

“Between here and there”:

Assertion of the Poetic Voice in the Poetry of Rita Bouvier and Marilyn Dumont

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May 2020

I. Introduction

Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, a “new people” known as the Métis began to emerge as a result of the French-Canadian fur trade. The Métis trace their origins to the seventeenth-century contact between the First Nation peoples and French settler fur traders in the Red River Valley area (around present-day Winnipeg), and have since become a distinct ethnic group through the process of endogamy, after “successive generations of dual-heritage children intermarried and created communities” (St. Onge 3). Though not officially recognized by the Canadian government as one of Canada’s three Indigenous groups until 1982, the Métis people have, over the past several centuries, developed their own language, economic activity, and artistic production. The term “Métis,” meaning “mixed-blood,” is derived from the French adjective *métis*, meaning “hybrid” or “mixed-race,” and was used by French colonists in the sixteenth century to refer to people of both European and Indigenous heritage in New France. The term, in its lower-case form, was largely used to describe people of mixed European and Indigenous parentage not only in Canada but in other French colonies as well, including Guadeloupe, Senegal, and Algeria. The spelling of Métis with an uppercase *M*, however, transforms the term into a proper noun and refers exclusively to the Indigenous Canadian group (St. Onge 7).

The original definition and usage of the term *métis*—“mixed-blood” or “hybrid”—reveal the mindset and intentions of those who applied it, namely French and later British settlers. British settlers in particular were invested in classification systems predicated on race and were therefore eager to categorize and classify the Métis people on the basis of their dual genetic heritage. Though today Canada’s First Nations tribes are often as genetically “mixed” as the Métis, the “symbolic power of race” continues to influence people’s perception of Métis as

“half-breed.” In *Contours of a People: Métis Family, Mobility, and History*, Nicole St. Onge points out that, “there is no such thing, in reality, as a half-breed. Blood does not mix, and surely not in equal proportions. ‘Blood’ is not ethnicity, nor is it culture” (St. Onge 29).

The issue of combatting this perception of the Métis people as “half-breed,” as well as of reconciling external with internal perceptions of Métis identity, is an issue that appears throughout Métis scholarship. As St. Onge highlights, the generalized understanding of Métis as “half-breeds” is flawed for a multitude of reasons, most notably because it overlooks the fact that Métis people do not identify as Métis due to their “half-breed” origins, but rather “as a result of their own knowledge of their identities, family histories, and communities” (Kearns 59). Métis identification is therefore not based on ethnic makeup, but is instead the result of a process involving personal history and identifications. Nevertheless, the concept of a dual- or multi-heritage figures strongly and frequently in the writings of Métis scholars and writers.

Métis writer Joanne Arnott explains the uniquely isolating experience of being Métis: “Many of us have participated in a tradition which is uniquely our own: to be accepted by no one, claimed by neither side, spurned by both” (Arnott 67). Arnott, however, refuses to have her identity degraded by the exclusion from both “sides,” asserting, “Who am I, then, if I am not both? Within the Western mindset, we are always asked to choose, to be one or another of an endless array of polar opposites. People with multiple heritages bow to the pressure to choose at the risk of great damage to our beings. We are both Native and European, we take part in some of the experiences of both groups” (Arnott 67). Arnott and other Métis writers oppose the stereotype that is often forced upon them of a “lost Halfbreed,” “suffering from an ‘in-between’ location,” affirming instead their history of borrowing from both sides of their heritage and of forming their own distinct culture and traditions. Emma LaRocque points to the strong

“‘returning home’ motif that runs throughout Metis writing” as an obvious indication of the “unbroken and cohesive home” that Métis people have to return to: “As complex as the discussion of Metis identity is, Metis Nation peoples have a very strong sense of identity as a distinct culture” (LaRocque).

In her essay, “Reflections on Métis Connections in the Life and Writings of Louise Erdrich,” Ute Lischke discusses the difficult and complicated process that Métis peoples face in negotiating their identity, as “they need to negotiate their identity between status and non-status Native groups as defined by the Canadian and US governments as well as by the white colonizers.” Lischke then points out that Métis peoples accomplish this negotiation of identity “through their own stories” (Lischke 39). Lischke therefore identifies “stories” as a site where Métis writers and storytellers can negotiate and explore their understanding of their own identities.

As LaRocque explains in “Contemporary Metis Literature: Resistance, Roots, Innovation,” “It is virtually impossible to treat Metis literature without dealing with the intricacies of identity.” LaRocque defines the concept of “hybrid identity” in Métis literature as follows:

The peripatetic element of contemporary Metis literature is characterised by a constant process of becoming, rootlessness, displacement and restlessness, a reality of multiple belonging, of being caught between cultures and loyalties, wandering a mindscape and landscape that is neither white nor Indian. Finally, however, it reclaims a vision beyond the lost savage, reasserting a Native consciousness and legitimising Native epistemologies in a third space located in communal relations outside the white-Indian dichotomy. (LaRocque)

In this act of reclaiming and creating a third space, most contemporary Métis writers and scholars therefore seek to “deconstruct the West’s stereotype of the itinerant hybrid and re-inscribe or, more properly, re-root the Metis with home(land), community, culture, and agency. [...] Metis aesthetics, then, is a re-humanization of [?] art” (LaRocque).

LaRocque defines contemporary Métis literature as beginning in the early 1970s, in conjunction with the Métis political movement for legal recognition. In response to this rising political movement, “intellectuals, artists, and writers became the voice and vehicle for articulating peoples’ histories, experiences, and aspirations” (LaRocque). In the following passage, LaRocque describes this 1970s wave of Métis literature:

Necessarily contestatory in its beginnings, Metis writing involves a re-collection of scattered parts, both personal and communal, and while in its initial stages it talks back *at* the proverbial imperial centre, it quickly repositions by decentering the “empire,” “coming home,” and foregrounding “healing,” cultural rebuilding, and self-determination. The body of literature that forms Metis literary aesthetics is marked by mixing, transgression, and a reinvention of genres, languages, tropes, and techniques. It is characterized by a style of deconstructing and reconstructing, often mixing documentation with “voice” informed by cultural ethos. Threaded through all of this is a “love of words.” (LaRocque)

This 1970s wave, which most notably included the publication of Maria Campbell’s autobiographical work, *Halfbreed*, then gave way to a 1990s wave, which is largely comprised of poetry interested in varying understandings of identity. LaRocque concludes by observing that, “We write for many reasons, but ultimately we write because, like Marilyn Dumont, we are ‘fascinated with language’—or languages, as befits Metis inheritance” (LaRocque).

This thesis will examine this latest movement in Métis literature—specifically Métis poetry—that LaRocque identifies as reclaiming and reasserting Native consciousness and epistemologies in a third space “located in communal relations outside the white-Indian dichotomy.” To accomplish this, I will first introduce the two poets whose work I will be analyzing, Rita Bouvier and Marilyn Dumont, as well as the concept of multilingual poetry as a political tool. I will then briefly examine the poems of Dumont that take up the topics that I have laid out in my introduction, including the experience of being excluded from both white and Indigenous groups, and language in the Métis community. Following this, I will analyze at length Bouvier’s poem, “national anthem,” to elucidate the work it does to counter the dominant white Canadian culture and assert the communal Métis voice in its stead. After analyzing “national anthem,” I will then offer shorter analyses of three other Bouvier poems, in order to contextualize and therefore better understand the resonance of the themes and techniques that “national anthem” engages with. Subsequently, I will return to Dumont’s writing to examine selected poems that employ poetic techniques and concepts that both resonate with and depart from those used by Bouvier, concentrating on the poems “To a fair country” and “It crosses my mind.” The analyses of these poems will lead to my conclusion, where I will discuss the role of poetic devices in the assertion of the Métis lyric voice.

II. Bouvier, Dumont, & Multilingual Poetry

Métis poets Rita Bouvier and Marilyn Dumont are considered to be two of the most prominent members of the second wave of modern Métis literature that began in the 1990s and continues into today. Bouvier conceptualizes her relationship with poetry as “a search for purpose and for meaning,” as “a way to, as a Métis woman, transcend the material and

imaginative failure of our time.” Through her poetry, Bouvier endeavors to “connect to something larger than [herself]” and explore the “themes of resistance and revolution” (Shaw TV Saskatoon 7:35-8:18). Dumont characterizes Bouvier’s latest collection, *nakamowin’sa for the seasons*, as a book that “quietly persuades the reader to consider ‘a different way of being’” that promotes “sustainability and survival” (Dumont). According to Dumont, “Bouvier understands the struggles and racial oppression of her ancestors who rowed the York boats, guided the missionaries/explorers in their attempts to adapt to a Eurocentric world. [...] The poet in the poems encounters banal racism, disillusionment, institutional oppression, empty nest syndrome, love, lust and loss” (Dumont). Dumont’s description of the “encounter” of the collection’s poetic voice portrays the poems as comprising a journey that the poetic voice is travelling. Through her poetry, Bouvier pays homage to her Métis ancestors, “who survived, despite adversity, by giving vocal expression to an untenable situation” (Dumont). Dumont therefore suggests that the quiet strength of Bouvier’s poetry functions as a tool of survival in the face of adversity.

LaRocque describes Bouvier’s work as “[e]xpressive and politically conscious,” writing that her “poetry clearly reflects her Metis cultural grounding in her use of Michif [and] Cree” (LaRocque). Bouvier’s use of Michif, Cree, and French within predominantly English poems allows several of her poems, including “national anthem,” to be categorized as multi- or translingual poems. In her Ph.D. thesis, “Evolving Multilingualisms in Poetry: Third Culture as a Window on Multilingual Poetic Praxis,” Nadia Niaz takes up the idea of the monolingual status quo, labeling it a “monolingual bias that arose when Western European thinkers adopted the idea that nations should be built around and defined by language” (Niaz). Sarah Dowling makes a similar argument in *Translingual Poetics: Writing Personhood Under Settler Colonialism*, pointing out that “multilingualism precedes the ‘invention of America’” (Dowling 3). Since the

“invention of America,” however, “settler colonial societies [...] have spent the past few centuries working to dismantle this original linguistic diversity as part of their broader project of destroying Indigenous societies in order to replace them with settler states” (3). The imposition of monolingualism, therefore, was and continues to be a colonialist tool intended to suppress the cultures and the people attached to multilingualism. Dowling labels this colonial linguistic tool “settler monolingualism” (3).

According to Niaz, this ideological concept of settler monolingualism resulted in the “popular notion that multilingual individuals – and creative writers in particular – are conflicted and fragmented as a result of their multilingualism” (Niaz). Here, the notion of fragmentation can be tied to the common misperception of Métis identity as fragmented due to the Métis people’s originally dual heritage. Niaz’s comment therefore evokes LaRocque’s rebuke of the perception of the Métis as “halfbreeds” who can “bounce from White to ‘Indian’—they are more than the sum of the two” (LaRocque). Niaz then identifies multilingual, or polyglot, poetry as the space where the defiance of this popular notion can occur, as “polyglot poetry reframes the idea of the fractured multilingual as a multifaceted one, with each identity and language representing not a shattered fragment but a new dimension. Creating polyglot poetry, then, is a political act in that it takes a dominant, sometimes colonizing, language, claims ownership of it, and then infuses it with the music of the Other” (Niaz). This argument allows us to read Bouvier’s use of multiple languages in her poem, “national anthem,” as well as other poems, as a carrying through of LaRocque’s assertion that Métis are more than the sum of their parts, as well as of her description of Métis aesthetics as a “discourse that counters dehumanizing romanticizations of the tragic lost ‘Hybrid’ and at the same time offers cultural signifiers such as language” (LaRocque). Specifically, the insertion of Michif into the writings of contemporary poets such as

Dumont and Bouvier can be found as “marker[s] of cultural belonging, distinction, and resistance” (LaRocque). In “national anthem,” each instance of Bouvier’s native languages signals a signifier of Métis culture, as well as an act of resistance, and rather than splintering Métis identity, adds another “dimension” to the whole.

The term for Michif, the Métis language—which can also be used to refer to Métis people—derives from the Plains pronunciation of the term *Métif*, in itself another derivation of Métis. The term Michif therefore carries the traces of the Métis’ history in its etymology and reveals a fundamental aspect of the language: just as the term arises from a pronunciation, the language itself has no standardized spelling system and words are therefore spelled as they are pronounced in varying regional dialects. This technique not only results in disparate spelling among communities but also speaks to the importance of Michif as an oral language. (Brown, Bakker)

In Peter Bakker’s seminal work on Michif, *A Language of our Own: the Genesis of Michif*, Bakker asserts that Michif most likely became an established language by 1840. He hypothesizes that Michif originated between 1812 and 1821, dates that center around a pair of important historical events for the development of the Métis people, the first being the “genesis of the ethnic identity of the Métis as a ‘new nation’,” and the second being the “beginning of the massive, organized bison hunts” (Bakker 190). Bakker traces Michif speakers back to these bison hunters, who were separated from the more elite Métis groups, who spoke French. As such, Michif was likely considered the language of the “poorer” Métis, which explains the language’s initial dismissal as a “poor French” (190). Nineteenth century Michif speakers themselves were likely fluent in other languages, most commonly French, which they used to communicate with outsiders and for purposes of political representation. These external

communications in other languages, along with “the striking absence of any mention of Michif in written sources,” indicate Michif’s original function as a Métis in-group language, used only in the home and unnoticed by outsiders (190).

The linguistic origins of the Michif language reflect the genetic origins of its Métis speakers, combining both Cree and French, and often borrowing from other languages such as Ojibwe and English. Structurally complex, Michif fuses French nouns, numerals, articles, and adjectives with Cree syntax, verb structures, demonstratives, question words, and personal pronouns. Other aspects of language, such as possessives and prepositions, are derived from both languages (Brown). Bakker argues that Michif differs from two common forms of language mixture—borrowing and code mixing—and is therefore a distinctly unique language, occupying a “third type of language mixture” (Bakker 191).

In her article, “Negotiating Métis culture in Michif: Disrupting Indigenous language shift,” Judy Iseke describes the language shift in Canada from Indigenous languages to English and other colonial languages as not a “natural” process, but rather “a shift towards the decline of Indigenous languages, propelled by colonial schooling designed to ‘civilize’ Indigenous children and turn them into citizens conforming to ‘white’ standards” (Iseke 98). Though residential schools closed in the 1960s, the devastating effects on Indigenous culture and language have continued, partially in the form of the persistence of “English as the language of instruction in schools, as the dominant language of media, and as the requirement of international trade and economic opportunity in Canada” (107). The Métis people, as well as other Indigenous groups, are therefore forced to learn English, which in turn has resulted in the replacement of Michif with English as the dominant language in the Métis community.

Bouvier's poetry can be understood to embody Niaz's definition of polyglot poetry as a political act. "national anthem" and her other poems are written primarily in English, which seems at first glance to reflect the ubiquitous dominance of the English language. However, the content of "national anthem" and her other poems, as well as the incorporation of Bouvier's native languages within them, serve to undermine the authority of English and transform her poetry into a multilingual experience representative of Bouvier's own relationship with language. Iseke explains the conflict of the younger Métis generations, who are not fluent in Michif or other Indigenous languages and are therefore "left to define themselves" in English or French, languages "in which the words can imprison and create a sense of powerlessness, [...] but [they are] unable to speak Indigenous languages well enough to express [deep thoughts and emotions] either" (Iseke 95).

For Dowling, translingual poetry addresses this linguistic conflict and refuses the domination of monolingualism by foregrounding the "historical processes of contact, colonization, migration, and assimilation, locating the evidence and the effects of these violences in language" (Dowling 6). The use of language in Bouvier's "national anthem" and in Dumont's poem "these are wintering words," for example, enacts this foregrounding of "contact" and "colonization" by formally putting the languages of English, French, Cree, and Michif in contact with each other in the lines of the poem. The multilingualism of these poems therefore both performs the colonial contact of languages and opposes the colonialist tool of settler monolingualism.

Translingual poetry is combatting an ideology that is "integral to the foundation of modern nation-states in Europe": "monolingualist ideologies produce singular national languages as powerful measures of who belongs to a given society—and who does not" (Dowling 3). Niaz

argues that, “rather than see their multifaceted identities as a hindrance to national belonging, [...] polyglot poets represent a large number of people around the world – multilinguals all – whose identities exist harmoniously across multiple languages and national affiliations” (Niaz). In “national anthem,” the speaker discusses the perceived notion of the multifaceted nature of Métis identity as a hindrance to national belonging, especially to belonging to a nation that was founded on the Western European ideology that “nations should be built around and defined by [one] language” (Niaz). The speaker demonstrates how the Métis are simultaneously included in and excluded from both the Canadian national anthem and community. In Dumont’s “It Crosses My Mind,” the speaker also addresses the impossibility of this simultaneous national belonging and exclusion. However, the multilingual nature of “national anthem,” as well as the content of the final stanzas, gestures toward a community that the speaker *can* belong to— a community of multilinguals, of people whose identities are not limited to one language or an imposed definition of nationhood. As I will clarify in the discussion below, “national anthem” offers its own definition of “national belonging” and nationhood.

Although Dumont, in contrast with Bouvier, writes almost exclusively in English, both Dumont’s and Bouvier’s poetry take up similar themes of national belonging, “halfbreed” identity, racism, dispossession, and returning home. In Dumont’s first and most renowned collection, *A Really Good Brown Girl*, “she confronts Canadian icons such as John A. Macdonald, as well as ‘squaw’ stereotypes and other gross misrepresentations of Aboriginal peoples. Her poems mix genres and languages and are marked by political edginess, yet never lose sight of human needs and emotions about love, loss, family friends, and the beauty of the land” (LaRocque). Bouvier has praised *A Really Good Brown Girl*, writing that the collection contains a poetic voice that is “as loving, tender and humane as it is powerful, satirical and

political” (Balsler). Though the collection was originally published in 1996, Bouvier argues that “the poems still resonate with a life lived in a context and the fallouts of a colonized, racialized and sexualized world. Even so, the closing lines of the last poem [...] ring with hopefulness” (Balsler).

Through their poetry, both poets seek to find and establish a third space wherein they can assert their poetic voices. In both Dumont and Bouvier’s work, the speakers of their poems challenge those who have historically or presently contributed to their community’s erasure and oppression. Many of Dumont and Bouvier’s poems therefore function as assertions of self in the face of those who wish to erase them, or to use them for their own purposes without allowing space for their voices. Their poetry negotiates, explores, and celebrates their own definitions of identity in the context of and in response to the claims of people of authority and the government itself. While Bouvier’s poetry challenges the established power through multi-language use, Dumont’s poetry offers its own defiance through its contestatory language and themes. Both poets put forth their poetic voices through shared lyric devices, including their dual roles as the speakers and subjects of their poems, and the use of mid-line extended spaces. Through the analysis of the form and content of their poems, I will explore how the poems of Bouvier and Dumont create and claim a third space in which they can celebrate their chosen identities and heritage rather than be excluded and degraded for them.

III. The Poetic Presence of Dual-Heritage Language and Culture

In Dumont’s poem, “Leather and Naughahyde,” the speaker recalls a conversation between herself and a “treaty guy from up North” (Dumont line 1). The two bond over their shared observance of “how crazy ‘the mooniyaw’ are in the city,” but the man draws a

distinction between them when he indirectly asks, in what the speaker refers to as an “underground/ language,” what the speaker’s status is (lines 2-4). The speaker’s reference to this “underground language” retroactively includes the terms “treaty guy” and “mooniyaw” in this language, as terms that are comprehensible to the participants of this represented conversation, but not to an out-group reader. The speaker, who belongs to the ‘in-group,’ understands the implication of the question, and answers, “I’m Métis like it’s an/ apology” and “he says, ‘mmh,’ like he forgives me, like he’s got a big/ heart and mine’s pumping diluted blood” (lines 5-7). The treaty man then makes it clear to the Métis speaker that “he’s leather and I’m naughahyde” (line 10). In creating this dichotomy between leather and naughahyde, the treaty man suggests that the speaker is an artificial replication of himself, that the speaker is a product of American manufacturing. This binary between leather and naughahyde, however, is complicated by naughahyde being named for its place of origin, Naugatuck, Connecticut, a name derived from an Algonquian word *neguttuck* meaning “lone tree by the fishing place” (“Naughahyde”). The term “naughahyde” therefore carries the traces of both Indigenous language and Western influence and appropriation.

Though the speaker and the treaty man find commonality in their perception of “the mooniyaw,” and thereby both distinguish themselves from the white people in the city, the treaty man in turn distinguishes himself from the speaker as a result of her “diluted blood,” terminology that recalls and opposes St. Onge’s assertion that “blood does not mix.” The treaty man thereby makes clear that the speaker’s “diluted blood,” or mixed heritage that is associated with being Métis, disqualifies her from belonging to either group or community. In doing so, the treaty man, despite their shared understanding of the “underground language,” relegates the speaker to the out-group. The speaker’s formulation of her Métis identity as “an apology” reveals her

familiarity with assuming the position of having to apologize for her identity, for her—in the eyes of the treaty man and likely “the mooniyaw”—inferiority. “Leather and Naughahyde” therefore poetically represents the Métis tradition that Arnott describes of being “claimed by neither side, spurned by both.”

Dumont’s poem “these are wintering words” celebrates a unique aspect of the Métis community that is afforded to them by the ‘dual-heritage’ that is scorned in “Leather and Naughahyde”: Michif. The poem enters into an exploration of the Michif language through the metaphor of making pemmican, describing Michif as “sliced thin, smoke-dried, pounded fine, folded in fat and berries/ pemmican not pidgin or creole” (lines 3-4). The making of pemmican involves the combination of several separate elements to form a distinct, continuous product. This poem’s metaphoric comparison between pemmican and Michif explains Michif as comprised of separate parts coming together to form a new, distinct language. Michif is not made less by its borrowing from different languages, but is instead “pleasure doubled twice the language twice the culture” (line 8). It is “neither Cree, Salteaux, nor French exactly, but something else / not less not half not lacking” (lines 13-14). Here, we see the first instance of a poetic device that will appear not only throughout the rest of this poem, but throughout Dumont and Bouvier’s poetry as well: an extended space inserted within the line of a poem. In this instance, the spaces seem to indicate where the speaker of the poem may take a pause, but as a written text, the spaces can also be read as the poem’s physical creation of more space, or a third space, to allow for the “doubled” size of the pleasure, language, and culture associated with Michif.

In *A Language of our Own*, Bakker explains, “a pidgin is no one’s native language. It may arise when speakers of two or more mutually unintelligible languages are required to

communicate and there is no opportunity, necessity, or desire to learn the language spoken by the others” (Bakker 193). Bakker then refutes the misconception that a creole language is “derived from a pidgin that acquired native speakers,” citing a lack of verifiable evidence as his reasoning (194). Instead, “the vocabulary of a creole language is derived almost exclusively from one language, often that of colonial powers like English, French, Portuguese, Dutch, Arabic, and Spanish” (194). Bakker argues—and therefore supports the speaker’s assertion in “these are wintering words”—that Michif differs from both pidgin and creole languages in its categorization as a “mixed language.” Bakker offers a specific definition of a mixed language as “a language that shows positive genetic similarities, in significant numbers, with two different languages. One can with equal justification claim that such a language belongs to language family A as that it belongs to language family B at the same time” (195). “Genetic” and “language family” create a lexical field that echoes “these are wintering words”’s description of Michif as the “problem family among the nuclear language types one parent/ French the other Cree/Salteaux” (Dumont lines 1-2).

In alternating and combining the descriptions of Michif and pemmican—as evidenced by the lines: “FrenchCreeOjibway different tongues buffalo, a delicacy source/ language right from the cow’s mouth”—the poem’s speaker creates a formal representation of the mixing and folding-in process required to make pemmican (lines 11-12). The speaker of the poem similarly folds French and Michif into the predominantly English poem—“à la façon du pays” and “la lawng” (lines 5-6). The poem slips in and in out of these two languages without acknowledging their difference or providing definitions, suggestive of the speaker’s own multilingual relationship with language. The French phrase, “à la façon du pays,” refers to the fur-trade era expression, marriage *à la façon du pays*, which denoted a “marital

relationship between Native women and European fur traders, based on Native cultural norms and local customs rather than European ones” (Hynes-Ciernia). In “these are wintering words,” the speaker precedes the phrase “à la façon du pays” with another combined metaphor: “traverse rapids: white and dangerous with Ojibway women” (lines 5-6). Given the accompanying context of *à la façon*, the description “white and dangerous,” which superficially describes the “rapids,” can be secondarily interpreted as a description of the “European fur traders,” while the “Ojibway women” represent the “Native women.” The poem’s reference to the expression “à la façon du pays” is therefore a reference to the genetic origins of the Métis people and of Michif.

The Michif phrase, included in the line, “Métis traders, speak la lawng of double genetic/ origin,” is a phonetic representation of how a Michif speaker would pronounce the word “lañg”— Michif for “tongue” or “language” and a derivative of the French *langue* (“Lañg”). The poem’s choice to represent the word phonetically points toward the Michif technique of spelling a word on the basis of its regional dialectic pronunciation. By including French, English, and Michif, within the same line, the speaker represents the language family that the poem’s first line references, and continues the formal act that mimics the making of pemmican of folding in several different elements to create something new that is greater than the sum of its parts— Michif. The representation of several languages characterizes “these are wintering words” as a multilingual poem and presents an expression of language that is more accurate to the experience of someone who operates in and moves fluidly among several languages.

Dumont’s poem, “that tongued belonging,” engages with two of the other languages common to the Métis people, and the complex relationship that exists between them. The speaker, by expressing a certain alienation from both English and Cree, exemplifies the position of conflict that Iseke identifies as that of the members of the younger Métis generation who find

themselves unable to properly express themselves in either English or Indigenous languages. The speaker foregrounds the importance and strength of Cree, but also its exposure to a dominant force, with the poem's opening line: "Cree survives in the words" (Dumont line 1). The speaker initially establishes a connection to Cree, describing the "recognition of being called into/ and belonging to Cree," and distances herself from English, asserting that in the "borrowed sounds of English/ the nerve of Cree remains/ in mouths that have tasted a foreign alphabet too long" (lines 4-8). "Remains," like "survives," is indicative of Cree's battle against English. The highly corporeal description of Cree as a "nerve [...] in mouths" juxtaposed with the description of English as a taste, creates an image of Cree as permanent and inherent, while English is, though durable, ultimately transient and nonnative to the speaker. Through these descriptions, the speaker evokes the image of a tongue, both as an organ that may taste the foreign alphabet of English and more generally as the "principal organ of speech; language" ("Tongue"). The image of the tongue is tied to the poem's title, a title which in turn suggests that the tongue, and therefore language, functions as a bridge between the speaker and belonging.

However, the speaker then describes an exchange in which Cree speakers ask "if we speak our language" and when "we respond in the negative/ we are regarded/ as if we are illegitimate children/ in a single language hostel" (lines 14-18). Though English is a "foreign alphabet" to the speaker, her inability to speak Cree renders her, and the "we" she embodies, simultaneously alien to the Cree speaking community. The speaker is therefore "foreign" to both languages and without a linguistic home. This dual exclusion from two communities recalls the position of the speaker in "Leather and Naughahyde" as belonging to neither group. The fraught relationship between the speaker and Cree—a language this is both native and foreign to her—is formally demonstrated by the use of English as the only language in the poem and the absence of

Cree. The monolingual nature of this poem therefore confirms the speaker's occupancy of a "single language hostel." The speaker expresses the irony of her predicament, explaining that, "we are a generation where/ these same sounds/ once forbidden/ are now pronounced/ and the echoes of a language/ that would have spared us grief/ (not to mention, alienation)/ had our parents communicated to us" (lines 21-28). The speaker of this poem is therefore speaking as a representative of the younger generation that Iseke describes as feeling imprisoned by English but unable to express themselves in Indigenous languages.

The speaker concludes by symbolizing Cree as "moss on our backs" that "will continue to grow," lamenting the fact that "no matter which way/ we turn to the light/ it will always exist/ on our cold side" (lines 29-34). Through this metaphor, the speaker transforms her body into a tree, with her back representing a tree's north side—where moss tends to grow in search of the shady, "cold side." This metaphor thereby connects Cree to nature and landscape, suggesting that Cree is native to both the speaker and the land. Nevertheless, the speaker finds herself unable to access this language that is simultaneously native to her and yet grows just out of reach on her back. The speaker then continues this image of Cree as something that is both innate and inaccessible by describing Cree as something that "ache[s]/ like a phantom limb" (lines 35-36). "Always exist" and "limb," like "nerve," create the image of a body part that is intrinsic to the speaker, but the idea of a "phantom limb" transforms this image of a relationship with Cree into something that is painful and missing, impossible to access. By concluding the poem with this final image of the phantom limb, the speaker privileges this idea of the space that the phantom limb occupies between presence and absence. For the speaker, her relationship with Cree is akin to continuing to feel a limb that is no longer a part of her. This association between Cree and a phantom limb functions as another highly corporeal metaphor by which the speaker describes

Cree. The phantom limb image suggests that Cree is a language that the speaker—or rather, her ancestors—once possessed, that has since been lost to a violent procedure—in this instance, colonialism. If Cree is a phantom limb, then the speaker is caused continual pain by her inability to forget the absence of that which she once had—or rather, could have had, had she not been deprived of “legitimate” membership in her community.

The multilingual nature of poems such as Bouvier’s “national anthem,” in contrast to the monolingualism of “that tongued belonging,” can be understood as a representation of a multilingual speaker who draws on their native languages to convey an idea that English fails to express. Alternately, the multilingualism can be interpreted as exemplifying this younger Métis generation represented in “that tongued belonging” who does not feel quite at home in any language and must therefore alternate among several languages. Though English is the dominant language of “national anthem”—as it has become the dominant language in the Métis community—the presence of Michif and Cree in the poem signals their refusal to be forgotten and their resistance against this domination, and by extension, the lingering destructive effects of colonialism. As characterized in “that tongued belonging,” the “nerve” of Michif and Cree endures.

IV. *“Who are you?”: Assertion of Self in Bouvier’s “national anthem”*

In this section, I will analyze “national anthem” stanza by stanza, addressing the history of the Canadian national anthem, post-structural and post-colonial theory, and the etymology of the terms “native” and “nation,” in conjunction with the poem’s engagement with these topics. I will examine how the poem’s speaker repeatedly refuses assumptions of her identity and counters these assumptions through the tools of multilingualism, a grounding in home and

family, and the assertion of the poetic 'I.' "national anthem" therefore figures into my larger discussion of the use of poetic tools in Métis poetry to offset Canada's dominant colonizing force with an affirmation and insistence of self.

"national anthem" appears as the sixth poem in the "*takwākan* — Autumn" section of Bouvier's 2015 collection, *nakamowin'sa for the season*. This is the third and shortest section, but its brief length is balanced by the rich content of this poem, which makes evident the highly researched and referential nature of Bouvier's poetry. The first signal of the poem's referential nature is paratextual, with the subtitle informing us that Bouvier wrote this poem "upon reading *A Fair Country* by John Raulston Saul" (Bouvier 51). Though Bouvier's poems often include a parenthetical subtitle, it is notable that this subtitle is the only one that is not a dedication or an in memoriam. While the wording of this subtitle is by itself fairly neutral, it is this very neutrality, in stark contrast with the laudatory nature of the other subtitles, that hints at the tone of the forthcoming poem and the author's sentiments toward Saul's *A Fair Country*. The subtitle's break from the pattern of previous dedications serves to catch the attention of and alert the reader to a potential change in tone or message from the preceding poems. Furthermore, the phrasing, "upon reading," functions by setting up "national anthem" as a response to Saul's text, and by opening up a dialogue between the two texts.

In his 2008 book *A Fair Country*, Saul opens with the claim, "We are a métis civilization," and goes on to recount the history of Canadian civilization by analyzing its connections to and emulations of indigenous cultures (Saul 3). Though the book was well received by Canada's mainstream literary culture and quickly became a national bestseller, many critics in the Métis community reacted against Saul's text and specifically against his opening, establishing claim. In her essay, "The Myth of Metis Cultural Ambivalence," Brenda

MacDougall critiques Saul's claim as misleading. MacDougall acknowledges that "while some Metis may be seduced by this statement—superficially, at least, it appears to be a positive affirmation of our identity and history," in truth "Saul's declaration really has little to do with us. Saul was not concerned with Metis history, culture, or nationalism but instead used the term to advance the argument that politically Canada is a hybrid of western European and First Nations philosophical traditions" (MacDougall 422). In "*Métis*": *Race, Recognition, and the Struggle for Indigenous Peoplehood*, Chris Andersen continues MacDougall's critique and argues that Saul's declaration works by serving his "larger narrative" of defining "Canada's political history as hybrid" (Andersen 5). Saul's depiction of Canada as a Métis civilization is thus one of many examples of "the Métis being *misrecognized* as a hybrid off-shoot of two races — 'Indian' and 'white' — rather than as an *Indigenous people*" (Andersen 6). For Andersen, Saul's misrecognition of the Métis is indicative of the "relationships that settlers are able to have—to choose—with Indigenous people in colonial countries such as Canada" (6). Furthermore, the detrimental consequence of Saul's claim is the reproduction of "a racialized hierarchy of indigeneity premised on a chain of logic" that infers that, if Métis are "mixed," then Métis are less Indigenous and therefore less worthy than First Nations and Inuit (7). By employing the Métis people as an analogy for the hybridity of Canadian civilization, Saul is using the Métis to advance his purportedly "brilliant and timely argument" (*Globe and Mail*), while failing to understand and acknowledge their history and culture.

The speaker of "national anthem" opens the poem with a couplet that quotes the opening two lines of Canada's national anthem, "O Canada," thus making clear the national anthem to which the title is referring. The speaker's change of "O Canada" to "oh, oh Canada" in the first line suggests that she will be addressing Canada on her own terms, that she will perhaps be

diverting from the message of the original anthem (Bouvier line 1). The ellipsis that ends the opening stanza and the direct quotation of “O Canada,” “*our home and native land...*” serves to draw the attention of the reader to the line and hints at the ironic tone of the speaker. This ironic tone of the second line calls into question the sincerity of the title “national anthem,” thereby supporting the idea that the poem is a critique of the anthem. If an anthem is defined as “a song officially adopted by a nation, [...] typically used as an expression of identity and pride,” then the poem can be interpreted as questioning whose “identity” and whose “pride” the Canadian national anthem is expressing (“Anthem”). The ellipsis in line 2 further suggests that the remainder of the poem will be comprised of the speaker’s continuation of the anthem, a shift that is formally indicated by the end of italics in line 3 and the first appearance of the poetic I. The speaker’s critique of the Canadian national anthem can thus also be read as the speaker’s revision or re-appropriation of the song.

A history of proposed alterations and revisions, both accepted and rejected, has made “O Canada” itself a site of contestation. Though “national anthem” only cites the English lyrics, the anthem exists officially in both English and French, with the same melody but divergent meaning and lyrics. By the mid-nineteenth century, and before “O Canada,” several patriotic songs functioned as “de facto national anthems” in English Canada, including “God Save the King” and “The Maple Leaf Forever,” however, an equivalent national song had long been sought by French Canadians (Kallmann). Although not officially adopted until June 27th, 1980, “Ô Canada” was first composed a hundred years prior in April 1880 by the French-Canadian composer, Calixa Lavallée, and written by Adolphe-Basile Routhier as a contribution to the Saint-Jean-Baptiste celebrations (Kallmann). Canada’s national anthem was thus originally

composed in response to a long held French-Canadian desire to be better represented by their country's national anthem.

“Ô Canada” quickly became accepted as the de-facto anthem in Québec, but it was not performed in English Canada until the turn of the twentieth century. This expansion of the anthem into English Canada prompted translators to produce several English versions of the song, which varied widely in interpretation and popularity, in an attempt to make the song more accessible to Canada's majority English speaking population. It was Robert Stanley Weir's 1908 version that was ultimately recognized as the “official” English version, a translation that departed from its French counterpart in its emphasis on patriotism and its downplaying of military valor (Kallmann). Several amendments were soon made to Weir's version, most notably the 1913 alteration of the original line, “True patriot love thou dost in us command,” to, “True patriot love in all thy sons command” (Kallmann). Though there exists no official explanation for this change to the anthem's third line, some scholars speculate that it was inspired by a reaction against the women's suffrage movement, which had reached particular prominence in 1913. The anthem began to draw criticism for this line change in the 1950s, however the designated 1964 committee ignored this criticism and instead altered the line, “O Canada, glorious and free,” to, “God keep our land, glorious and free,” a change that would later inspire its own controversy for not representing the Canadian government's commitment to secularism (Kallmann). The French version of the anthem has been similarly criticized for its repeated reference to the Christian cross. Since Canada's adoption of “O Canada” as the official national anthem in 1980, there has been a plethora of proposals and petitions put forward to modify the lyrics, most commonly with the intention of making the anthem more inclusive and representative of its citizens. In 1990, for example, “Toronto City Council voted in favour of

recommending to the federal government that the wording ‘our home and native land’ be changed to ‘our home and cherished land’” (Kallmann). Though the intention of this suggested change was “to be more inclusive of non-native-born Canadians” (Kallmann), this line is also emphasized by the speaker in “national anthem” ostensibly for its ironic celebration of a land that is not in fact “native” to the anthem’s writer and the majority of its performers.

The same council also recommended the change of the line, “in all thy sons command,” to, “in all of us command,” in order “to bring it closer to the original ‘thou dost in us command’ and be more gender-inclusive” (Kallmann). Councillor Howard Moscoe argued that the word “sons” suggested “that women can’t feel true patriotism or love for Canada” (Kallmann). Several more legislative changes regarding this line were proposed, including a campaign titled “Restore Our Anthem,” which was led by Margaret Atwood and former Prime Minister Kim Campbell, but all were ultimately rejected until the House of Commons finally voted to change the line in 2018. Even then, the change was highly divisive, as demonstrated by the Conservative Party senators’ boycott of the vote. In response to the vote, Senator Frances Lankin lauded the change for making the anthem “inclusive of all of us. This may be small, it’s about two words, but it’s huge. We can now sing it with pride knowing the law will support us in terms of the language” (Kallmann). Lankin’s words speak to the significance of a seemingly small symbolic change as well as to both the power of two words and the power of the anthem itself. According to Moscoe and Lankin, the words of the national anthem designate who can “feel true patriotism” for Canada and in turn, who is represented and supported by the law.

“national anthem,” published in 2015 amidst the many efforts to alter the anthem, is a poem that can be read in the context of these movements toward a more inclusive national anthem. By beginning the poem with the opening lines of “O Canada,” the speaker is entering

into this decades-old debate surrounding the question of whether or not the anthem should be amendable. In offering her rewritten version of the anthem, the speaker is adding her name to the long list of those who have proposed their own revisions. However, by specifically quoting the line, “our home and native land”—a line which the poem repeats in its final line—the speaker emphasizes the irony of the word “native” and suggests a criticism of the minimal concerted effort to amend this line. Though there have been past attempts to rewrite the line to be more inclusive of non-native-born Canadians, little thought has been given to the effect of the line on Canada’s Native population. Lankin’s claim that the change of “all thy sons” to “all of us” renders the anthem “inclusive of all of us” can then be read as forgetting or ignoring a group that continues to be paradoxically acknowledged and excluded from the anthem. The suggested revision of “O Canada” that the speaker puts forward in “national anthem” therefore distinguishes itself by addressing an exclusion that has been largely ignored in the history of proposed revisions to the anthem.

The term “native,” as it is used in “O Canada,” carries with it a history as complex and contentious as that of the national anthem. Its lowercase use connotes both the word’s literal definition: “belonging naturally to,” as well as its use, in the capitalized form, as a general appellation for Canada’s Indigenous peoples (“Native”). The term “Native,” along with similar terms including Aboriginal, have been long contested as catchall phrases with English origins that force the people whom the terms describe to abandon their own identity and adapt to a new, imposed one. Though the term “Indigenous” has lately gained popularity for its implied connection to land, it remains nevertheless another word that stems from a foreign, colonizing language. In “What’s in a Name? The Politics of Labeling and Native Identity Constructions,” Steffi Retzlaff argues that “emancipation from state-imposed names and labels,” whose negative

connotations shape “both the direction of federal policy and popular prejudices,” functions as a tool by which Indigenous people “rid themselves of outside domination” (Retzlaff 610). Retzlaff affirms, “the rejection of imposed terminology [is] fundamental to the construction and affirmation of political and social identities” (610).

While many Indigenous people continue to contest these appellations in hopes of more appropriate terminology, still others continue to employ them as self-descriptors, in an effort to strip these terms of their negative connotation and instead use them as means of identity expression and empowerment. In reference to the continued use of such terms, Retzlaff explains, “The preferred use nowadays [...] is to capitalize the terms Aboriginal and Native and to use them as modifiers” (615). Retzlaff points to ‘First Nations’ as a term by which Indigenous peoples in Canada can assert autonomy and reinforce the “notion that Aboriginal people were not only distinct nations but also the first on Turtle Island (Canada)” (Retzlaff 620). The collectivism connoted by the plurality of the term ‘First Nations’ represents the united identification with a common cause that has been made necessary by “the shared experience of colonialism, the identity—and culturally—destructive experience of residential schools, or the problems and challenges faced by Aboriginal people [today]” (Retzlaff 620). The use of “nation” in ‘First Nations’ has been questioned as the “concept of the ‘nation’ is a European or Western one describing a Western view of a political, cultural and economic entity” (Retzlaff 621). The use of “this term to describe traditionally clan and family-oriented societies” is therefore a tool “of First Nations people to negotiate their way into the Canadian (political) consciousness” (Retzlaff 621).

Retzlaff acknowledges that the appropriation of an external, European concept “is not a completely satisfactory one,” but is nevertheless “the result of socio-political circumstances which force First Nations to use a foreign system of representation” (Retzlaff 621). By

presenting themselves as a “unified and unifying nation,” the First Nation people form a comparison between themselves and Canada, a comparison that makes clear that the First Nations people are claiming that which Canada already has: “the right to political identity and autonomy as a people, together with the control of some territory” (Retzlaff 621). “Nation” also serves to evoke the term “native,” as both words stem from the same Latin root, *nāscī*, to be born (“Nation,” “Native”). Both terms therefore connote a sense of birthright belonging to a place. Though the use of the term ‘First Nations’ necessarily engages with the European concept of a nation as a political, economic formation, it simultaneously connects the definition of First Nations to the simpler concept of “native”: that of belonging to a place. “O Canada” can therefore be criticized for including—and misusing—a term, “native,” whose complexity and history it does not address. In citing this line from “O Canada,” “national anthem” brings the layered complexity of these ideas of “native” and “nation” into the poem’s staged debate.

Canadian historian Christopher Moore describes “O Canada” as a song that can “send patriotic shivers down your spine” and “affirm our belonging and shared love of our nation” (Chai). For Moore, it is this act of communal performance that certifies and translates to a Canadian’s membership in the national community. This performance is an experience of visceral patriotism, of love for one’s country. Moore expands upon this claim by stating that the Canadian national anthem “makes you proud to be Canadian, [and] gives you a feeling of community and togetherness” (Chai). For Moore, “O Canada,” or perhaps more specifically, the act of signing “O Canada,” has the power to bestow upon its singer membership within Canada’s national community. This act of inclusion into Canada’s community is problematized when one remembers the anthem’s lyric’s exclusion of some of its citizens, namely Native Canadians. The anthem’s gesture of inclusion via performance is rendered null when the anthem itself excludes

Native Canadians by failing to represent them. In “national anthem,” the speaker expands upon this dual action of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion from Canada’s national community through the exploration of the same action as carried out by other figures, beginning with John Ralston Saul.

The speaker commences her revision of “O Canada” by placing her younger self “over the hill through the red willows,” firmly in the “native land” to which the second line of “O Canada” refers (line 6). This line marks the first appearance of the poetic device of the extended space that was introduced in Dumont’s “these wintering words.” As the speaker walks “along the path” and “over the hill” she hears “owl’s song” (lines 3-6). Here, “song” can be interpreted as a counterexample of the type of song that the “national anthem” represents, as well as an evocation of the poetry collection’s title, *nakamowin’sa*, or “wordsongs.” The poem “national anthem” in its entirety can also be thought of as a “wordsong,” as it is one of the collection’s many “wordsongs for the seasons.” The first word of the third stanza, “*ôhô*”—Cree for “owl”—marks the poem’s first use of another language and the poem’s first indication of its status as a multilingual poem. The combined effect of the sound and spelling of “*ôhô*” is both visible in the “oh, oh” and “our home” of the first stanza, and in the question that the owl asks the speaker “over and over again”: “ooh who, ooh who are you?” (lines 8-9). Though the speaker claims that she has “no time to respond to a silly old owl,” in the following line she takes up the owl’s question, or song, and repeats, “ooh who, ooh who, indeed! I sing/ stealing owl’s song tonight” (lines 10-12). The phrase’s repetition, onomatopoeia, near internal rhyme, and concluding exclamation mark contribute to the sense of a represented voice, a sense that is confirmed by “I sing.” The present tense of the active phrase, “I sing,” as well as the temporal marker of “tonight,” markedly shift the poem into the present and gives the speaker power over the motif of

“song.” This jump in time also serves as a potential explanation for why the speaker now has the “time to respond to a silly old owl.” Now that she is no longer a child, and now that she has read Saul’s *A Fair Country*, perhaps the owl’s question has become more pertinent and pressing. The shift of the song motif into the power of the speaker confirms the speaker’s agency as the raconteur of the poetic story and the challenger of the conventional National Anthem.

The speaker’s joyous song is at least seemingly motivated, or “buoyed” by Saul’s “premise *we are all Métis*,” a phrase that references *A Fair Country*’s opening line, “We are a métis civilization” (line 13) (Saul 3). The speaker’s initially positive reaction to the words, “*we are all Métis*” functions as a poetic performance of MacDougall’s hypothesis that “some Métis may be [superficially] seduced by this statement.” In the context of “national anthem,” the seduction of Saul’s words is born from the wide reaching, all-encompassing community suggested by the plurality of “we are all.” The seduction is thus the promise of membership in a community, which for Saul is Canadian civilization, from which the Métis have been historically excluded.

The line’s use of italics is similar to the use of italics in line 2 and makes clear that the poem is representing the voice of someone other than the speaker, in this case Saul. This representation of another voice contributes to the idea that the speaker is in dialogue with Saul, an idea that is reinforced by the immediate reappearance of the speaker’s voice in response to Saul’s premise: “but not so fast John Raulston Saul!” (line 14). The exclamation mark again brings emotion to the speaker’s represented voice, making clear her emphatic disagreement with Saul’s claim, a disagreement that can be interpreted as a continuation of the speaker’s poetic performance of MacDougall’s criticism. In disagreeing with Saul, the speaker is refusing the idea

of an all-encompassing community that ignores the history that has oppressed and divided the Métis and therefore prevented the formation of such a community.

The speaker then once again sings the owl's song, repeating, "ooh who, ooh who are you, I sing" (line 15). Though this line's repetition of "I sing" asserts the presence of the speaker's voice, the following line introduces the representation of a third voice: "say something, something exotic/ oh dark, wild mysterious woman./ answer! answer quickly before you forget" (lines 16-18). Here, the poem's forgoing of italics indicates that this third representation of a voice is not a direct quote and thereby obscures the identity of the lines' speaker. Though these lines occur shortly after the speaker's representation of Saul's voice in line 13, the notable absence of italics suggests that the lines are the voice of a more general, imagined figure. Perhaps this voice is the voice of the settler whom Saul is evoking by, as Andersen argues, reproducing a "racialized hierarchy." In this moment, the voice of the settler is imploring the speaker to answer her own questions—"who are you?"—and to "say something" that will confirm his perception of her as a "dark, wild mysterious woman," and therefore something "exotic." Though these lines are an imagined representation of the words of someone who is not the poem's primary speaker, the diction, and specifically the word "exotic," reveal the speaker's continued tone of irony, as it reveals the imagined settler's hypocritical perception of the speaker as someone "introduced from abroad, not indigenous" ("Exotic"). The third appearance of an exclamation mark, in line 18, is the first to emphasize the emotion of someone who is not the speaker, however it serves the same role of creating the effect of a voice engaged in an impassioned debate. At this juncture in the 'debate,' the imagined settler, or re-settler, is, while demanding that the speaker answer the question, paradoxically asserting and imposing his own understanding of her identity.

In response to the “settler”’s demand that she “answer!” the question, “who are you,” the speaker replies in the following stanza: “we are the bastard children left behind/ by white men and *mixed blood women,/ uncommonly pretty and provocative./* so the his-story books say” (lines 19-22). The stanza’s opening word, “we,” signals the speaker’s shift from the first person singular to the first-person plural, suggesting another representation—in this instance, the voice of the speaker’s chosen community, the people of the Métis Nation. The plurality created by the “we” in line 19 recalls not only the promise of community in line 13’s “*we are all Métis,*” but also the poem’s first use of the first person plural in line two’s citation of “O Canada”: “*our home and native land.*” That the “we” in line 19 has been “left behind,” however, suggests that this “we,” and its implied community, have been excluded from the “we” and the community represented in both the Canadian national anthem and Saul’s claim.

The speaker’s representation of the Métis community’s voice soon transitions into the representation of another voice, a transition that is made explicit by the use of italics, which once again indicates the use of a direct quotation from an outside source. In this case, “*mixed blood women,/ uncommonly pretty and provocative*” is a line from Montana historian Joseph Kinsey Howard’s 1952 book, *Strange Empire: A Narrative of the Northwest*. In a chapter titled “Wagon Man,” Howard dedicates several pages to the history and development of the Métis people with writing that at best stereotypically mischaracterizes the Métis as the “wanderers of the wilderness,” and at worst, claims that in reaction to their “difficult [...] hybrid” status, the Métis developed “egocentric and chauvinistic” personalities (Howard 40-41). In discussing “the unions of white men and Métis women,” Howard notes, “nearly all white visitors, including some who had not been away from home long enough to impair their judgment, found the mixed-blood women uncommonly pretty and provocative” (44). The clearly white male, colonial perspective

of this passage explains the speaker's division of the word "history" into "his-story," an act that emphasizes the control that men such as Howard have over the narrative of Indigenous history. This passage from Howard's *Strange Empire* thus serves as the speaker's example of the "his-story" books' response to the question of who the speaker, a Métis woman, is. Much like the previous stanza, the poem's inclusion of Howard's description of Métis women functions as another external and imperial imposition of identity. In this moment in the poem, the speaker takes on this imposed identity with the stanza's opening words, "we are," but then clearly distances herself from this identity in the stanza's final line, where she attributes the identity to history books: "so the his-story books say." In momentarily assuming an imperial, racist identity claim, the speaker provides a literal demonstration of the internalization of a harmful colonialist perception.

In the following stanza, the speaker shifts to the second person, with the stanza's first line, "that was not what you wanted to hear!" (line 23). The direct address created by the line's "you" recalls line 14, wherein the speaker directly addresses Saul. This connection therefore implies that the speaker is once again addressing Saul, an implication that is supported by the similar emotion that is brought to both of the lines by the concluding exclamation mark. The direct address and the repeated exclamation mark also serve to reinforce the created effect of a dialogue, or heated debate, between the speaker and Saul. The speaker then continues to address Saul in line 24, where she refers to him as, "oh you post-structural, post-colonial sensitive one" (line 24). The line's first word, "oh" confirms a pattern of the poem as it marks the seventh line to start with a variation of "oh." This instance of "oh" most directly resembles line 17: "oh dark, wild mysterious woman." The similarity between the two epithets—with both lines beginning with "oh" and using three adjectives to directly address the object—coupled with the speaker's

denial of what the “you” “wanted to hear,” indicates the speaker’s inversion of the act of imposed identity that has previously been applied to her. The speaker takes a sentence structure that was used to limit and stereotype her, and reappropriates it for her own purposes. By labeling Saul as a “post-structural, post-colonial sensitive one,” the speaker reverses the subject-object dynamic of the act of identity imposition and thus once again asserts her power through her subjectivity. By repositioning herself as the subject, the speaker once again asserts her agency takes control of the narrative from the “his-story books.”

By specifically classifying Saul as “post-structural, post-colonial,” the speaker draws the reader’s attention to the implication of the repeated prefix, “post.” Both post-structuralism and post-colonialism are among the critical theories that arose in the twentieth century that, along with other theories such as post-modernism, defined themselves as “post” a preceding school of thought, a trend that for some critics, led to the question of why, in the twentieth century, everything had to be “post” something else. This implied problematizing of these twentieth century critical theories, as well as the negative connotation of the adjective “sensitive” indicate that the speaker, in describing Saul as “post-structural” and “post-colonial,” is resisting these theories. In *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Terry Eagleton explains that post-structuralism, in its development, “became a convenient way of evading political questions altogether,” for, according to the theorists of post-structuralism, “if meaning, the signified, was a passing product of words or signifiers, always shift and unstable, [...] how could there be any determinate truth or meaning at all?” (Eagleton 124). Post-structuralism thus “frees you at a stroke from having to assume a position on important issues, since what you say of such things will be no more than a passing product of a signifier and so in no sense to be taken as ‘true’ or ‘serious’” (125). By labeling Saul and the claims he makes in *A Fair Country* as post-structuralist, then, the speaker

suggests that in making claims like “we are all Métis,” Saul betrays his privileged and damaging ability to make “mischievously radical” claims from an “invulnerable position” (125). He is in such an invulnerable position, because, following the claims of post-structural theory, words, or signs, have shifting meaning—and therefore arguably no meaning—thus allowing Saul to not be held accountable for his claims. This position becomes particularly problematic in the context of his claim, “we are all Métis,” because if his writing is post-structural, then he is using “Métis” as a sign, and particularly as a sign whose meaning or significance he does not have to concern himself with. The invulnerable position that post structuralism allows Saul can therefore be tied to MacDougall’s criticism of Saul and his claim as ignorant of Métis history and culture, as well as her accusation that Saul is misusing “the term” (or “sign”) Métis in order to advance his argument.

The speaker’s use of the term “post-structural” can also be understood through the closely-connected ‘death of the author’ theory, which argues that the context of a text’s author should not be taken into consideration in the text’s analysis, since “the biography of the author is, after all, merely another text, which need not be ascribed any special privilege” (Eagleton 120). According to Eagleton, “it is language which speaks in literature, [...] not the author himself. If there is any place where this seething multiplicity of the text is momentarily focused, it is not the author but the *reader*” (120). The death of the author theory thus suggests that the text belongs not to the author but to the reader, or to the reader’s interpretation of the text. This shift in ownership of a text and its interpretation becomes suspect in the context of “national anthem” because it suggests that the interpretations and opinions of critics such as Saul, which are often imposed and inaccurate, are of greater importance than those of Bouvier. If the interpretations of critics like Saul carry greater weight than those of Bouvier, then “national anthem”’s speaker is

not only being excluded from Saul's suggested community, but also from her own poem. In her essay, "The Race for Theory," Barbara Christian expresses her dissatisfaction with criticism's "new literary orientation," by stating, "Now I am being told that philosophers are the ones who write literature, that authors are dead, irrelevant, mere vessels through which their narratives ooze, that they do not work nor have they the faintest idea what they are doing; rather they produce texts as disembodied as the angels" (Christian 56). Christian's critique highlights the manner by which the death of the author theory robs authors of their agency and renders them passive, mindless objects. By engaging in post-structuralism and the death of the author theory, then, Saul is denying the speaker her subjectivity.

In labeling Saul as "post-colonial," the speaker draws attention to the question of whether the practice of post-colonialism can be applied to the field of Canadian studies, a field that is not typically associated with post-colonialism. Laura Moss takes up this very question in her collection of critical essays, *Is Canada Postcolonial?: Unsettling Canadian Literature*, in which several authors respond to the collection's posed question. In response to Moss's question, Kanien'kehá:ka professor Taiaiake Alfred argues that Canada can be considered neither post-colonial, nor neo-colonial, as both labels "'assume that [Canada] actually went through a different phase from its original colonial state'" (Moss 10). Moss continues Alfred's argument in stating, "Thus, Canada is emphatically not 'post colonial' but is still actively engaging in colonial practices" (10). Saul's engagement with postcolonial theory, as suggested by "national anthem"'s speaker, can therefore be understood as further evidence of the logical gap in his writing between his perception of Canadian civilization and reality. In the chapter of *When the Other is Me* titled "Decolonizing Postcolonials," LaRocque addresses scholars who "may live in the illusion that they not only understand 'Natives,' but that somehow, by their postcolonial

powers of analysis, they have neutralized the colonial experience” (LaRocque 167). Saul can therefore be interpreted as one of these scholars who believes that his progressive claims have “neutralized the colonial experience” through the “powers” of his postcolonial analysis. His writing, and more specifically his “We are all Métis” claim, is in fact dependent on this neutralization being true. Saul’s “We are all Métis” claim is largely dependent on a postcolonial Canada, but this imagined Canada cannot exist in a country “still actively engaging in colonial practices” and is therefore indicative of *A Fair Country*’s inability to accurately represent or understand present-day Canada. The basic error in reasoning for Saul and other Canadian postcolonial scholars lies in their belief that “the alienation and the othering are over,” despite the fact that, “For many reasons Native writers and scholars have made apparent, neither the political nor the textual devastations are over” (LaRocque 167). Saul and the claims he puts forward in *A Fair Country* thus ignore and thereby reproduce the political and textual devastations that some postcolonial theorists believe to be over.

Moss further criticizes post-colonialism as a lens of interpretation that can create a “basic binarism” that excludes “the ambiguity of Canada as both colonial subject and agent” and forces us to look “at Canada as a settler/white colony in opposition to an invaded/indigenous population” (Moss 11). This binary then “places Native populations in a constant state of opposition rather than separation,” “denies the existence of the Métis,” and “freezes First Nations writers in a historical role rather than integrating (not assimilating) Native writers into the larger canon of contemporary Canadian literature” (11). For Moss, then, the Métis people exist somewhere in between this post-colonialism binary, as both the “colonial subject and agent.” Moss’s description gestures toward the connection between the Métis people in literature and a need for a ‘third space’ that exists outside of the binary. First Nations writers’ forced historical

role can be understood through LaRocque's description of the exclusion of Native writers and scholars from "international postcolonial discourse," which she explains is a result of the continued perception of Native writers and scholars "more as storytelling peoples or cultural or victim/trauma informants, not contemporary theorists and intellectuals" (LaRocque 165). By being limited to play the part of "cultural or victim/trauma informants," Indigenous scholars and writers are left out of the arena of contemporary scholarship and theory, ostensibly so that white postcolonial scholars can exploit them as resources for their own scholarship. If post-colonialism plays a role both in the erasure of the Métis people and in the exclusion of First Nations and other Indigenous intellectuals from contemporary Canadian literature and theory, then the speaker's labeling of Saul as "post-colonial" can be interpreted as an accusation of Saul's contribution to this erasure and exclusion. In asserting her subjectivity through the appropriation of a sentence structure that was previously used against her, the speaker is therefore combatting the erasure and exclusion that Saul and other "post-structural, post-colonial" critics are responsible for. This act of resistance can also be understood as one of the motivations behind the poem as a whole: to assert the speaker's existence and poetry in response to a text that is operating through critical theories that, at least in part, deny her existence as a subject and as a storyteller.

The pairing of post-structuralism and post-colonialism at this moment in the poem not only serves to criticize each individual critical theory, but also to criticize theory itself, as both critical theories indirectly contribute to the exclusion and oppression of the speaker. Though the prefix of both of these theories—"post"—implies an element of futurism, the speaker's implied criticism of the theories indicates a continuation of the exclusion of indigenous writers and scholars from the practice of critical theory. In the conclusion of *When the Other is Me*,

LaRocque denounces “the convoluted mix of English and philosophy in the theories associated with postcolonial studies, which requires specialization that the majority of Aboriginal readers [...] cannot access” (LaRocque 164). In “The Race for Theory,” Christian explains that it is this language that is produced by the “convoluted mix of English and philosophy” that makes “it possible for a few people who know that particular language to control the critical scene” (Christian 55). It is therefore this inaccessible language that allows those who have always been in power to maintain their power, as it allows them to exclude the voices of those whom they may view as a threat. Christian notes the suspicious coincidence of this language surfacing “just when the literature of peoples of color, of black women, of Latin Americans, of Africans began to move to ‘the center’” (55). The development by white critics of critical theories such as post-structuralism can thus be understood as a reactionary measure against the rising presence of voices of the ‘other’ in “the center,” who stand to bring new perspectives to the field of literary criticism that would dispossess white critics of their intellectual dominance.

LaRocque continues by calling for “the de-imperialization of scholarship,” due to scholarship’s historic exclusion of Native “research, critical constructions, interrogations, and ideas” (LaRocque 166). The speaker’s criticism of Saul is therefore a criticism of his engagement with critical theories that actively isolate indigenous writers and readers, an engagement that is made especially ironic by his seemingly ‘progressive’ treatment of Métis and Native peoples as subjects. As part of LaRocque’s proposal to de-imperialize scholarship, she states, “We are all challenged to keep decolonizing as we seek to de-imperialize the Western voice” (168). Native Canadian scholars and writers have already taken up this project by “troubling the colonizer” and acting as “the uncomfortable mirrors to the White Canadian identity” (168). Line 24 of “national anthem”—“oh you post-structural, post-colonial one”—can

be interpreted as the speaker's taking up of LaRocque's proposal. The reappropriation of the syntax that was used against her in line 17 ("oh dark, wild mysterious woman"), as well as her reversal of critical theories that are typically dominated by scholars typified by Saul, demonstrate the speaker's efforts to "de-imperialize" and shift the power away from "the Western voice." Line 24 holds up an "uncomfortable mirror to the White Canadian identity" specifically by mimicking the sentence structure of line 17 and creating a reflection between the two lines. This reflection forces Saul, or other White scholars, to recognize his voice in the racist, exoticizing words of line 17. LaRocque expresses her desire to see "more substantial treatment of the colonizer personality psyche, which has yet to appear in our poetry novels, and plays" (168). Written five years after *When the Other is Me*, "national anthem," through its exploration of Saul and other colonizers illustrated by the representation of their voices, seems to answer LaRocque's wish.

In the following line, the speaker, who first denied Saul what he "wanted to hear," now briefly takes on the role that she imagines Saul desires of her, and claims, "I am the obedient subservient" (line 25). If, in *A Fair Country*, Saul utilizes the Métis Nation to advance his argument for Canada's hybrid civilization, then he needs the speaker to participate, to accept her role as a superficial symbol. The speaker is therefore literally Saul's subservient; she is "of use or service as an instrument or means; serving as a means to further an end, object, or purpose" ("Subservient"). The subject and main verb of "I am" indicate the speaker's momentary adoption of her identity as desired by Saul, while the two adjectives "obedient subservient" and notable absence of a noun indicate Saul's complicity in the erasure of the speaker's subjectivity by requiring her to be "subservient" to him.

In the last line of the stanza, the speaker directly represents the voice of Saul or the settler's imagined voice; "come ooon! be a nice, *good brown girl!*" (line 26). This line's combined use of roman and italic text blurs the subject positions, a grey area which seems to function as a transition between the speaker's momentary adoption of the identity imposed by Saul in line 25 and the direct quote marked by the italics at the end of line 26. Nevertheless, the three "o's" in "ooon!", much like the repeated "o's" in "ooh who, ooh who are you," as well as the exclamation mark, render the speaker's representation of an external voice unmistakable. As in the fifth stanza, the represented voice is once again demanding something of the speaker; he is demanding that she act like "the obedient subservient" he expects and requires her to be.

The italics used for the last phrase of the line, "*good brown girl,*" once again signal that the phrase is a direct quote, in this case, a reference to Marilyn Dumont's celebrated poetry collection, *A Really Good Brown Girl*. In the collection's titular prose poem, "Memoirs of a Really Good Brown Girl," Dumont chronicles her time at school, starting with her first day and ending with university. In school, she describes the perpetual feeling of being a "foreigner, [...] afraid to make a mistake, afraid to speak, they talk differently than I do, I don't sound the way they do, but I don't know how to sound any different, so I don't talk, [...] I become invisible" (Dumont 29). In an effort to become invisible, the poem's speaker learns to "follow really well," up until the last stanza: "I am in a university classroom, an English professor corrects my spoken English in front of the class. I say, 'really good.' He says, 'You mean, really well, don't you?' I glare at him and say emphatically, 'No, I mean really good'" (31). Dumont, who has stated, "I do not underestimate the politics of the English language to silence us," has an "interest in subverting the dominant tongue" that is reflected in her poetic 'I's assertion of her language, and by extension, her rebellion against the domination and oppression of English as a colonial

language (Andrews 29). The subversive context of this line cited in “national anthem,” “*good brown girl*,” suggests the presence of the speaker’s consciousness in a line that is purportedly the representation of an external voice. By quoting a line whose purpose it is to subvert the power of the English language, the speaker is subverting in turn the power of the voice that is ordering her to conform to his perception of her identity. The speaker’s resistance is further represented by the inclusion of an extended space in the middle of the line: a formal signal of the speaker’s claim for space, a space that breaks up the words of those who wish to stereotype and oppress her.

The stanza that follows the citation of Dumont marks a tonal shift in the poem, as indicated by the first lines, “the truth? I am a mass of matter/ that matters” (Bouvier lines 27-28). Following this shift, the speaker ceases to represent external voices and adopt imposed identities, and instead responds to the owl’s question with her own “truth[ful]” answers. Though this line’s “I am” appears only two lines after the “I am” of line 25, its function shifts from representing an imposed identity to representing the truth. This “I am” indicates that the speaker is reclaiming her subjectivity, which had previously been altered or erased. The speaker further asserts her subjectivity by describing herself as a “mass of matter,” a phrase that repeats the same “ma” sound as well as the same meaning, as “mass” can be defined as “a body of matter,” while matter can inversely be defined as “that which has mass and occupies space” (“Matter”). The speaker is thereby making clear that she “occupies space” and therefore cannot be erased or diminished by false expectations of her identity. By emphasizing her description of herself as someone that takes up space, the speaker embodies the poetic device of the extended spaces that appear throughout the poem; she is occupying the space that the poem has created. The collective nature of “mass” also hints at the speaker’s understanding of herself as an “aggregation of objects,” as a whole comprised of several parts (“Matter”). This understanding of a plural self evokes not only

the idea of an individual standing for a community, but also Métis heritage and the Michif language as whole entities made up of, or formed by, various parts.

The speaker reinforces her agency in the following two lines where her addition of an “s” transforms “matters” into a verb and alters its definition to mean: “to be of importance; to signify” (“Matters”). The first “matters” is followed by a semi-colon and a large break in text—the largest in the poem. This large break mimics the repeated tool of the extended space, thereby once again creating space for the extent of her “matter,” her significance. The aesthetic choice of the large break emphasizes the speaker’s claim and makes clear that her significance is unequivocal, that she “matters” in any situation and context. However, the visual effect of this extended break in the text, as well as of the poem’s other extended spaces, can also be seen as a manifestation of a blank emptiness. Through this stylistic choice, the poem gestures toward an absence that is reminiscent of the “phantom limb” image in Dumont’s “that tongued belonging.” Yet, whereas this image of a phantom limb, of a permanent but unforgettable absence, is seen as unchangeable, this poem’s empty spaces function as the site of a possible future articulation of self. Though the present emptiness of these spaces suggests that this articulation is not currently possible, the spaces nonetheless symbolize a hope for a future where such an articulation will be conceivable. The poem’s own creation of these spaces indicates that these articulations will be made possible by repeated, insisted-upon presence and assertion of the Métis voice in Canada’s literary and political spheres.

After confirming her absolute significance, the speaker then repeats “matters” for the third time, this time applying it to the specific context of “her family” (line 29). By grounding her significance in the context of her family, it is as if the speaker is removing herself from the

public sphere that is debating and claiming her identity and is instead situating herself and her significance within the framework of her family and home.

Between the first mention of the owl's question and the speaker's familial contextualization of her identity and significance, the speaker dedicates four stanzas to the representation of multiple external voices, perceptions of her identity, and answers to the owl's question, before offering her own answer. In this way, the speaker has stayed true to her words from the second stanza and, as is represented by the formal distance between the third and eighth stanzas, has taken "the long way home" (line 5). This return to home, a theme that is common to Bouvier and other Métis poetry, is signaled by the poem's second use of one of the speaker's native languages in the last line of the stanza: "*marrî lapatte* – pliable like dough-girl" (line 30). Here, the italics cease to indicate the citation of an outside voice or text and return to indicate the use of Cree-Michif language, as they did for "*ôhô*" in line 7. This second use of Cree-Michif confirms the speaker's close association of the language with home and with her answer to the owl's "who are you" question. The speaker is answering the owl—which she first named in Cree—partially in Cree-Michif, implying that the speaker's conceptualization of self is highly tied up with her native languages.

"*Marrî lapatte*" is the first of several names that the speaker will give herself, names for which she provides in-text glosses marked by em dashes. The "ma" and "atte" of the name "*marrî lapatte*" can also be thought of as an extended fourth iteration of "matter," and is thus an insertion of her significance within her name. The speaker spends the next several lines offering an extended definition of "*marrî lapatte*," and then offers a second name with its own gloss: "*julie* – a little on the raggedy edge,/ sometimes-forgets-to-finish-her-tasks girl" (lines 33-34). Both definitions for these names include ostensibly negative characteristics, but the domestic

descriptors—“kitchen counter” and “tasks”—carry a tone of familiarity, as if these are the descriptions someone would lovingly ascribe to a family member. The tone of these descriptions, along with the use of Cree-Michif and the prefacing of the names with “her family,” suggest that these names are family pet names. These ‘negative’ but loving characteristics stand in opposition to the qualities that were previously imposed upon the subject: “mysterious,” “provocative,” “obedient.” Though in both instances the characteristics are being applied to the speaker, they are differentiated by the identity of who is applying these characteristics. The speaker gives importance to her family-given characteristics by claiming them with line 27’s “I am.”

The speaker continues to answer the owl’s question in the following stanza, in which she presents two more italicized Cree-Michif names with accompanying glosses: “I am *oui-la* loved,/ a name to remember my French heritage;/ *wāstīyāp* is my name from the old ones –/ wolf-like eyes shining and all seeing” (lines 35-38). With this “I am,” the speaker offers her understanding of her Métis heritage, a French-Native heritage that is represented by the names “*oui-la*” and “*wāstīyāp*.” In both names’ definitions, the words “remember,” “heritage,” and “from the old ones,” evoke a theme of inheritance, suggesting that with these names, the speaker inherits both the heritage and the cultures of her ancestors. As in Dumont’s poem, “these are wintering words,” the contact between French and Cree enacts the contact between the two languages that created Michif. This stanza’s description of the speaker’s identity as made up of several parts—specifically French and Native—recalls her description of self as “a mass of matter,” or an “aggregation of objects.” The speaker’s characterization of Métis heritage in this stanza encourages a retroactive reading of the preceding stanzas as a formal representation of métissage. The poem’s taking up of multiple voices, texts, and languages can be interpreted as the speaker’s formal exploration of the métissage of cultures and languages associated with Métis heritage.

The speaker's task can therefore be understood as an effort to produce a text that bears the history of *métissage* in response and opposition to the way that Saul's work attempts to celebrate *métissage*—an attempt that in actuality flattens the history of *métissage*. In response to Saul's, among others', misappropriation and misuse of Métis history and heritage, the speaker, through both the form and content of the poem, offers her own definition—a definition to replace and remedy that of Saul. The speaker's attempt to replace Saul's claim echoes the poem's overarching goal of revising the Canadian national anthem and challenging its use of the term “native,” among others.

The speaker summarizes this project in the following stanza in stating, “there you have it all now in my/ ooh who, ooh who are you song” (lines 39-40). The speaker's second use of the address “you” suggests that she is once again directly addressing Saul, just as she did in lines 23 and 24. The “my” at the end of line 39 indicates that, since “stealing owl's song” in line 12, the “ooh who, ooh who are you song” has become hers—further demonstration of the speaker's control of the poetic narrative and the shift in power from Saul and the other represented voices to the speaker. The speaker's claiming of the song as “my [...] song” is support for the speaker's revision and appropriation of the poem's titular song: the national anthem. The speaker continues to summarize her response to the owl's question by claiming, “I am neither European or Indian – nor/ Christopher Columbus' lost song for that matter” (lines 41-42). With this fourth “I am” of the poem, the speaker asserts her identity through the denial of what others expect her to be. Though in the previous stanza the speaker acknowledges both parts of her Métis heritage respectively, here she refuses to be defined by either, recalling LaRocque's assertion that the Métis do not “bounce from White to ‘Indian’—they are more than the sum of the two,” as well as Arnott's declaration: “I am one hundred percent who I am” (LaRocque) (Arnott 66). This

assertion of self as a whole that cannot be defined by its individual parts emphasizes the speaker's need for a 'third space' wherein her chosen identity can exist, a space that lies outside of the two option binary. The speaker once again rejects her role as a colonizer's object; in this case Christopher Columbus's "lost song." Her power in subjectivity is demonstrated by her ownership of the "ooh who, ooh who are you song" and her refusal to be the song of someone else, a demonstration that reinforces the power that the motif of song holds within the poem. The speaker rebukes both Columbus and Saul's attempts to objectify her, to use her as a symbol for their own purposes; this connection between Columbus and Saul creates a parallel between the two men and implicates Saul as a 'descendant' of Columbus, as an inheritor of the colonizing tradition set forth by Columbus.

The speaker begins the next and penultimate stanza with the poem's final "I am," this time asserting, "I am *ayisiyino* – a human being;/ *ewāhkōtoyak* – we are all related" (lines 43-44). The words that the speaker uses to describe herself – "*ayisiyino*" and "*ewāhkōtoyak*" – are once again accompanied by in-text glosses, thereby continuing the pattern that she started in the ninth stanza. The phrasing of the second gloss, "we are all related," evokes the phrasing of Saul's claim from line 13: "*we are all Métis.*" The "we are all" in both statements conjures a sense of community, of universal connection. While both Saul and the speaker are making a claim about the interconnected nature of mankind, the speaker's "we are all related" claim distinguishes itself from Saul's claim by not misappropriating or inaccurately using a term. Unlike Saul's, the speaker's claim does not flatten or ignore Métis history and culture, as is demonstrated by the speaker's use of Cree-Michif to describe the feeling of universal connection. "We are all related" is thus the speaker's improvement, or replacement, of Saul's "*we are all Métis,*" which serves to

contribute to the poem's overarching project of revision. This suggests that the space the speaker is creating throughout the poem is not a space of exclusion, but a communal, familial space.

The speaker then reestablishes her and her family's connection to the land of her home that she first introduced in the second stanza, asserting that "this place knows me – remembers me,/ the soft sounds of my grandmothers' tongues" (lines 45-46). The speaker personifies "this place" as a subject that knows and remembers the speaker, suggesting a familiarity that is in keeping with the connection between person and place that is implied by the phrase "native land," from the "O Canada" line that "national anthem" cites: "*our home and native land.*" In referencing her "grandmothers' tongues," the speaker continues the poem's themes that she associates with her sense of self – family, heritage, and Native languages – and grounds these themes by connecting them to "this place." That "this place" remembers the speaker denotes that "this place," remembers the speaker from when she "was ten"—the last moment in the poem where the speaker situates herself in relation to the land. That "this place" also remembers her grandmothers' voices gestures toward a long-lasting relationship between the land and the speaker's ancestors, thereby supporting the idea of the speaker's "native" relationship with the land. "national anthem" then concludes with a couplet in the form of a request: "sing her song, oh, oh Canada!/ *our home and native land!*" (lines 47-48). This couplet repeats the poem's opening couplet, but notably adds the imperative, "sing her song," and two exclamation marks. The first of the two exclamation marks, used for the first time since the poem's shift from imposed to claimed identity, places emphasis on the speaker's request and once again imbues the line with the impression of the emotion of the speaker's voice. The second exclamation mark replaces the ellipses that ended the poem's opening couplet and signaled the poem's continuation or revision of the Canadian national anthem. This final exclamation mark thereby serves as a

definitive marker of the poem's point of conclusion and signals the end of the speaker's revision of the national anthem. In closing the poem with a repetition of the structure and words of the opening stanza, the final stanza operates as a sort of musical refrain. 'Song' as a motif in "national anthem" therefore not only appears on the level of content—"ooh who are you song"—and in the poem's overall project—the revision of "O Canada"—it also serves as a framework for the poem's structure.

The final two lines of the poem offer two different readings that are dependent on the interpretation of the ambiguous word "her" in the penultimate line. "Her" can initially be interpreted as a reference to Canada, as "oh, oh Canada" can be read as the speaker playing with "O Canada's" opening line, transforming it into an address of Canada, in the same manner that "oh" was used to address Saul in line 24. This interpretation is further supported by the fact that "her song" refers to the national anthem and can therefore be understood as 'Canada's song.' The interpretation of "her" as referring to Canada imbues the last stanza with a tone of irony and criticism. By instructing the reader to "sing her song," the speaker is criticizing or mocking those who would continue to perform a song whose lyrics actively misrepresent and ignore Canada's Indigenous population. The next and final line, "*our home and native land,*" is therefore an example of the anthem's mistreatment of Indigenous Canadians. This repetition of the second line from the Canadian national anthem, as well as the importance that is bestowed upon it by its role as the poem's final line, emphasizes the irony of the line's words: "our home," and "native land." The plurality connoted by "our" ask the question of who belongs to this our, and who is excluded from it? To whom is the land native? "O Canada" is thereby using the word "native" in a manner similar to Saul's use of the word "Métis." Both the anthem and Saul are flattening the

significance of these words by employing them without properly acknowledging or understanding their history and meaning.

“Her” can alternately be interpreted as invoking the speaker’s grandmothers, whom she refers to in the previous line. The proximity of the reference to her “grandmothers’ tongues” at the end of line 46 to the female pronoun “her” at the beginning of line 47 reinforces this interpretation. If the “her” does in fact refer to one, or both, of the speaker’s grandmothers, this implies that “O Canada” is her grandmother’s song; or rather that it should be her song. The final line then serves to support the argument that the national anthem should belong to the speaker’s grandmother. In the preceding stanza, the lines “this place knows” and “remembers [...] the soft sounds of my grandmothers’ tongues” emphasize the grandmothers’ long-lasting and native relationship with the land. The “home” and “native land” that the national anthem’s line refers to should therefore be theirs to claim. In “O Canada,” the line “our home and native land” celebrates Canada’s land and is one of several lines to allude or directly refer to “land.” The Canadian national anthem, as a declaration and performance of national identity, therefore ties the motif of land to the concept of Canadian national identity.

In “national anthem,” the speaker’s assertion that “this place knows me”—an assertion that she makes in response to the question, “who are you?”—creates a similar tie between place and identity. The speaker’s use of the word “place” here, rather than “land,” calls the reader’s attention to the difference between these two terms. Whereas place can be simply defined as “available space,” “land”—the word used in the national anthem—carries with it a history of settler colonialism’s production of a commercialization and conceptualization of land as something to be owned (“Place,” “Land”). “Land” therefore connotes the process by which the Métis and other Indigenous peoples were dispossessed of their home. In her essay, “The Country

Born,” Arnott similarly employs “place” when she speaks for the Métis community collectively: “For each and every one of us, this place is our home place, our history encompasses the histories of all Native North American Nations and all the invading and immigrating Nations. We do belong here” (Arnott 68). By choosing to use the word “place” instead of “land,” the speaker of “national anthem” distances her message from the destructive connotation of “land,” and expresses herself, and her sense of home, with a word that is untouched by the devastation of the Canadian government. This replacement can be read as another instance of the speaker’s revision of the Canadian national anthem.

By claiming that the national anthem is her grandmother’s song, then, the speaker is making the argument that the national anthem expresses her grandmother’s identity. The “her” can be understood as standing in for not only both of her grandmothers but also for the Métis community. The speaker is thereby suggesting a version of the national anthem that expresses her community’s identity rather than excluding it. The speaker’s argument for her people’s claim to the anthem can also be read as a challenge of Saul’s “We are all Métis” claim. If we are actually all Métis, if Canada is “a métis civilization,” then the nation should have an anthem that properly acknowledges and celebrates the Métis people. It becomes clear by the end of “national anthem” that the revised version of the Canadian national anthem that the speaker sets out to write at the beginning of the poem is in fact her grandmothers’, and by extension her community’s— the Métis Nation’s song. Throughout the poem, the speaker creates and claims space for herself and for her community, a space that can exist outside of the expectations and stereotypes of the colonizing figures the poem portrays. The speaker creates a space for her revised national anthem and for the community it represents.

V. *Returning Home*

The analysis of Bouvier's other poems from the same collection, *nakamowin'sa for the seasons*, resonates with "national anthem" and helps to clarify, amplify, and expand upon the themes that the poem addresses. Contextualized in the framework of the collection's other poems, the common themes of citation, resistance, language, and returning home gain further dimension, increasing their impact as poetic tools.

"national anthem"'s direct and indirect citations of several external texts suggest that the poem is playing with the poetic concept of found poems, which "take existing texts and refashion them, reorder them, and present them as poems" (poets.org). In "national anthem," the speaker takes lines from "existing texts"— "O Canada," *A Fair Country, Strange Empire*, and "A Really Good Brown Girl"—and "refashion[s]" them in order to serve the message and story being told by the poem. Bouvier's poetic practice of incorporating excerpts of other texts is not unique to "national anthem"; the pattern appears in Bouvier's first collection, *Blueberry Clouds*, continues in her second collection, *papîyâhtak*, and permeates her most recent collection, *nakamowin'sa for the seasons*. The collection's penultimate poem, "reconciliation – a found poem," constitutes the collection's most "pure found poem," comprising entirely of lines from existing texts, "with the exception of one line, which is mine alone" (Bouvier 75). The entire poem, save for the line that Bouvier contributed, is italicized—a stylistic choice that reflects the external sourcing of the italicized lines in "national anthem." Through the poetic reordering of text borrowed from legal documents that contributed to the Indian Residential Schools Agreement (2006), Bouvier's poem "reconciliation" explores the subject of the perpetrators of residential schools and former residential school students. In an endnote for this poem, Bouvier includes a brief history of this agreement, which occurred as a result of "former residential school students [taking] the federal government and churches to court seeking compensation for harm suffered at Indian Residential

Schools” and became “the largest class action settlement in Canadian history” (75). Bouvier notes that at an event in her hometown, “the Oblates of Mary Immaculate issued a statement of apology to all who were present. At the event an artificial rose was offered to each of us. I accepted the rose” (75). Bouvier’s acceptance of the rose can therefore be understood as an example of the poem’s titular “reconciliation.” However, the adjective “artificial” indicates the potentially contrived, hollow nature of the Oblates’ apology. Furthermore, Bouvier’s somewhat truncated final sentence—“I accepted the rose”—suggests that Bouvier’s acceptance of the rose does not necessarily signify her acceptance of the apology. The religious lexicon of the borrowed text results in the final line concluding with a gloss of “*repentance – an act of honesty and courage,*” thereby putting forth repentance as a precondition for the goal stated by the poem’s title: reconciliation (line 22). The context of Bouvier’s acceptance of the artificial rose and not the apology, however, suggests to the reader that this “act of honesty,” and therefore reconciliation, is the responsibility of the Oblates—an interpretation which is bolstered by the suggestion that repentance, a Catholic act, is necessary for reconciliation—who have yet to offer a sincere, non-artificial apology.

In Bouvier’s poem, “the map of my heart,” the speaker creates another similarity with the project of “national anthem” by distinguishing her sense of self, the “map of [her] heart,” from the identity projected onto her by colonizers. The poem opens with her assertion that the map of her heart “lies somewhere between here/ and there. it is not on a piece of paper/ carved by the surveyors’ pen/ of distant monarchies” (Bouvier lines 1-4). By metaphorizing her heart as a map, the speaker connects her sense of self to land. However, as in the final stanzas of “national anthem,” the speaker here opposes the colonial understanding of land as something that can be claimed, bought, or stolen. Instead, her heart, lying ambiguously “somewhere between here/ and

there,” cannot be localized to one specific ‘plot of land,’ and therefore cannot be claimed. Furthermore, “somewhere between here/ and there” recalls the idea of a ‘third space’ that exists between or outside of the two poles of “here” and “there.” The speaker creates an extended geographical metaphor by describing the monarchs who order these land claims as “distant,” an adjective that emphasizes the illegitimate nature of the colonizing countries’ claims to the land that would become Canada.

The speaker denies the right of surveyors’ to claim land, and by extension, the right to claim her: “places and names that do not know me,/ but claim to do so – Churchill, Hudson Mackenzie./ a claim is not at truth etched in stone/ forever a claim is just a piece of paper,/ without body without spirit” (lines 5-9). Much like the speaker of “national anthem” rebukes John Ralston Saul and others’ claim of understanding her, the speaker here refuses to be claimed or known by the men whose names adorn the landscape of Canada—a reference that further extends the geographic metaphor. The speaker once again delegitimizes the claim of the colonizers by characterizing it as transient—as opposed to “forever”—and insubstantial—as opposed to “rock,” “body,” and “spirit.” The speaker again performs a similar action to that of “national anthem” by grounding her sense of self in language, which she describes as “the languages/ that know me, sing to me, speak to me” (lines 11-12). The phrasing of “languages/ that know me” recalls the speaker’s claim in “national anthem”: “this place knows me,” a connection that here ties language to place. The familiar relationship suggested by “know,” as well as the context of the surrounding poems, indicates that “the languages” are the speaker’s native languages, which is subsequently confirmed by the appearance of Cree-Michif. Before the first appearance of Cree-Michif, the speaker inserts an extended space—the fourth of the poem—after “speak to me,” which is ended by the speaker’s instruction to the reader to “listen” (line

12). This formal choice of an extended space which appears in the middle of lines recalls the use of the same poetic device in “national anthem” and can be interpreted as a formal demonstration of the poems’ work to create a space wherein the poems’ speaker can exist and assert her voice.

As the speaker introduces and defines Cree-Michif words, she continues to contribute to the poem’s land imagery, with “*kiwētinohk*” defined within the poem as “a place signaling the destination/ of the ice’s retreat” and “*misnipīyak*” defined as “the big bodies of water/ I carry on my back [...] the memories of the people” (lines 13-15). Here, the speaker once again creates an image of herself that is connected to the earth and implies that she carries with her the heritage of her ancestors. The specific position of the memories as on her back establishes this carrying as a task, as something the speaker does out of a sense of duty. As in “national anthem,” the speaker provides glosses of the Cree-Michif words within the poem, composing the poem’s fifth stanza almost entirely out of these glosses. Though the first half of the poem is written entirely in English, Cree-Michif appears with the first word of this second half and increases in usage until it is being used equally and interchangeably with English by the last stanza, which ends with an untranslated Cree-Michif expression: “*miyo kisîwâtisowin*” (line 24). The use of Cree-Michif in this latter half opposes the “surveyors” and “purveyors” of the first half who took the land of her ancestors. The speaker, who carries the memories of her ancestors on her back, opposes these figures by continuing to use her native language. The speaker turns away from those who claim to know her and toward the language that expresses “the spirit/energy” that is absent from the “claim” of these colonizing figures. “the map of my heart” therefore uses multilingualism as an act of resistance and assertion of self against the force of colonialism.

Bouvier’s poem “returning to silence” continues to treat this theme of language and can be connected to Dumont’s “that tongued belonging,” as the speakers of both poems voice a

similar struggle with their relationships with the English language. This strenuous relationship is captured in the poem's opening lines: "I return home tongue tied/ by the English language/ that seems to slip every now and then,/ when I say *church* or *jam*./ God and marmalade/ would have been easier" (lines 1-6). Like the speaker of "that tongued belonging," the speaker uses the image of the tongue in her description of language. In both poems, English is depicted as negatively affecting the mouth: as a bad taste in "that tongued belonging" and as a tongue twister in "returning to silence." The English words which the speaker emphasizes, "*church* or *jam*" and "God and marmalade" are notably European 'imports' and therefore examples—of differing extremes—of European culture forced upon Indigenous populations, much like the English language. The specific letters the italics emphasize, "*ch*" and "*j*", indicate the difference in pronunciation of these sounds in French and in English, introducing an added layer of difficulty for a multilingual speaker.

In the second stanza, "a return to the land" is associated with "return home," thus establishing the theme of a return to land and home that appears in "national anthem" and, as LaRocque notes, Métis literature more generally. In the remaining lines of the poem, the speaker makes clear that this return to land and home is a return to silence. For the speaker, home is a space where she does not need to worry about her pronunciation of English, where she does not need to worry about verbally expressing herself in order to be understood. Instead, "my presence and the meal I cook/ for my cousins will be enough (lines 15-16). Here, the only extended space of the poem signifies the speaker's creation of this space wherein she can live silently and peacefully, at home with her family.

Bouvier's poem "songs to sing" poetically chronicles the history of "the free traders and coureur de bois" who "arrived from the east singing their songs,/ searching for riches the land

held” (lines 2, 4-5). These initial lines establish a relationship between the songs of the traders and *coueur de bois*, a relationship that the reader can track throughout the poem as the land is plundered of its resources, and the traders correlatedly lose their song. The traders’ “fifty songs to sing” are repeated throughout the poem, a repetition that emphasizes the importance of song, a motif that appears in “national anthem” and throughout the collection. The poem initially recounts the immersion of these traders into indigenous communities—an immersion and fusion of cultures that is demonstrated by the seamless insertion of Cree-Michif in the poem. The greater weight and importance of the Indigenous side of the relationship is implied by the language that the speaker uses to describe this period of immersion: “swallowed,” “importance,” “reverence,” and “generosity.” Following their integration into the Indigenous communities, the traders “launched their boats” and are powered by their songs, as “no river or portage [was] ever too long/ or arduous, as long as they had fifty songs to sing” (lines 19-21). It is on these journeys that the speaker describes the connection that the traders form with the natural world: “white pelicans soared above them in kinship” (line 22). The traders are accompanied not only by their own songs, but also by the songs of birds, which the speaker refers to in both English and Cree-Michif, operating as another indication of the fusion of cultures and languages between the traders and the Indigenous communities.

However, in the poem’s eighth stanza, the tone begins to shift as the paddlers start to be guided “by a new silver moon,” for which the speaker provides a definition in the same style that she provides definitions for Cree-Michif words: with an em dash. Here, the speaker defines the “new silver moon” as “*hallowed be thy name*” (lines 37-38). Though the use of italics in this line is ostensibly meant to make clear the reference to the Lord’s Prayer, the italics also suggest that the words are of ‘another language,’ in this case, religious language, the language of the

missions, or the language of the colonizer. This language therefore recalls the religious lexicon of “reconciliation.” That the traders are now beginning to be guided by this new moon of Catholicism suggests that they are no longer being guided by what they have learned from the Indigenous communities and by the natural world, but instead by the colonizing mission as represented by Catholicism. This hint of a shift in the tone of the poem as well as in the actions of the traders is concretized in the following stanza when the speaker describes how “the free traders and coureur de bois fought family/ in competition for rich furs/ until trade and then food declined;/ the land exhausted no song to sing” (lines 42-45). “No song to sing” is juxtaposed with “fifty songs to sing” by their parallel formatting; both phrases appear as the last words of a stanza after an extended space in the line. “No song to sing” implies both that the paddlers now no longer have “fifty songs to sing” to power them, but also, with the personification of the land as “exhausted,” that the land itself has no song to sing. The sign of the speaker’s resistance to this change is still visible, however, in the form of the extended spaces that intersperse the lines.

In the third stanza, “our mothers” teach the traders the “importance of *wahkohtowin*” : “being in relationship [with all life]” – in the first half of the poem, the traders demonstrate that they have learned this lesson (line 12). But by the ninth stanza, the traders, “mesmerized” by the mission of Catholicism and colonization, have seemingly forgotten this lesson and return to their original intention of “searching for riches”—an act which has devastating consequences for the land (lines 5, 40). The speaker describes this shift as: “a new way of being arrived, a slight shift in the wind—/ an ominous hush telling of what was yet to come” (lines 46-47). In describing this shift in the wind, the speaker momentarily reverses the orientation of her glosses; she offers the English word first before defining it in Cree-Michif. This momentary reversal hints at the

beginning of a shift in power in the relationship between the Indigenous communities and the traders and colonizers. While the language in the beginning of the poem emphasizes the importance of the members of the Indigenous communities as teachers and leaders of the European traders, the “slight shift in the wind” indicating the “ominous” arrival of “a new way of being” gestures toward an increasing dominance of the European colonizing force. The wind warns of a monstrous “wild man-animal,” who functions as a symbol of colonialism, who then “gorged itself” on the resources “and spirits” of the land, “with which it [the man-animal] is blessed *holy Mary, / mother of God, wīcihinān – help us*” (lines 45, 47-50). Here, the speaker returns to Catholicism in her plea for help in the wake of the destructions of this monstrous man. The italics perform the same double action of making clear the citation of the Hail Mary prayer—the second Catholic prayer of the poem—and suggesting its status as a foreign language. The speaker’s turn to a Catholic figure for help speaks to the speaker’s compromised and complex position of seeking help from a representative of the force that only stanzas earlier influenced the shift in the traders toward destructive actions and played an instrumental role in the colonization and oppression of her ancestors. As is common in Bouvier’s poetry, the speaker’s resistance, represented by the lingering presence of Cree-Michif, is revealed by the inclusion the word *wīcihinān* in the same line; the speaker turns to a Catholic figure for help, but she asks for said help—the active part of the sentence—in Michif-Cree.

In the final two stanzas of the poem, however, when the natural world settles, the song of the traders returns. As they sing their song, these phantom paddlers are “on their way home their flock awaiting.” This concluding line evokes the common theme of returning home and a home that is associated with the natural world, a conclusion that indicates the poem’s enduring hope.

VI. *Creating the Space Between*

Marilyn Dumont engages in many poetic practices similar to those of “national anthem”—including the practice of citation—in her collection, *The Pemmican Eaters*. *The Pemmican Eaters*, published in the same year as *nakaomiwn’ sa for the seasons* (2015), endeavors to intertwine the history of Métis folk heroes Gabriel Dumont—Dumont’s ancestor—and Louis Riel with the experiences of present-day Métis people. As a collection with a largely historical focus, *The Pemmican Eaters* begins several of its poems with quotations from historical texts and figures of Canadian history, a pattern that recalls the opening dedications of Bouvier’s poems in *nakaomiwn’ sa for the seasons*. Throughout the collection, Dumont’s poems represent, focalize, and address a plurality of Métis figures, historical and contemporary, famous and commonplace. Throughout the collection, the poems continue a common thematic thread of beads and weaving, suggesting that the collection is weaving together these many figures and identities. Dumont’s *The Pemmican Eaters* therefore argues for the multiplicity of identities, often thought of as a characteristic of Métis culture, as a strength rather than a weakness or dilution of culture.

Notably, Dumont prefaces a poem titled “Ode to the Red River Cart” with a quote from Joseph Kinsey Howard’s *Strange Empire: Louis Riel and the Métis People*—the same text that the speaker of “national anthem” cites in the poem’s sixth stanza. The speaker of “Ode to the Red River Cart” quotes *Strange Empire* thrice within the body of the poem, indicated each time with quotation marks and footnotes. Though the *Strange Empire* chapter this poem is quoting is the chapter that precedes the one cited in “national anthem,” the “red river cart” in Dumont’s poem’s title evokes the title of the *Strange Empire* chapter that “national anthem” is drawing from: “Wagon Man.”

In a poem titled “Letter to Sir John A. Macdonald,” the speaker directly addresses Canada’s first Prime Minister John Macdonald much in the same way that the speaker of “national anthem” addresses John Ralston Saul: “Dear John: I’m still here/ and halfbreed,/ after all these years/ you’re dead, funny thing” (Dumont lines 1-4). In fact, the collection’s title, *The Pemmican Eaters*, is in reference to John A. Macdonald’s moniker for the Métis. Much like the speaker’s rebuke of John Ralston Saul’s use of the term “Métis” in “national anthem,” the opening lines of “Letter to Sir John A. Macdonald,” as well as the collection’s title, respond to and rebuke a well-known white colonizer’s misuse of a term that categorizes the Métis people. The word “pemmican” refers to “pounded dried meat mixed to a paste with melted fat [...] originally made by North American Indians and later adopted by explorers, travellers,” and is especially prevalent in Métis cuisine. “Pemmican” derives from the Cree *pimihkān* or *pimihkē*: “to make grease.” (“Pemmican”)

The title of another of Dumont’s poems, “To a fair country,” likely references Saul’s *A Fair Country* and therefore sets up the poem as one to be read in comparison with Bouvier’s “national anthem.” The addition of “To” in the title transforms the poem into an address or response to Saul’s work, just as the subtitle of “national anthem”—“(upon reading *A Fair Country by John Raulston Saul*)”—sets the poem up as response to Saul. As “To a fair country” takes up the Métis people and history as subjects, this poem can also be interpreted as indirectly entering into dialogue with Saul’s “we are a métis civilization” claim and general treatment of the Métis people in *A Fair Country*. “To a fair country” differentiates itself from “national anthem,” however, in that its content seems to be responding directly to the literal meaning of Saul’s title, answering the unspoken question: Is Canada a fair country? To answer this question,

the poem examines the history of the deployment of the land scrip policy by the Canadian government against the Métis people.

Land scrip, or “half-breed” scrip, referred to “negotiable certificates redeemable in land or cash that entitled their holder to take up land or to receive money or some other form of compensation. The Canadian government issued scrip to Metis in the Prairie West, purportedly to extinguish their aboriginal title to the region” (Hogue 183). The words of Prime Minister John A. Macdonald in an 1885 House of Commons debate encapsulate the motivating theory of the land settlement policy: “If they are Indians, they go with the tribe [...] if they are Halfbreeds, they are whites” (183). Macdonald’s categorization of “Halfbreeds” as white coupled with his limited understanding of the Métis people therefore simultaneously excluded the Métis from land treaties and denied them of any land rights accorded to white settlers. LaRocque explains:

This attitude and policy had a devastating impact on the Metis. While prairie Indians secured reserves and other rights through treaties and White re-settlers received homesteads and other assistance, the Metis were subjected to a chaotic scrip program, both in Red River and again in the North West, which left them largely without ownership of lands, either as individuals or a collective. As a result, the Metis found themselves squatters on lands not yet claimed by White immigrants, or on “road allowance” strips of land in unoccupied Crown lands, literally living on the edge of roads and valiantly making a living both from harvesting the land and wage-based seasonal labour. For about a century the Metis were indeed Canada’s “forgotten people.” (LaRocque)

The land scrip policy, which began in the 1870s, therefore played an instrumental and far-reaching role in the process of the sidelining and erasure of the Métis people, until their official

recognition as a distinct Indigenous people a century later in 1982. LaRocque's reference to the "road allowance" strips of lands suggests that the Métis people were forced to live in an impermanent, in-between space, an image that strengthens the efforts of Bouvier and Dumont's poetic voices to create and claim a space of their own.

"To a fair country" opens with an epigraph of British-American poet Rosalind Brackenbury's poem, "Poetry in Time of War": "I want to forget their names, the generals." This act of citing an external text recalls Bouvier's engagement with the technique of found poetry, specifically the explicit and non-explicit citations of several external texts within "national anthem" (Brackenbury line 1). Brackenbury's "Poetry in Time of War" addresses and denounces the unnecessary violence and politics of war, and wishes instead "to be washed of them,/ to begin again" (lines 11-12). By citing this poem, "To a fair country" then brings these themes of violence, politics, and renewal into its discussion of land scrip and the relationship between the Canadian government and the Métis people. "To a fair country" borrows the first line of "Poetry in Time of War" and uses it as its own: "I want to forget their names," this time referring to "the scrip commissioners and their escorts" in lieu of "the generals" (Dumont line 1). While "Poetry in Time of War" repeats the phrase "I want to forget" once more, "To a fair country" begins all nine stanzas with the phrase, thereby emphasizing the phrase's significance. This repetition and emphasis demonstrate the impossibility of the phrase's stated desire— in listing exactly what the "I" wants to forget, the speaker is remembering them, committing them to memory. The repetition of "I want to forget" evokes the classroom punishment of rewriting a phrase over and over again in order to not forget it, a punishment often used in the Indian residential school system and an image that frequently appears in Indigenous poetry. The poem

therefore reveals the contradictory nature of wishing to forget a harmful event that is simultaneously inherent to the development of one's community's history.

By contextualizing the poem through historical detail and directly identifying the perpetrators of the scrip policy (or theft), Dumont's "To a fair country" can be read as more explicitly critical and contestatory of the Canadian government and its representatives than Bouvier's "national anthem," which criticizes the government through its national anthem and its representative figures. Though the majority of the stanzas in "To a fair country" are comprised of historical events, the final stanza, the last thing the speaker wants to forget, is "the number of Métis/ less than one percent/ who hold property from that scrip today" (Dumont lines 36-38). Whereas the preceding stanza addresses the "1921 amended Criminal Code of Canada," "today" abruptly shifts the tense of the poem into the present, reminding the reader of the lasting detrimental impact of the land scrip policy that the speaker wishes she had the luxury of forgetting (line 32).

Dumont's poem "It Crosses My Mind" engages in a poetic project similar to that of "national anthem," and thereby enters into a productive dialogue with Bouvier's poem. Like "national anthem," "It Crosses My Mind" addresses and explores the same questions of Canadian citizenship and national belonging, from a Métis perspective. Both speakers initiate their poems by responding to the works of renowned Canadian sociologists: in the case of "national anthem," John Ralston Saul, and in the case of "It Crosses My Mind," John Porter. "It Crosses My Mind" opens with the line, "It crosses my mind to wonder where we fit in this 'vertical mosaic,' this colour colony," a line that references John Porter's 1965 seminal study of social and ethnic disparity in Canada, *The Vertical Mosaic* (line 1). In *The Vertical Mosaic*, Porter works to dismantle the myth of Canada as a true democracy or meritocracy, demonstrating

instead the uneven distribution of educational and social mobility and the overrepresentation of one ethnic and social group—white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants—at the most elite and powerful levels of Canadian society. “Vertical mosaic” refers to Porter’s conceptualization of Canada as “a hierarchical patchwork of classes and ethnic groups” (Helmes-Hayes). The speaker offers a second name for the concept of the vertical mosaic: “this colour colony,” a name which plays with the multiple definitions of “colony,” evoking both the idea of “a settlement in a new country” and a honeybee colony, composed of a mosaic-like structure and a ‘social’ hierarchy of its own. The adjective “colour,” a superficial reference to the colors of a mosaic, makes clear that the hierarchy of this colony is organized by race. By defining the “we” as “the urban pariah,” the speaker affirms the “we”’s position at the bottom of the hierarchy.

In questioning where she, and her Métis community, belong in this hierarchical patchwork, the speaker asks, “are we distinct ‘survivors of white noise,’ or merely hostages in the enemy camp” (lines 3-5). The line’s reference to “survivors of white noise” calls upon the metaphor of “white noise” that can be found throughout Métis and other Indigenous literature and scholarship. In *Translingual Poetics*, Sarah Dowling refers to “the white noise produced by the settler state” as a defining term for the white cultural, political, and economic domination in Canada (Dowling 6). The speaker is thus asking herself whether or not the Métis have escaped this domination. The section of the collection in which this poem—as well as “Letter to Sir John A. Macdonald” and “Leather and Naughahyde”—appear is itself titled “White Noise.” Each of the poems that appears in this section takes up an aspect of the Métis people’s relationship with the dominant force of European Canada, including the notion of the “halfbreed,” Catholicism, English’s erasure of Cree, and national belonging. In taking up and subsequently opposing these

concepts, the poems seek to pierce through or interrupt the wavelength of the “white noise” that dominates Canadian culture without allowing room for other noise, or voices.

Similarly to the speaker in “national anthem,” the speaker in “It Crosses My Mind” repeats a question to herself, which originates from a mundane job application but serves as the catalyst for the existential exploration of identity that the poem describes: “Are you a Canadian citizen?” (line 21). The speaker wonders whether she is “expected to mindlessly check ‘yes,’ indifferent to skin colour and the deaths of 1885” or if she is “actually free to check ‘no,’ like *the true north/ strong and free*” (lines 6-8). Here, the speaker creates another parallel to “national anthem” by citing “O Canada,” in a context that similarly highlights the irony of Canada’s national anthem. The citation of the national anthem—the poem’s third of several citations—and its italicized format both recall Bouvier’s technique of weaving in citations of external text into her poems, particularly “national anthem.” In this instance, the irony of the anthem is created by the juxtaposed images of imprisonment—“hostages in the enemy/ camp”—and of purported freedom—“*true north strong and free.*” “O Canada” is later referred to as “their self-absorbed anthem” (line 17). The speaker wonders, or rather doubts, that she has the freedom to check the box that most accurately describes her sense of self. The speaker later describes this lack of freedom as “no space provided to/ write my historical interpretation here” (lines 22-23). This idea of a lack of space and freedom is made visible by the cramped configuration of the poem, an effect created by the formatting of the poem in justified text. Additionally, the stylistic choice to compose the poem out of only one extended sentence contributes to the impression of the spoken quality of the poem and indicates the speaker’s agitated state of mind. However, the formatting of the poem can also be interpreted as resisting the imposed spatial limitations in the form of the poetic device of mid-line extended spaces in the latter half of the poem. This device, which

functions similarly in both Dumont and Bouvier's poetry, creates literal space where the speaker claims there is none. The poem is therefore flouting structural expectations and creating the space that the speaker desires but cannot find; it is creating a third space that can exist outside of the binary imposed by the job application. In indicating that to "check 'yes'" would be to choose an option that is "indifferent to skin colour and the deaths of 1885," the speaker suggests that to label herself as a Canadian citizen without qualification or more "space" would be to not acknowledge her own or the Métis people's ethnic or historical reality.

The speaker later confirms this implication by imagining how the constricting, whitewashing label of 'Canadian citizen' would not allow her to identify her "own kin [...] other than by shape of nose and cheekbone, colour of eyes and hair" (lines 8, 13-14). The speaker expresses her desire to transgress the limits of bureaucratic forms and check both "*yes and no,*" or "*yes, but no ... there's more,*" suggesting that her response to the question, her sense of self, lies somewhere in between the "yes" and "no," somewhere amongst the "and" and the ellipses (lines 24-25). The speaker is searching for a space between the binary where she can exist and maintain her true identity. In the final lines of the poem, the speaker turns toward the future, specifically the future of her young niece, "whose mother is Métis but only half as Métis as her grandmother" (lines 26-27). In pondering this 'dilution' of Métis heritage, the speaker concludes the poem by asking a final question: "what will she name herself/ and will there come a time and can it be measured or predicted when/ she will stop naming herself and crossing her own mind" (lines 27-29). This final question resembles the poem's main question's concern with self-identification. The speaker wonders if her niece, when faced with a similar question, will name herself as Métis or as a Canadian citizen or whether she will name herself at all. Like the question, "Are you a Canadian citizen?", this final question is left unanswered by its status as the

final lines of the poem. However, the poem's fourth and final extended space appears between "my eight-year-old niece" and "whose mother is Métis," a formal choice that suggests that the poem is attempting to create a space where the speaker's niece will be free of the need to cross her own mind.

VII. Conclusion

In each of these Dumont poems, the speaker opposes, references, or responds to the ideas of a white Canadian man of cultural significance. The speaker of these poems, much like the speaker of Bouvier's "national anthem" and "the map of my heart," refuses to be defined or pigeonholed by these figures. In opposition, the speaker, as well as the speaker of Bouvier's poems, assert their poetic voice through their positioning of themselves the subject of the poems, the use of Cree-Michif, and the repetition of the poetic device of the extended space. The speakers of both Bouvier and Dumont's poetry acknowledge and address the history of exclusion and oppression to which their community has been subjected, but they reject the passive position that has been imposed upon them. So that they cannot be defined by the claims of those who aim to limit or exclude them, the speakers must claim their agency and subjectivity, their right to be the storytellers of their own story. In doing so, the speakers take from the power of those who have disproportionately controlled the narrative and carry on the Métis Nation's tradition of storytelling. Even by doing this, there is an act of internal rebellion, as these female poets are taking over the role of storyteller from the Métis men who traditionally held this position, while the women were charged with making tea for guests (Campbell). Operating as the "I"s and "We"s of their poems, the speakers assert their authority to tell their own story, and the story of their community. The presence of Cree-Michif in many of these poems repeatedly signals the

presence of an Indigenous voice and culture that refuses to be forgotten or erased. These instances of multilingual use oppose the monolingual domination of the English language that makes up the majority of the poems. The speakers' predominant use of English can be interpreted as a further subversion of the dominating effects of English, as the speakers are employing the language that has been used against them for centuries to assert their own voices and tell the story of this domination.

The speakers move beyond the relationship of the oppressor and the oppressed through the repeated appearance of mid-line extended spaces throughout both Bouvier and Dumont's poetry. These formally created spaces allow the speakers and the community they represent to move past the many binary structures that have been imposed upon them, such as the binary of the colonizer and the colonized or the binary of Indigenous and European. They move beyond these binaries to a third space, which, by definition, interferes with and breaks down the two-pole structure of the binaries. Though this space may not yet be fully formed beyond the lines of these poems, by creating a third space, the speakers are claiming not only their authorial power, but also their right to occupy such a space. Outside of the limitations of a dichotomy and inside this third space, the speakers are able to assert their poetic voices and conceptions of self, unrestricted by the expectations of those who are invested in the maintenance of the binary structure. Through the poetic devices they employ, the poetry of Bouvier and Dumont gives power and authority to the Métis poetic voice.

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