprive poetry of its public function. Discussing her decision to continue writing following the collapse of the movements that grounded her writing, Brand says:

To sustain poetry in the absence of its radical muse—left collective political action—to sustain poetry when there is no inspiration, that was my work. I suppose I simply continued. Poetry was both insufficient and necessary. (*Perfect* 23)

“No Basis for Consensus”: Brand and the Politics of the Canadian Public Sphere

The fact that she regards poetry as insufficient to the task of building a public helps to explain why, despite placing poetry at the heart of her career, Brand has been consistently engaged in labour that is more readily received as that of the public intellectual. In this section I situate her view of the public, as articulated in *No Language in Neutral*, in the context of the 1990s in Canada. Despite her professed lack of interest in Canadianness as a site of identity, I am interested in Canada as one of Brand’s chief material contexts. Specifically, the following section picks up my tracing, in the previous chapter, of the Massey Commission’s material and discursive roles in fashioning a modern Canadian public sphere. Looking at Brand’s interventions into the assumptions of similarity and consensus that ground the Massey Commission model, I will show that public discourse of the 1990s was marked by challenges to these values. The urgency of discussions about the role of difference in the arts in Canada that characterized the 1990s marked a fruition of the public sphere in Canada, even as government cutbacks began to erode the foundation of this same sphere.

When Brand writes about the possibilities of and necessary conditions for public life, she usually imagines her public in terms other than those of the nation. Her imagined publics are usually defined either by identifications that cut across national borders (for example, the publics comprised by black nationalist, Caribbean, and Communist intellectuals that she cites in an interview with Pauline Butling), or by the space of the city (for example in *Thirsty* [2002] or *What We all Long For* [2005]). Her relationship to the Canadian nation

is largely one of contestation. Yet as a writer working in Canada, Brand has been both enabled and limited by material networks of cultural production that have been designed to cultivate a Canadian national culture. These networks, and the imagined nation that they are intended to serve, are strongly marked by the values of disinterest, European high art, and cultural defence, which I have labeled, collectively, as the Massey Commission model. It is this model that Brand encounters, and critiques, in her 1994 essay “Whose Gaze, and Who Speaks for Whom.”

As argued in my previous chapter, there has been a strong left-wing tradition of imagining the Canadian public and the stakes of its cultural production. Although this tradition is not its focus, one of the things that Brand’s essay so incisively reveals is the extent to which left-wing visions of cultural production and public life had been abandoned by the 1990s, to be supplanted by a liberal investment in the Massey Commission model and its fruits.

In “Whose Gaze, and Who Speaks for Whom,” Brand addresses the debate about cultural appropriation that was then prominent in public discussions of literature in Canada. The topic of cultural appropriation, and specifically appropriation of literary voice, became a key concern in feminist and other left communities in the 1980s. The controversy gained traction following the publication of Anne Cameron’s *Daughters of Copper Woman* in 1981, a book written by a white woman that told the oral stories of a group of native women from Vancouver Island. Following a (rejected) recommendation on the topic that

was made by the Advisory Committee to the Canada Council for Racial Equality in the Arts, debate over “appropriation of voice” gained national attention. Much of the popular participation in this debate occurred in response to an article by Stephen Godfrey that appeared in *The Globe and Mail*. Brand’s essay appears to be a response to Godfrey’s essay and the media spectacle that it prompted.

Godfrey’s article implies that, in expressing concern with the appropriation of voices belonging to marginalized communities and identities, the Canada Council moves dangerously towards censorship. It culminates in a quotation of Neil Bissoondath, whose anti-racist credibility is presumably established by Godfrey’s description of him as “Trinidadian born”: “Fiction is an exploration of the other, and the only thing that matters is whether you do it badly or well, not whether you collaborate or ask for any kind of permission” (C5). Representing the Canada Council, and presumably the “other side” of the debate, Joyce Zemans, the then director of the council, also frames the issue as one of artistic merit, suggesting that the council is not engaged in censorship but is rather concerned with the “quality” of writing. If a writer is unfamiliar with the group she or he chooses to represent, consultation with the communities in question can help to ensure the quality and authenticity of his or her writing. Despite the fact that his article focuses on the Canada Council, which is a funding body that determines many of the material conditions of cultural production in Canada, Godfrey at no point represents the materialist critiques that were being made by critics of cultural appropriation. The terms

of the debate, as Godfrey represents them, are implicitly liberal: the pertinent questions are about the artistic imagination, censorship, and quality.

In response to this framing, Brand's essay intervenes on a number of points. It provides specifically materialist and historical critiques of the relationships between representation and power. It refuses the language of "rights" and instead asks about the political stakes of representation. It suggests that artists who question appropriation function as critics who attend to the context of cultural production rather than as censors who are intent on curtailing freedom. It highlights reception, rather than treating cultural production as a freestanding activity. These are all highly relevant insights into the political forces that were at work in the controversy over "appropriation of voice." What is most interesting to me, however, are the ways in which Brand addresses the subjects of interest, consensus, and quality in this essay.

In her attention to these subjects, Brand usefully challenges the liberal notion of the public sphere that subtends both Godfrey's article and the Massey Commission model. She suggests instead that we become more open about the clash of interests and identities that is inherent to a functioning public sphere. Responding to Neil Bissoondath's assertion that he has the right to write in the voice of a woman or a black person if he desires, Brand writes: "Well, of course he has a 'right'—and right may not be the correct word here at all—that is, he can" (163). She then argues that:

Cultural appropriation is not an accusation, it is a critical category. It looks at the location of the text, and the author in the world at specific historical moments. . . It challenges the author's anonymity; it questions the author's 'interests' in the text. (163)

Her use of the word "interest" undermines discourses that posit the artist's imagination as disinterested. She reminds the reader that all texts have interests, and implicitly asks how certain texts, categories of people, and political positions come to be marked as interested while others may claim immunity from power relations.

Similarly, Brand's treatment of the subject of racial difference challenges assumptions about the consensual nature of the public sphere. She reflects on her experience serving on a jury for the Governor General's Award for poetry, and specifically the pressure towards consensus that she experienced in that context. Responding to this pressure, Brand calls her co-jurors' Habermasian optimism about consensus "precious." "I insist that we have no basis for consensus, that we acknowledge our differences—race, gender, class, age, sexualities—and proceed, that we do not need sameness for decision-making" (167). She suggests that voting, and the registering of dissent, is less coercive and more democratic than a consensual model, which occludes difference and power relations.

Finally, she challenges the conception of quality as a depoliticized and universal term. Brand satirizes the attitude of her jury-mates, which leaves her with a "full-body headache," in the following language:

(N)o one wants to tell any one what to write and we are only interested in the quality of the work and quality is some kind of essence, impossible to pin down like the imagination, but identifiable, has nothing to do with what is said, but what is said should not be shrill. (167-168)

In this essay, Brand critiques consensus, quality, and the masquerade of artistic disinterest, understanding them as linked values. These are not posed as abstract critiques, but are linked to the immediate material context of funding for the arts. In taking this position, Brand places herself firmly in the “interested” tradition of the public intellectual. She performs her task as a public intellectual in the sense that is now dominant: she uses her status as a writer to intervene in a political debate. This intervention takes place in accessible prose in a book of essays. Brand’s choice of book form as opposed to a more popular (at the time) forum such as a national newspaper perhaps speaks to exclusions of voices such as Brand’s from national discussions. The treatment of the issue by Godfrey and the subsequent ridicule and misrepresentation of artists who were concerned about cultural appropriation would support the suggestion that she has been marginalized. It suggests not only a potential material exclusion of her voice from publications such as *The Globe and Mail* but the awareness that her speech could not be heard by a broader Canadian public in that moment. Her public, as she imagines it, is composed of the people who are positioned to hear her speech. In constructing her imagined public she allows for the possibility of solidarity and coalition, upon which a broader public can be built. However, she insists on thinking about the

possibility of a broader public through the lens of power differentials, resisting a flattened and universalizing understanding of “the public.” This can be read as a refusal of Habermasian conceptions of the public as a liberal, rational, and universal body.

This strategy of publication is echoed by the content of her article. She suggests the substitution of the term “cultural imperialism” for “cultural appropriation.” The significance of this distinction is that it redirects what is taking shape as a conversation about rights and censorship into a conversation that is concerned with the material foundations and implications of the debate. The material context that Brand supplies is highly relevant, both for understanding the context of the controversy itself, and for the connections that Brand makes between literary voice, funding systems, and multiculturalism. Brand points out that the lending of legitimacy to white people when they borrow the voices of people of colour occurs not as an abstraction to be debated in principle, but within a context that excludes the actual voices of people of colour. She describes the mechanisms of this exclusion as pervasive and institutional:

Assumptions of white racial superiority inform the designation of formal culture in this country and the assigning of public funds. Culture is organized around ‘whiteness’ through various ‘para-statal’ bodies, including the CBC, the NFB, the Canada Council, provincial and metropolitan arts councils, and through private media and cultural and educational institutions. (158-159)

Brand labels the universalism that would view the artist as a representative of some higher anti-identitarian humanity a fiction, founded on the denial of material reality, power relations, and difference. She shows that a broader public does not in actuality exist in Canada; the institutions through which we are supposed to have built a public sphere are saturated with specific, not universal, values. She goes on to suggest what a first step for building a broader public might be: the registering of difference. Brand does not insist that there is no possibility of common ground—she sees the potential for the transformation of discourse and the recognition of a cultural world in common. But the ground for such a common world is dialogue between different subject positions, based on a genuine appreciation of power relations, as opposed to tokenism, “inclusion,” and consensus.

On the basis of Brand’s challenges to rational, liberal, and consensual models of art and its place in the public sphere, one might quite fruitfully and without friction read her as operating within the interest-based tradition of the public intellectual. Her concern with power relations and her political advocacy for specific identity-based groups support this reading of her function as a public intellectual. Nonetheless, Brand’s participation in the institutional structures that came out of the Massey Commission complicates the point, as does some of the content of her argument. I see Brand as being equally concerned with the larger quality of public life. Her interventions are less concerned with the gaining of economic power for specific groups than they are with a deeply political critique of the assumptions that pervade public culture in Canada. Put in Arendt’s terms, Brand is

concerned not with the social dimension of human interaction, but with its political dimension. A close reading of the essay's final remarks reveals this element of Brand's thinking:

I only draw attention here to the dominant discourse on culture in Canada. Its response to criticism from people of colour, women, lesbians and gays and progressives has been to try to assimilate a few voices into the discourse without overturning it fundamentally. Yet more vibrant possibilities exist in the multitude of voices now emerging in this country. These voices see the imagination as transformative, as leading out of the pessimism of colonial discourse, as making new narratives. . . [ellipsis hers]. (168)

Brand's language here is not that of the expansion of rights, but rather that of the possibilities for transformation that come with the engagement of difference. Her refusal of closure, indicated by the use of an ellipsis to end the essay, echoes the quality of openness to the future that she elsewhere refers to by the term "grace." Brand's emphasis on making institutions such as the Canada Council *more* public in nature, through the inclusion of difference and the difficult encounters that difference can occasion, echoes Arendt's conception of the public sphere. This position conceives of the public as a space of appearance for subjectivities marked by difference. Its universality is ensured by the cultivation of dissensus rather than consensus.

Critical as she may be of the Canadian nation-state, in the 1990s Brand participated in its apparatus and made critical recommendations for its improvement. Two potential ways of construing this tension are as hypocrisy, or as a liberal interest in expanding the inclusivity of the state, neither of which strikes me as a convincing explanation. A third way of looking at Brand's engagement with the Canadian nation-state is that she treats it much like she treats poetry, as a mechanism for the production of public life. Her fundamental concern is not with the nation, but rather with the potentials of the public that it creates. Brand's use of state structures to produce an expansive vision of public life suggests that the mechanisms of nation produce a public, not the other way around. This is a very Canadian assumption; it is this understanding of nation that informs much of the discourse of *At the Mermaid Inn*, as well as that of the Massey Commission. Canada has often been understood as a space where a public can only be produced by state institutions. However, the type of public that Brand seeks to produce differs significantly from that articulated in the foundation of the institutions that she utilizes. She doesn't only use these institutions, she tries to transform them to produce the particular public that she believes in and requires. This public, as imagined in both *No Language is Neutral* and "Whose Gaze and Who Speaks for Whom," is a necessary condition for optimism and hope. In this light, the despair that infuses Brand's recent books of poetry, such as *Inventory*, can be linked to the erosion of these same institutions and the publics that they helped to produce.

An Inventory of These Small Years

I now wish to turn to Brand's more recent work, focusing in depth on her 2006 book of poetry, *Inventory*. For a book of poetry, *Inventory* has had an enthusiastic reception, possibly because it successfully captured the tone of overwhelmed despair that many readers felt in the political and military aftermath of September 11, 2001. In 2011 it gained George Murray's nomination for the CBC's Canada Reads Poetry, an online counterpart to the more popular Canada Reads radio initiative. *Inventory* was also short-listed for the Governor General's award for Poetry, the Pat Lowther Memorial Award for Poetry, and the Trillium Book Award. Although well received, it by no means stands out among Brand's late career books in this respect. Brand has become a highly awarded poet in Canada. Having thought about *No Language is Neutral* in the context of her interventions into the politics of Canadian granting systems in the 1990s, I want to place the success of *Inventory*, as well as its perspective on public engagement, in the context of what I see as a shift towards a prize-based from a grant-based model of funding for the arts in Canada. This shift reflects the larger economic shift away from nation-based economies towards globalization. Prizes bridge national and international recognition. As Gillian Roberts points out, they also represent a form of recognition in which economic and cultural capital intersect (17). If Brand's perspective on the Canada Council in the 1990s reflected a critical use of the nation as a vehicle for building a public, her perspective on the public in her later work responds to the forces of globalization.

The Privation of the Literary Prize

To situate Dionne Brand's more recent work within its material context, I will be looking at shifts in Canadian cultural policy from the 1990s on that have produced an erosion of the Massey model of arts funding in Canada, and its partial replacement by a corporate and private donor driven culture of literary prizes. In addition to being funded by privately held capital, these prizes have often had the express purpose of positioning Canadian talent on a global scale. This evolution has reflected the political realities of globalization, in particular its emphases on the international movement of private capital, and the role of the nation as facilitative of the circulation of that capital. The longstanding Canadian institutional commitment to fostering a sense of national identity through the arts is becoming an increasingly partisan proposal; as a defining Canadian value, the arts yield decreasing discursive and institutional power. The symbolic and material purviews of the nation have been reduced in most Western democracies. In Canada, this evolution has coincided with the waning of Red Toryism and a redistribution of regional power from East to West, to produce an ideological transformation of the right. The changing nature of conservative politics in Canada has resulted in an evacuation of the concept of Canadian cultural defence, a concern that has in previous generations been expressed across the political spectrum. Conservative forces display decreasing interest in the protection of Canadian culture from globalization, instead embracing a free-market model for the arts. Public arts funding is, when not being gutted, shifting from being a source of support for the production of public culture to being a resource for supporting institutions on the basis of their abilities to act as sources of economic growth.

Barbara Godard has documented the cuts in public funding for the arts that occurred throughout Canada in the 1990s and their attendant rhetorical strategies (“Writing,” “Resignifying”), showing that the artist has been reconfigured as a “heroic individual transcending the polity” (“Resignifying” 86), with which she contrasts a more collective vision that she sees as more historically rooted in Canada. In “Notes from the Cultural Field,” she dates this reconfiguration not from the signing of the Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement in 1988 as one might expect, but from the 1950s:

In the transformation I am concerned with, occurring between the 1950s and the 1990s, literature works no longer in the service of the nation’s identity within a Cold War competition between communism and capitalism, but to further its economic security in an era of global capitalism. “Culture,” which was first disembedded from pre-capitalist traditional life-ways and positioned as a countervailing force to industry within a social whole, is now as an autonomous and self-regulating field of social reproduction and domain of value positioned asymmetrically as a counter force to democracy within an all-encompassing “economy” to whose ends it is subordinate. (237)

Although Godard clearly regrets the withdrawal of the Canadian state from the task of fostering a national culture, she sees no great ideological break between the actors structuring the cultural field in Canada in the 1990s and those of the 1950s. Rather than seeing a clear historical trajectory to the terms “culture” and “nation” as they apply to

Canada, she instead imagines “dynamic interactions of disparate signifying systems and contingency’s contextual mediations” (270). What I take from this is that the common Canadian assumption that one of the roles of government is to support the representation of a pre-existing collective identity is a fiction that serves to disguise the ideological conflicts that have always been present in the Canadian cultural field. This fiction is useful to the extent that it provides a nationalist rallying point for the preservation of Canadian cultural institutions. It is, however, dangerous to the extent that it assumes a consensual notion of Canadian culture, and erases the very histories of struggle that produced some of the institutions in question. In this context, the Canadian nation takes its meaning as a field of production.

The fragility and historical contingency of the very idea of a Canadian polity is attested to by the relative historical proximity of the Massey Commission. It is also reflected thematically in Canadian literature: for example, in *Post-National Arguments*, Frank Davey reads post-1967 Canadian novels and finds that, contrary to rhetoric mobilized in resistance to the Canada/U.S. Free Trade Agreement that figures Canada as a “caring society,” the novels present a negation of, and despair about, polity (264-265). For Davey, the nation is a skipped term in the fictions he studies, which move from the individual to the trans-national. This trend reflects the emergence of a post-national state “invisible to its own citizens, indistinguishable from its fellows, maintained by invisible political forces, and significant mainly through its position within [a] grid of world-class post-card cities” (266).

Following Godard's understanding of the nation as a field of production, I believe that the idea that Canada is a paradigmatic post-national state reflects a particularity of Canadian history. The conflation of polity with nation in Davey's argument is, I believe, to a great extent true for Canada, although not true globally. The state in Canada has been called upon to play a specific role in building the public. While the state in other countries has been called on to secure, maintain, or strengthen a sense of public life, it is not usual in all national contexts to believe that a substantive role of the state is the *creation* of a public. The more dominant historical relationship between the polity and public life has been the reverse. Arendt for example understands the public as pre-existing the polis. Public life is constituted through the capacity of people to act and speak together; the polis follows and secures this action (198).

As I have shown, Canadian public support for the arts emerged from longstanding cultural discourses that positioned the state as having a key role to play in the fostering of a national culture. These discourses can be seen to be operating (at least) as far back as the 1890s in the newspaper column "At the Mermaid Inn." In the 1930s and 1940s, cultural institutions were established to ensure an ongoing commitment to this fostering of a public, which was increasingly seen as a form of self-defence against American cultural power. Because of a historical alignment with British high culture and an attendant disdain for American commercialism, Canadian conservatives were for a time invested in this project of cultural defence. The realignment of the Canadian right in the

1980s and 1990s, from national culture to the global movement of capital, resulted in a redescription of arts funding as a niche, left-wing, and elite concern, rather than a Canadian one. This discursive realignment has been accompanied by extensive cuts to arts funding at all levels of government.

At the same time, Canada's global image has been carried in part by its literary celebrities; Canadian representation in international prizes such as The Booker Prize, and the general international visibility of Canadian authors, has increased (an increase that Roberts identifies as taking place in the period since 1990, placing it roughly contemporaneous to the turn to a neo-liberal conception of cultural production in Canada). As programs and policies designed to produce a national culture came to fruition, a handful of marketable celebrities emerged to represent Canada to the world. Within Canada, alongside a decline in public funding, a number of privately funded prizes have emerged, designed to award (particular visions of) individual excellence, rather than to foster public culture. The judgment of excellence is left in the hands of a few, and is evaluated in opaque processes. As Jennifer Scott and Myka Tucker-Abramson argue, these prizes are symptoms of neo-liberalism and economic globalization (7).

The movement from a grant-based to a prize-based model of funding for the arts in Canada has been a backdrop to Brand's increasing success and prestige over the last two decades. From the late 1990s on, her cultural capital has grown rapidly, resulting in numerous financial awards from diverse parties including the League of Canadian Poets,

the Canada Council funded Governor General's Literary Awards, and, recently, the privately funded Griffin Trust for Excellence in Poetry. Further honours have included her 2006 election as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and her 2009-12 tenure as Poet Laureate of Toronto. Brand's appeal is multifactorial; the ideological content of her recognition by each of these institutions is different, while common factors in her rising value are her skill and erudition as both a creative writer and an intellectual.

Two recent forms of recognition, her receipt of the Griffin Poetry Prize in 2011, and her Laureateship, do illuminate that elements of Brand's appeal are her understanding of her citizenship, and her relationship to public life. These honours reflect common critical receptions of Brand as invested in the public life of cities, and as interested in a global dimension of citizenship. She may be described in Davey's terms as post-national, in that throughout her work the nation appears as a site of ambivalence (Georgis, Weins) more often than as a site of identification. However, in contrast to Davey's reading of post-1967 novels, Brand's post-nationalism is not a sign of withdrawal from the polis, or of the isolation of the individual. This polis, rather, is thought about in terms that reside on either side of the nation-state: the city and the world. One can see why Brand would be an attractive choice for Toronto's Poet Laureate: her writing is consistently concerned with Toronto as a location, and her ongoing linking of art and public engagement lends itself to a celebration of the value of the arts as a liberal democratic force. One can also see the appeal of Brand's civic engagement, alongside her formal proficiency, erudition, and cosmopolitanism, to the jury of the Griffin Poetry Prize. These elements of Brand's

poetry and persona fit well with the prize's mission of valuing poetry's contribution to cultural life, and of linking Canadian and international poets and judges, with the implied purpose of placing Canadian poetry in a global conversation.

Nevertheless, Brand's work makes it clear that her understanding of the city is not fully aligned with the humanist discourse of the Laureateship, even as she inhabits that discourse within her role. Similarly, Brand's global imaginary is clearly at odds with the material foundation of the Griffin Poetry Prize, whose founder draws his wealth in part from military contracts and the automotive industry. The privatizing nature of the literary prize is augmented by its lack of institutional transparency. As with the Canada Council, Brand has both been a recipient of the Griffin and served on its jury. Unlike her very public reflections on the processes involved in awarding grants, however, her experiences on the jury for the Griffin have not, yet, inspired her to produce any public critical commentary. Although I can think of multiple explanations for this difference in Brand's approach, the fact that private prizes do not open themselves to the same type of public scrutiny as do government grants is surely a factor in the lack of general cultural critique that has accompanied prizes such as the Griffin.

I draw attention to these tensions in Brand's public engagements in order to think about the current material context in which she is able to build a reading public. This context offers both possibilities and limitations. As in my reading of Pauline Johnson's and Dorothy Livesay's careers, it is my understanding that Brand has appropriated the

existing form of the public sphere in her historical context in order to articulate her own vision of public life, and to enable herself to act as a public intellectual. The migration of money for poets from grants to prizes is one that both creates and mirrors changes in the public sphere. These changes, as well as Brand's response to them, are visible in Brand's recent writing, particularly in her 2006 book *Inventory*.

An Inventory of Despair: Mourning the Loss of a Public

In reading *Inventory*, I take my point of departure from Diana Brydon's argument in "Dionne Brand's Global Intimacies: Practicing Affective Citizenship," which has strongly influenced my own reading of Brand. She understands that Brand's view of poetry "condenses the ethical and the affective to compel rethinking modes of social life, political engagement, and poetry itself as a public sphere," resulting in what she calls a "practice of affective citizenship" (991). This citizenship is not nation-based, nor does it engage in "Habermasian notions of the public sphere" (994). Further, Brydon identifies a tension in *Inventory* between the narrative content, which conveys the seemingly irresistible power of globalization, and the "manner of telling," which "enacts the belief that other worlds are possible" (994).

In my view, this tension continues the dialogue between despair and grace that runs through *No Language is Neutral*, and, a longer study might show, much of Brand's writing career. A close reading of Brand's "manner of telling" does, I believe, clarify the stakes of this tension and its relationship to Brand's understanding of the public. Like

Brydon, I believe that Brand at times imagines poetry itself as a public sphere; however, because, as Brand might put it, poetry is “insufficient,” the attempt to treat poetry as a public sphere unto itself is shadowed by despair. Poetry in *Inventory* appears as form of mourning for the public that Brand lacks, and as a preserving technology that might act to produce the public that Brand requires. Brand’s poetry, her manner of telling, serves as a model for the public, but it cannot fruitfully substitute for it.

Brand communicates both hope and despair in *Inventory*, communications that occur both thematically and formally. *Inventory* employs a number of voices that can be difficult to tease apart from one another. This formal configuration, especially given Brand’s abiding interest in the function of voice (or “who speaks”), calls for a detailed analysis. The poem contains complicated relationships between various pronouns—I, she, they, we, you—relationships that exceed those that I attend to here. Most relevant to my argument is the movement between “I” and “she” in the poem, and what that movement communicates. The speaker represents herself directly in the first person, as an I, in some sections. In others she occludes the “I,” speaking instead of a “she.” The “she” and the “I” are quite close, tempting the reader to collapse these characters into one, the speaker, who is a profoundly despairing witness. Upon closer reading, however, it appears that the “she” serves as a distinct focalizer. The speaker employs free indirect discourse while representing the “she,” further complicating the structure of speech in this poem. When we tease out the “she” from the “I,” we can see two distinct attitudes towards hope, the public, and the future.

The double movement of hope and despair that the poem conveys is captured by the doubled significance of the poem's title. In the first sense, inventory is the act of keeping a count. This count is kept by the third person representation of the speaker, "she": "the wars' last and late night witness" (3). This witness sits at her television counting deaths that others have rendered ordinary and invisible. Although she represents it as an ethical responsibility, this witness, resisting the numbness of refusing to see, has become numb through her compulsive seeing. The technology of television news has immobilized and deadened her, rather than motivating her to act. Acting seems anathema to this dissociated aspect of the speaker.

As readers we are assaulted, as is she, by the impersonal enumeration of atrocities. One hour of her watching is represented in an account that I quote only partially:

—twenty-seven in Hillah, three in fighting in
Amariya, two by roadside bombing, Adhaim,
five by mortars in Afar, in firefight in Samarra

two, two in collision near Khallis, council member
in Kirkuk, one near medical complex, two in
Talafar, five by suicide bomb in Kirkuk, five

by suicide in Shorgat, one in attack on police

chief, Buhurz, five by car bomb in Baquba,
policeman in Mosul, two by car bomb, Madaen. (23)

The mind-numbing, and ultimately alienating repetition inherent in this form of inventory is enacted formally by the monotonous, martial, and hypnotic quality of the predominantly trochaic rhythm. The same interpretation of the act of keeping an inventory is supported by the book's cover design, which features an analog meter, its numbers a blur of accumulation.

The "she" of *Inventory* can be seen as confirming Marlene Goldman's argument that Brand's later works, including *Inventory*, "demonstrate what happens when capitalist modes of possession are no longer powerfully challenged by alternative forms of knowledge" (197). Television appears, in Goldman's terms, as a medium of possession. This function is emphasized by the poem's first section, written from the point of view of the "I," which criticizes the role of "black-and-white american movies" (3) in the psychic colonization of "we poor, we weak, we dying" (5). Taking a body count from television news is not the act of an ethical witness, as long as "the news was advertisement for movies, \ the movies were the real killings" (22); it is represented instead as numbing. This aspect of the speaker is indeed, as Goldman claims, that of a melancholic witness, paralyzed by atrocity and the irresistible forward thrust of history.

There is, however, *something* both active and ethical about the witnessing function of this “she”; it is not to be found in the act of the “late night witness” as one oriented towards the past and loss, but rather in the hope that is, ironically, implied by this inventory. Even as it seems despairing and numbed, it resists a larger cultural numbing, and is oriented towards the future:

If they’re numb over there, and all around her,
She’ll gather the nerve endings
Spilled on the streets, she’ll count them like rice grains
She’ll keep them for when they’re needed. (30)

This is an act of preservation, containing a message that cannot be received in her time and instead awaits a future reader, an act that I referred to earlier as leaving a trace. If the “she” represents a dissociated element of the speaker, this dissociation is not only pathological, it also serves a purpose that implies hope: it keeps things for the future. In this hope, the poem can be seen as a counterpart to the photograph that appears in “Blues Spiritual for Mammy Prater.” In that poem Mammy Prater encapsulates, through the technology of photography, a message for the future, which is then received by the speaker of the poem. In *Inventory* the poem itself is a technology that is oriented towards a redemptive future. This orientation would situate it as an example of the “self-reflexive, counter-discursive engagements with the power of *techne*—film, television, and print—to (re)possess people’s minds and bodies” (188) that Goldman sees in some of Brand’s earlier work. Although the speaker is at times a numbed and melancholic witness, the

poem itself, like the photograph of Mammy Prater, is a technology of hope. When housed in the voice of the speaker's dissociated aspect—the “she”—this hope may seem thin on the ground. It does, however, find more robust expression when the speaker uses the first person: when we hear from “I.”

The argument that there is a strong strain of hope in *Inventory* brushes against most receptions of the poem. Certainly the dominant tone of the poem is, in Brand's own words, one of “overwhelm and despair” (*Perfect* 26). This tone is largely communicated by the speaker's dissociated part, the “she.” Focusing on the sections in which the speaker appears in the first person, however, allows a different effect of the poem to come into focus: that which Brand might characterize as “an act, which will precipitate other acts” (*Perfect* 27). Read with attention to the speaker's first person voice, the poem comes to appear as not merely a frozen repository of the past and passive hope for a future—inventory in its melancholic sense—but also an act of building the public that the speaker requires. This attention recognizes that the poem also carries a second sense of the term inventory—that of inventory as a subjective political act that precedes change

Isolating the poem's use of “I” reveals a different aspect of the speaker, with very different feelings and activities than those contained by the poem's “she.” “I” is

mournful, fearful, and angry, but she resists the despair that “she” is allowed to indulge.²⁶ Perhaps most significantly, unlike the focalizer “she,” “I” engages with, remembers, and seeks out various “you’s.” Where there is dialogue in the poem, it occurs in her voice. She articulates a wish for “another life,” and a “you” that brings it:

if I say in this letter, I’m waiting
to step into another life,
will you come then and find me

without rivers, without hopes, without nails,

²⁶ An exception to this division of the speaker into “I” and “she” occurs in the final section (VII) of *Inventory*, in which the focalizer usually represented as “she” is referred to in the first person. This sequence leaves the reader with the poem’s most despairing voice, and contributes to the tendency to read *Inventory* as a poem of despair. On the other hand, this section consists primarily of reasons for hope and happiness in the face of despair, even as the speaker compulsively undermines them. In my reading, what is most hopeful about this section is the fact that it breaks with the poem’s persistent dissociation between the “she” and “I” focalizers. The section can be read as a dialogue between elements of the speaker, and brings hope and despair into contact with one another, suggesting that the “she” may one day be able to relinquish her job of “revis[ing] this bristling list, \ hourly” (100), and join the “I” in a more complex, and more hopeful, relationship to the traumas of history.

without anything we now know, without

bruises, without bullet-holed walls

will you come without news of confessions

of serial killers and lost brides? (35)

The hopes of this voice are most on display in section IV. This section occupies the formal and, I would argue, the affective core of the poem. Section IV, ii, conveys an interaction between the speaker, traveling in Cairo, and a silversmith who greets her by the name “Cousin.” She introduces this section with the line: “Something else, more happened there” (56). The else and the more form the location of hope in this poem, which is encapsulated in a single moment of contact with the silversmith. As in *No Language is Neutral*, Brand uses the term “grace” to describe an unexpected encounter:

it meets you sometimes

on a hot mountain road or in a cool silver shop,

its startling purposes,

its imperishable beckoning grace,

so unexpected,

so merciful. (60)

However, it is not just the fact of an unexpected hailing that forms hope in this poem: it is the specific type of relation that is suggested by the greeting “cousin” that is significant.

Brand writes: “that word is more than father sister brother \ mother, clasping what is foreign whole” (59). Brand’s “grace” finds a startlingly compact representation in the silversmith’s unexpected greeting of the foreign speaker as a cousin. It is unexpected: it comes from outside the speaker’s own projections. It clasps what is foreign whole: it exists in relation to but does no violence to the foreignness of, the other. In this reading, Brand’s “grace” shares significant features with Jessica Benjamin’s concept of recognition, discussed above in relation to Pauline Johnson’s work. Further, it calls to mind that Arendt’s model of the public sphere takes intersubjective encounter as its constitutive act. It is in the establishment of relationships that the public is born.

A further elaboration of the meaning of grace in this poem is suggested by understanding this section’s relationship to the poem’s title. The title-lending Gramsci quotation that Brand, according to Brydon, kept above her desk while writing *Inventory* was Edward Said’s translation, as it appeared in *Orientalism*. Taking an inventory is, in this poem as in Said’s text, an act that counters the colonizer’s representation of the colonized: specifically an orientalizing construction. The orientalizing gaze in this book operates as a desubjectifying force against which colonized people must struggle. In other sections Brand describes the ways in which colonized people are seduced into complicity in their own colonization through the effects of American film, or numbed into despair through the mediating power of television news. The result of the mediation of relations between colonized subjects through American cinema and television is the inability to imagine relationality between colonized subjects.

It is not only intersubjectivity between colonized subjects that is inaugurated by the appellation “cousin,” but also the potential for a collective identity to arise out of mutual recognition. Section III portrays a “she” enacting a horrified and alienated consumption of images of the Middle East. Although she attempts to extend her sympathy, she cannot imagine a collective identity from this point of view: “we, \ there is no ‘we’” (42). In contrast to the alienation embodied by the “she,” section IV portrays a moment of hope that is the result of a direct encounter between the speaker and an Egyptian man. The unmediated moment of contact is conveyed by a speaker who is an “I”; it leads to the use of the first person plural pronouns “we” and “ours” (60).

The progression to a grammatical representation of collective identity suggests another significance of the term “cousin.” “Clasping what is foreign whole” may be read as constituting the foundation of a public. Although a direct hail in a marketplace does not exactly embody Michael Warner’s definition of public speech, the figuration of clasping foreignness resembles his conception of publics as characterized by “stranger-relationality” (75). For Brand, I believe that the moment of hope implied by the term “cousin” is not about an interpersonal transcendence of the historical moment, but rather about a hope for the creation of a public within which her speech might be received.

In *Inventory*, the despair that dominates the poem and the hope that offers an alternative are related to the possibilities of public life. As in *No Language is Neutral*, subjectivity

and the potentials of intersubjectivity are not private concerns but rather fundamental conditions of the public sphere. Hope is linked to the possibility of public life, and despair to its contraction. This conception of the public holds many features in common with Arendt's vision of a public founded on the open-ended and unpredictable quality of relationships (191). As with Arendt (38), with Brand the private is thought of as privation.

This is why, in my reading, poetry cannot function as a public sphere unto itself for Brand, and why the attempt to turn poetry into its own public is marked by despair. Hope emerges when poetry is conceived of as an act, in dialogue with a larger public: this circulation is what Brand articulates in the title of her installation project: *Poetry is Public is Poetry*. In the absence of that circulation, poetry can serve as a model and a repository, but it cannot substitute for the meaning and hope that can reside only in the public sphere. Similarly, for Arendt poetry forms a model for the polis. For Arendt the polis is a kind of "organized remembrance" that supplements the work of poetry:

It assures the mortal actor that his passing existence and fleeting greatness will never lack the reality that comes from being seen, being heard, and, generally, appearing before an audience of fellow men, who outside the polis could attend only the short duration of the performance and therefore needed Homer and "others of his craft" in order to be presented to those who were not there (198).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have made a case for reading Dionne Brand as a public intellectual, and for understanding her poetry as forming the heart of her public engagement. The question of who comprises Brand's imagined public underlies my analysis of her function as a public intellectual. At various times Brand conceives of her public along the lines of race, culture, shared political interest, activist community, and civic location, to name a few organizing principles that she overtly invokes. At the same time she invokes a national public, even as she critiques both nation as an organizing principle and the particular violences and exclusions of the Canadian nation-state. This invocation has two causes. The first is that the infrastructure of nation forms a powerful material context for Brand's writing career, one that she could not escape even if she wanted to. The second is that Brand treats the institutions of public culture in Canada as resources for the production of publics that exceed the original intents of these institutions. It is the production of a public that can receive her intellectual production that, as with Johnson and Livesay before her, forms the core of Brand's work as a public intellectual.

The arc of Brand's career to date has coincided with radical changes to the cultural public sphere in Canada. In reference to the loss of her political community in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a period that included her witnessing of the violent repression of the Grenadian revolution, Brand reflects: "I don't know how I got through that time; I don't think I have" (*Perfect* 23). She then says that she "simply continued" writing poetry. Brand's poetry reflects both what fails to survive, and what continues nonetheless, when

the public context for writing is lost. The readings I present in this chapter suggest that Brand's survival of the death of her own most relevant context, radical politics, may have led her to see a role for poetry as that which can preserve, model, and convey the qualities of public engagement that had vanished from her world. In its elegiac capacity, Brand's poetry conveys a deep despair. In its capacity to model the open-ended engagement that characterizes public discourse, it communicates an equally profound hope. The politics whose death Brand refers to and the public world that Brand consequently lost are very different from the nationalist cultural public sphere whose waning is the partial subject of this chapter. Brand suggests, however, that poetry has an ongoing role to play in the preservation of public life, and that, despite its marginalization as a form of public speech, it has a distinct role to play in illustrating and cultivating some of the necessary conditions of public engagement. This view of poetry seems to me to be both relevant, and a source of hope, for those of us (I include myself) who mourn the erosion of the Canadian public sphere. It would take a highly motivated reader to construe Brand as an optimist. But in the face of the death of her particular public, she offers her readers a vision of openness to the future that is the very nature of public engagement itself.

Afterword

How have Canadian women poets acted as public intellectuals? What institutional conditions favour the development of intellectual culture in Canada? How have Canadian women poets both created and secured their publics? These have been key questions that have motivated this study. In writing this dissertation I have confirmed my original belief that state initiatives have played an important role in creating public discourse in Canada, which includes publicly informed poetics. At the same time, I have been impressed with the way in which each poet I studied was able to fashion herself as a public intellectual using the materials at hand. On the one hand, public life becomes robust and dependable to the extent that we have arenas in which people can appear as equals in conversation about the cultural and material world that we occupy. On the other hand, the production of public life seems to me to be inevitable, in that it emerges from people and their relations to one another, rather than from institutions.

Each poet that I have investigated was able to engage with a public that was partly of her own making. They leveraged the institutions and communities that they had access to in order to function as public intellectuals. During her career, Pauline Johnson had only marginal access to the high-art public sphere that her white male contemporaries were in the process of establishing. In the face of that exclusion she built a highly successful performance career, using the stage as a platform from which to communicate her political views. Dorothy Livesay seized the potential of CBC radio as a medium of public discourse. In embracing the figure of the housewife, she used dominant assumptions

about the relationship of the public to the private in order to act, against many odds, as a public intellectual. Dionne Brand uses the infrastructure that was developed to support the Canadian nation-state, alongside that which is developing to reward “excellence,” in order to build and address a public that is more aligned with her own hopes, even as she despairs of being able to do so in her lifetime.

Although I am struck by the ways in which these Canadian women poets have been able to function as public intellectuals, they have generally been more successful in creating their own fleeting publics than in addressing a national public sphere. These poets demonstrate the capacities that people have to build publics out of the material conditions at hand; however they also demonstrate the limits of those publics in the absence of institutional support. In making this observation, I return to the question of the public sphere. Each of these poets built a career that expressed a high degree of political interest; their identities as public intellectuals are largely defined by these interests. Yet, each poet’s career suggests a desire to address a larger public than she is able to access. They make the most of the materials at hand, but lack the resources to address the public at large, and to be immediately legible as public intellectuals.

In my view this inability is due to the fact that they lack a truly disinterested public sphere. To my mind this is the true value of the notion of disinterest; it is not an ideal quality of the intellectual, but rather an ideal quality of the public sphere in which she appears. This quality defines Arendt’s idea of the public as a category apart from the

social. Significantly, in Arendt's understanding, the public sphere is not defined by the erasure of difference, but rather by radical plurality. It is not individuals who should aspire to be without interest (which is truly impossible), but rather the sphere itself that acts to bracket interest. Arendt uses the figure of a table to illustrate the fact that a public sphere connects across difference, including different interests:

To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time . . . What makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved . . . but the fact that the world between them has lost its power to gather them together, to relate and to separate them. (52-53)

The various national projects that have sought to establish and maintain a public sphere in Canada have, at their best, been attempts to function as such a table. Although their potential has not yet been fully realized, they could yet facilitate the production and evaluation of culture in ways that are marked by the honest elaboration of difference rather than fantasies of sameness.

Our current moment is marked by two competing factors that influence public poetics in Canada. One is what might be characterized as a cultural conflict between those who remain invested in state support for the arts, and those who see the role of government in primarily economic terms. The ascendancy of the economic view of government is on

the verge of becoming common sense, such that a humanist defence of the arts is hardly thinkable on its own. For example, in a 2008 *Globe and Mail* column, written in response to Prime Minister Stephen Harper's claim that "ordinary people" don't care about the arts, Margaret Atwood included not only a humanist defence of the arts, but an economic one as well ("Ordinary People"). That a figure who is so representative of the "other" side of the culture wars in Canada felt a need to do so is telling. The argument that we should value the arts on economic grounds may well be the contemporary equivalent of the Cold War argument for the arts in Canada as a vehicle of national defence. It remains to be seen whether the economic argument can spur state investment in the arts. In my view economic logic seems too linked to the outcome of privatization to warrant such a hope.

The other factor that influences the ability of poets to act as public intellectuals in contemporary Canada is the internet. In writing this dissertation I reached out to other scholars, sometimes through email, sometimes through social media. I had immediate online access to books, dissertations, and journals. This speed and ease of communication has an impact on the production and circulation of ideas that is constantly mentioned, even as its implications are still under-theorized. Scholars and poets are engaging online, producing not only discourse, but also communities. Of particular note is Sina Queyras's *Lemon Hound* (2005-2015), which over its ten-year life evolved from a personal blog to an online, publicly accessible, literary journal. As such, it fostered critical dialogue, and reached an international audience. Additionally, it served as the motivation for the

formation of a new organization, Canadian Women in the Literary Arts, that seeks to increase the critical reception of women writers in Canada (“About Us”).

This evolution in the capacity to connect the like-minded is exciting. There is legitimate public-building potential in the capacity for dialogue fostered by the internet. The ability of individuals to interact in ways that sidestep traditional cultural gatekeepers results in the production of cultural criticism that could not have existed a short time ago. At the same time, it seems to me that while the internet is useful for building communities based upon common views and interests, it is currently a particularly poor venue for creating the conditions of address that characterize the public sphere. Although *Lemon Hound*, for example, is addressed to strangers, these strangers are likely to be already highly self-selected. Comparing this style of address to Dorothy Livesay’s CBC broadcasts, which were addressed to a broader public, illustrates the pitfalls of imagining the internet as a public sphere. The imagined addressee for Livesay’s radio programming is someone who happens to have the time and inclination to listen to CBC radio at the time that a show is being broadcast. This implies a far broader public than the imagined audiences of most blogs. While the internet facilitates the production and circulation of thought, from the point of view of public life it does so under impoverished conditions.

This dissertation has established that artists and intellectuals have the ability to build their own publics out of the materials at hand under a variety of conditions. However, it also suggests that, at least in the Canadian context, in the absence of institutional support,

these publics are often both small and fleeting. The maintenance of a public sphere requires institutions that amplify and secure the work of intellectuals and artists. This understanding bodes ill for the current moment, in which government is imagined as serving a primarily economic function. Therefore this study concludes on both an optimistic and a pessimistic note about current and future conditions of a poetic public sphere in Canada.

The distinction between the fleeting publics that these poets have built, and a resilient and long-lasting public poetic sphere can be thought about through Arendt's insight, which I cited in my reading of Brand, that Homer provided only a temporary form of "organized remembrance," whereas the polis as a physical space secured the potentials of public life in an ongoing way (198-199). Arendt's distinction is between poiesis and praxis. Poiesis in this context involves the creation of publics; praxis becomes possible when they are institutionally secured. Brand is particularly concerned with the potential of poetry to operate as praxis. As I argue, her poetry's deferral of hope indicates that the current context doesn't allow her poetry to fulfill this potential.

I share the sense, common to the poets that I study, that poetry can operate as a form of political action, and that this does not entail the sacrifice of formal sophistication. Against the prevailing logic of our times, I continue to believe that poetry and poetics are important tools for building a world in common, which is the foundation of public life. The question this dissertation leaves me with is not whether poets can continue to act as

public intellectuals. To me it seems clear that poets in this country have been capable of doing so under varied and adverse conditions. I see the connection between poetry and public life as inevitable. People, in their relations with one another, seem to have an orientation towards producing publics. Poetry as an activity that constitutes imaginative worlds is particularly driven towards this activity. The question that I'm left with is how poets, along with other artists and intellectuals, can best mobilize this tendency in order to once again secure and defend a Canadian public sphere.

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