

Resource Rhetoric in Three Canadian Novels, 1919-1945

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

In this dissertation, I propose the term resource rhetoric to describe the cultural logic that renders extractivism an interminable part of Canadian identity. As Canada solidified its settler-colonial expansion in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, there was an attendant formalization of infrastructures promoting the extractivist ambitions of the state. Within those infrastructures a resource discourse—of natural resources and human resource management—was born. In *Resource Rhetoric in Three Canadian Novels, 1919-1945*, I examine three novels that articulate a cultural dimension to Canada's broad attempt to adapt workers to a confluence of precarious working conditions in the first half of the twentieth century. I analyze the downplaying of class formation in these novels and link it to their use of resource rhetoric—tropes and figures that assert the primacy of the extractivist state over and against the primacy of the working-class collective.

My thesis develops by first establishing the 1919-1945 period as one marked by an unease about whether workers could truly become the “human resources” Canada's extractivist economy needed. I explore how this uncertainty is manifested in Douglas Durkin's 1923 novel *The Magpie*, an economic novel set during the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike. I then demonstrate that during the interwar period, a worker's success in embodying the ideal Canadian “human resource” identity was measured against a racial hierarchy emerging from eugenic ideology. In my analysis of Irene Baird's 1938 novel *Waste Heritage*, I consider how the “rank and sort” logic of eugenics is used to calibrate moral rectitude in the novel's portrayal of labour strife among Canada's Depression-era unemployed. In the second part of my thesis, I consider how human resource discourse expanded to include social reproductive labour in the period just prior to the establishment of Canada's welfare state. I argue that Gabrielle Roy's 1945 novel *The Tin Flute* makes the home a terrain for potential class struggle against the exploitation of women's work, while at the same time positioning this work as vital for the Canadian state to function.

The rhetorical framing of workers in these novels consistently emphasizes their lack of agency and cooperation; foregrounds their interchangeability, and stresses workers' inability to overcome their circumstances because of these factors. They articulate a deep-seated clash between the imperative that workers act as assets to Canada's resource state, and the imperative that they might improve their lives through class formation and solidarity. While these novels are generally aligned with the resource discourse of the era, they demonstrate one fundamental failure of extractivist ideologies and resource logic: a person can never truly be a “dematerialized asset,” or a “universal Canadian worker subject.” My main claim in this thesis is that these novels show that to be a human resource is an unattainable goal.

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Dedication

To Mark Adam Dishon Benzan. You see my hope and I see yours, and without that none of this would have been possible.

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We need poets, we need painters
We need poets, we need painters
We need poetry and paintings

We need filmers, and writers, dancers, musicians
Actors, and sculptors, bakers, electricians
Thinkers, and doctors, cyclists, and builders
Lovers, friends, and neighbours, and others
Filmers, writers, dancers, musicians
Poets and painters, poets and painters

—The Ex, “Listen to the Painters”

Introduction:

Resource Rhetoric in Three Canadian Novels, 1919-1945

For it is not only in the simple possession of great natural resources that a country's fortune consists. Fertile lands in far flung prairies, wide expanses of forest, boundless mineral belts, great lakes and rapid rivers alone, do not constitute a country. It calls for a people of the right kind to go out and occupy these possessions, to labour on them energetically, to employ resourcefulness, ingenuity and patience in their development.

—Charles Hamilton Mitchell
“Canada’s Resources in Development”

Guess if we was some kind of mineral land or had oil gushing out of us the big money interests would take us over and turn us into cash but on the hoof we are not worth a nickel.

—Irene Baird
Waste Heritage

I. Introduction

Charles Hamilton Mitchell was born in Petrolia Ontario in 1872 and worked as a civil engineer for much of his early life, specializing in hydraulic and hydro-electric power development and overseeing the design and construction of a number of plants in the Maritimes, Ontario, and Western Canada. He became the dean of the Faculty of Applied Science at the University of Toronto in 1919, serving in that role until his death in 1941 (“Charles Hamilton Mitchell”). Mitchell authored the essay “Canada’s Resources in Development” for the *University of Toronto Quarterly* in 1932, detailing each of Canada’s resource industries and their stages of development, as well as numerous infrastructure projects. What is striking about this essay is the rhetorical construction of human *and* natural resources as the parallel keys to Canada’s success as a nation, with the “human” element being of more significance to Mitchell—unsurprising for

the dean of a faculty of science. In fact, he exclaims total faith in Canadian “human resources” to spur the development he sees as required in Canada moving ahead:

While these directions in which Canada's development has become outstanding are all of a nature in which enterprise and engineering have taken a preeminent part, other factors must not be overlooked. With the development of these material resources there has simultaneously progressed the parallel development of Canada's human resources, providing the energy, thrift and intelligence needed to achieve success. *The one has made possible the other and the two have marched together.* (429, my emphasis).

For Mitchell, human and natural resources are co-constitutive and “made,” not discovered or naturally occurring. As the epigraph to this chapter states, it is only with the “right kind” of people to “labour energetically” that this national development can be made possible—Canada’s human resources must “march together” with its natural resources, and only with that (and proper training) will there be societal success (429). Mitchell’s rhetorical formulation of the parallel notions of human and natural resources speaks to the broad concern of this dissertation: the ideological transformation of work, and the people performing it, into “human resources” under a resource regime where natural and human resources “march together,” and an exploration of the degree to which *people* may have been understood as *resources* by authors writing novels about the labour struggles in the 1919-1945 period in Canada. My central claim is that these novels reveal the fundamental incompatibility between Canada’s human resource discourse—vital for its extractivist practices—and notions of worker solidarity and class formation.

Irene Baird does not use the word “resources” or “human resources” in *Waste Heritage*, her modernist reportage novel documenting the sit-down strikes of British Columbia in the late

1930s. But the title suggests a comparison of the unemployed to a form of biological detritus – *waste*, a comparison that exceeds the metaphorical in a book replete with eugenic rhetoric. Baird’s language communicates an understanding of working-class people as a resource to be used for the production of profit, whether that be for the capitalist or for the nation. In this thesis, I take up the exploration of the degree to which people came to be understood as resources in twentieth century Canada by examining three novels portraying labour struggles. None of these explicitly may use the word “resources,” but my argument is that each of these novels employs rhetoric that discursively understands people as “assets that can be drawn on when necessary,” like money or materials, or other abstracted entities, which is in fact the most basic definition of “resources” (“Resources”). Throughout this dissertation, I examine the broad consequences of depicting human workers as resources. My primary focus, however, is to understand what Canadian fiction can tell us about the consequences for labour movements when workers are understood as resources, rather than as collectives, or as a class.

This study explores Douglas Durkin’s 1923 novel *The Magpie*, Irene Baird’s 1939 novel *Waste Heritage*, and Gabrielle Roy’s 1945 novel *Bonheur d’occasion* (English title, *The Tin Flute*). These novels portray the labour struggles that sparked across Canada in the early twentieth century and stage these struggles in urban settings saturated by the immediate reality of Canada’s resource economy. At times, these novels link the exploitation of workers with the exploitation of the natural environment, and hint at a deeper connection between the two. They therefore help us understand attitudes about the environment and human labour that were formative in the development of Canada as an extractivist state. By representing labour struggles and the refusal of labour, key attributes of how these novels understand resources—their *resource thinking*—become evident. In this dissertation, I engage with resource thinking by

exploring what I have called *resource rhetoric*. These are the tropes and figures used by authors to *inscribe* workers as human resources—a literary process of bodily transmutation animated by the cultural and political imaginaries of the era, which informed Charles Hamilton Mitchell’s argued belief that only by making workers into resources could Canada truly thrive as a nation.

These novels offer examples of the recognition by writers of workers being made into resources. Perhaps surprisingly, given this recognition, each of these novels downplays the importance of *class* in the history of labour in Canada. The concept of class has multiple meanings. The most well-known of these is class as system of “structured inequality” within societies based on levels of income or wealth (Wright 10). The understanding of classes as social strata was famously elucidated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who explained that in capitalism, economic and social systems are defined by two main classes: the owners of the means of production and those whose labour is exploited for their profit—the working class (Marx and Engels 474). But the idea of class has a meaning that goes beyond occupying a stratum in society, which is the idea of classes as antagonistic “formations.”

Class formations are groups of people occupying the same class position who come together as collective political actors as a result of class struggle (Therborn 39-40). Working classes, massed together in workplaces, communities or cultures, like “potatoes in a sack form a sackful of potatoes,” become a class formation not because they are accreted into one socio-economic category (i.e., statistically) but because they *constitute themselves* into a political unit through a consciousness of their shared subjugation and acts of struggle to eradicate it (Marx, *Eighteenth Brumaire* 117). In this thesis, I take class to refer to working class formations as groups who unite to take power away from the capitalist class, contest their subordinate position, or contest the class relation itself. These groups may appear as political parties, unions, political

action groups, or any group of people coalescing to counter the capitalist oppression of working-class people.

In the interwar period, working class formations—groups understanding themselves as classes, ready to contest the forces that created socio-economic haves and have-nots—existed around the world. They existed in force in Canada as well (McKay 74). The fact that the novels I analyze in this study minimize working class formation is telling, given the socio-political landscape in which they emerged. By appearing to diminish, de-emphasize or hide instances where working class people grasped their shared predicament *and* did something to advance their interests, these novels diverged from leftist literary cultures flowering at the time in Canada. As opposed to the poetry, plays, literary magazines and associations that celebrated this tremendous era of struggle of workers against owners, these novels choose to foreground conflicts *between* workers, the isolation and alienation they experienced, and the many ways in which their circumstances were immutable and beyond their ability to reverse.¹ I link this pervasive downplaying of class formation to these novels' use of resource rhetoric, a rhetoric which assumes the primacy of the extractivist state over and against the primacy of the working class collective.

In the first part of this dissertation, I examine two novels set during the most famous of Canada's interwar labour actions: the Winnipeg General Strike (1919), the setting of *The Magpie*, and the Depression-era sit-down strikes in British Columbia (1938), the setting of *Waste Heritage*. I analyse the dearth of depictions of working-class solidarity in these novels and explore the many ways they portray the controlling influence of Canada's extractivist state on

¹ See Filewod (2011), Rifkind (2009), and Watt (1977) for discussions of Canada's literary left in the interwar period.

their characters' lives as something incontrovertible and impossible to dislodge. The second section investigates a novel written in the early years of World War Two, *The Tin Flute*. While this novel depicts the precarity of all inhabitants of Montreal's St. Henri neighbourhood, I focus on Roy's portrayal of the difficulties faced by women performing domestic work in the home. Written just prior to postwar labour laws that would standardize employee relations and institute "gendered labour market dualism," *The Tin Flute* depicts social reproductive labour as a necessary element in Canada's overall political economy (a reality the labour laws that followed failed to address) (Fudge and Vosko 272). In this novel, social reproductive labour is shown to be yet another exploitable resource, and workers are represented as too isolated and overcome by poverty to collectively press governments or employers to improve their conditions.

Canada is a resource economy. It is also a nation of resource labourers who support this economy and are necessary to make it function. Literature in Canada has long been attuned to these realities, including the inequalities such an economy can create and the labour unrest these inequalities can generate in turn. In addition to the novels I examine here, Canadian fictions of resource include: Cecil Foster's *Slammin' Tar* (1998), which explores the struggles of migrant agricultural workers in 1990s Ontario; Alistair Macleod's *The Lost Salt Gift of Blood* (1976), a collection of short stories set in a Nova Scotia marked indelibly by the extractivist economies of fish, timber and coal mining; and the depictions of logging camps in Northern Ontario in Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of the Lion* (1987). Poetry about the precarious and dangerous work of the extractive industry includes the gold mining ballads of Robert Service, the "bard of the woods"; the logger poetry of Robert Swanson; the reflections on extraction by Pat Lowther; and contemporary work by Warren Cariou, Canisia Lubrin, and Rita Wong. There are also numerous comics that deal with extraction, including Kate Beaton's *Ducks* (2020), Simon

Orphana's *Gasoline Dreams: Waking Up from Petroculture* (2021), and Joe Sacco's *Paying the Land* (2020).

Like these texts, *The Magpie*, *Waste Heritage* and *The Tin Flute* index the relevance of Canada's resource economy for the central components of life in the country, especially the ability to earn a livelihood. The locus of much of the action in *The Magpie* is the Winnipeg Grain Exchange in 1919. The strikes depicted in *Waste Heritage* were led by migrant workers previously employed in extractive industries like mining, logging, and wheat farming. *The Tin Flute*, set in the more industrialized and developed Montreal of 1940, situates social reproduction labour as a vital node in an infrastructure of resource extraction. All these novels reflect the centrality of Canada's resource economy through the depiction of labour disputes and work. But even more importantly, as I will argue, these novels register their characters' inability to overcome labour inequality as a problem connected to their status as workers within a resource economy, where workers are positioned as "human resources" within a broader resource regime. Crucially, and differently from the literary texts mentioned above, these novels were written during a time when discourses surrounding natural and human resources were solidifying, and just before major labour legislation would come into force during and after World War Two.²

² One of the most important pieces of legislation was the 1944 order-in-council PC 1003, which "gave workers the right to unionize and bargain collectively in individual workplaces. In exchange, union leaders agreed to act against their members' 'direct action' tactics (slowdowns, sitdowns, walkouts, etc.) while collective agreements were in force." (Wells 149). A temporary wartime measure, the gains of P.C. 1003 had to be enshrined in law to be adopted by the provinces, and the Industrial Relations and Disputes Investigations Act (IRDA) in 1948 did just that (Palmer 238). These acts, in combination with welfare state provisions; the "standard employment relationship" (which defined employment as working in one location, usually the employer's premises, for a set period of hours per week) (Fudge and Vosko 273); and citizenship

These novels therefore serve as portals to the ideas fomenting about the role of human work in Canada's resource economy, the forces compelling the solidification of labour law within Canada's postwar resource economy, and the future legal and cultural interpretation of workers in Canada.

II. Resource Discourse in Canada before World War Two

The novels I examine in this thesis participated in the development of the discourse of "natural resources" and "human resources" in Canada in the early twentieth century, contributing to debates about the future of Canada's resource economy and the role of workers within it.³ Scholars who study the field of "human resources" in Canada have traced the widespread use of the term to attempts by public and private administration in the twentieth century to extricate "labour problems" from the purview of communist activists and union organizers, and brand them as something that could be solved by the "rational" application of management principles.

law, established in 1947, which restricted the application of legally enforceable employment standards and rights to *citizen* workers, all amount to what is referred to as the postwar compromise between capital and labour.

³ By discourse, I mean not only linguistic meaning and rhetorical impact, but the infrastructures of knowledge by which power (often state power) is internalized and reproduced in fields such as medicine, science, education, and culture. This sense of discourse is defined both by language and the social fields in which language is employed. Discourse is an essential component of the process Michel Foucault names "power/knowledge," in which concepts generate meanings and distinctions at the same time as hierarchies and structures of power. The nomenclature of discourse and the method of discourse analysis have become normative ways of tracing the emergence of politico-cultural ideas and language.

Human resource historian Tim Krywulak notes that “at the turn of the twentieth century there were virtually no university courses, conferences, or institutes organized around ‘human resources.’ But by the end of the Second World War the academic study of these ‘labour problems’ had become a veritable growth industry” (71).

Krywulak argues that the regime of human resources originates in the period prior to World War Two, when “individuals and populations had to be shaped in ways that would make them productive, sustainable, and governable by way of the ‘science’ of human resources management, which would address the ‘problem’ of the human factor in production” (73).

Human resource discourse emerged in Canada with the appearance of labour movements in the early 1900s, and business-led movements for “industrial betterment” appeared in conjunction with it (Krywulak 74). As Krywulak notes,

What set personnel management apart from the other new management sciences was its distinctive blending of political economy, psychology, sociology, production engineering, and cost accounting, as well as its specific focus on the administrative and motivational aspects of the management of “human resources.” These included laboratories, departments and numerous books by Canadians such as R.M. MacIver’s *Labor in the Changing World* from 1919. In this work, MacIver, a professor of Political Economy at the University of Toronto, located at least part of the problems of contemporary industrial relations in the “lack of appreciation of worker psychology.” (77-78)

Human resource discourse also extended into the vocational-guidance movement and “the idea that individuals might be ideally sorted into different occupations” as well as “man-rating” systems or early instances of “performance reviews” (83). As Krywulak’s research suggests, by the end of World War Two, “human resource management had emerged as a relatively coherent

set of ideologies and practices circulating throughout the school system, the state, and workplace within Canada and other advanced-industrial societies” (93). As the text by Charles Hamilton Mitchell that begins this dissertation attests, a discourse of human resources was fully entrenched by the 1930s, readily understood by publics and academic communities alike.

The discourse of “natural resources” came about in Canada at approximately the same time, when Canadian state power over raw material extraction and colonization consolidated via a regime of interconnected administrative bodies. The history and purviews of the federal departments responsible for natural resources can serve as an index for the emergence of a discourse of natural resources and its inextricable entanglement with the colonization of Indigenous lands.⁴ The precursor to the present-day Natural Resources Canada was the Geological Survey of Canada (GSC), established in 1842 under the auspices of the Province of Canada (the British colony of Upper and Lower Canada), an organization still in existence that collects and performs geoscientific research (“Our History”). At its origins, the GSC was a major administrative arm of government, which surveyed mineral deposits in the region, publicized Canada as a location for investment, colonial expansion and settlement, and promoted Canada’s natural resources internationally (Pannekoek 90-91). As environmental historian Suzanne Zeller has argued with reference to the GSC, “this way of creating an inventory of the land gave rise to

⁴ As noted by resource sociologist Katie Mazer, with reference to the work of Frances Abele (1987, pg. 313) the naming history of federal departments indicates “a history inextricably linked to shifting industrial geographies of resource prospects” (*Roads to Resources* 31, note 51). See Abele for a detailed discussion of this regarding Northern colonization and development in the twentieth century (313).

the idea of a transcontinental national existence and imparted to Canadians a sense of direction for the future” (Pannekoek 91).

A separate Department of Mines was established in 1907, which became the Department of Mines and Resources in 1936 (“Department of Mines and Resources”). The intervening years saw a major administrative overhaul, further illustrating the intertwined development of Canada’s colonial expansion and its extractive industries. After the passage of the Natural Resource Acts in 1930, which dissolved the Department of the Interior and gave administrative control of natural resources to the provinces west of Ontario (Lothian 5), the new Department of Mines and Resources brought together the departments of Indian Affairs, Northern Affairs and the Department of Immigration and Colonization under the auspice of the Department of Mines and Resources (Government of Canada; Parliament of Canada). This administrative consolidation was a formalization of the co-extensive and constitutive relationship between natural resource development in Canada and the colonization of Indigenous lands. A complex history, these shifting jurisdictions attest to the imbrication of the remit of “resources” with the remit of “Indian Affairs.”

Forming the background to the discursive rise of the twin notions of human and natural resources was Canada’s National Policy, which was instituted by John A. Macdonald in 1876 and continued into the early twentieth century (Heintzman 2). This policy brought to life the intertwined goals of colonial expansion and natural resource extraction through massive infrastructural projects. It originally promoted a nationalist strategy meant to prove MacDonald’s interest in national well-being and “steal the thunder” of the incipient “Canada First” movement, which viewed MacDonald and confederation as vehicles of elite interest (Vigod). The National Policy agenda included, among other things, protectionist trade policies, infrastructure for

increased extraction of raw materials (such as the trans-continental railway), and increased immigration and settlement infrastructure. Forced migration and dispossession of Indigenous land was essential to enable extraction, establish circulation routes, and locate permanent settlements of workers in extractive communities. This can be understood as a general trend in North America in the latter half of the nineteenth century, where, following increased industrialization, North American colonial processes “increasingly focused on the elimination of Indian peoples in order to gain access to their territory for the purpose of resource extraction” (Huseman and Short, qtd by Willow 3).

As political theorist Tyler Shipley notes in *Canada in the World: Settler Capitalism and the Colonial Imagination*, “Canada’s colonial project was driven by one fundamental material goal—the destruction of Indigenous political economic practices and their displacement by capitalism—and an equally important ideological foundation in the claim that Europeans were racially and culturally advanced and, thus, that their conquest of Indigenous Peoples represented ‘progress’” (2). Shipley’s emphasis on the interplay between ideology and “economic compulsion” is important here, as in conjunction with Canada’s colonial expansion in the later nineteenth and earlier twentieth century there was an upsurge of anti-imperial movements within the British empire. There was also militant domestic Indigenous resistance, such as the Red River Rebellion (1869–1870), which brought to consciousness the violence of this whole process.⁵ These factors, in concert, may have helped generate the need for a resource ideology that would instill the validity of Canada’s national goals and the goals of its elite financial backers.

⁵ See, for example, Sohi (2011) for the impact of Indian anticolonial movements on North American labour practices.

The discursive entanglement of resource ideology and colonization has also been categorically asserted by Indigenous North American critical theorists. Métis anthropologist Zoe Todd notes “resources is just another word for colonialism” (qtd in Curley 79), and with this statement elucidates how the word “resources,” enforces power and dominance as both an epistemological category and a form of state power. Navajo geographer Andrew Curley offers a similar account of the function of the term “resource.” “To turn nature into resources,” he writes, “is to violently abstract from complex and interconnected ecological processes for purposes of extraction and exploitation” (79).⁶ The violent practice of forcing Indigenous people from their lands is justified by transforming extracted materials into something more important to the state’s existence than the communities inhabiting the land.⁷ I focus on a similar transformation

⁶ In *Red Skin, White Masks*, Glenn Coulthard contrasts resource colonialism in Canada with the Indigenous economic model of “grounded normativity” (60, 172). Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson define this concept as “the ethical frameworks provided by these Indigenous place-based practices and associated forms of knowledge. Grounded normativity houses and reproduces the practices and procedures, based on deep reciprocity, that are inherently informed by an intimate relationship to place. Grounded normativity teaches us how to live our lives in relation to other people and nonhuman life forms in a profoundly nonauthoritarian, nondominating, nonexploitive manner” (254).

⁷ Peyton and Keeling explain this context in more depth: “In early Canada, mineral exploration and development contributed directly to the dispossession of Indigenous land and territorial sovereignty on the extractive frontier. Time and again mineral developments precipitated waves of settler invasion that rapidly displaced Indigenous communities. In many instances, such invasions precipitated Indigenous resistance. Typically, the discovery of valuable mineral resources prompted hasty treaty-making by the settler colonial state, a process designed to sever Indigenous people from their lands and territories, in order to gain access to the subsurface” (117).

in these novels, the discursive transformation of unemployed, poor and striking workers into the human resources required by Canada's extractivist state. I contend in this dissertation that this transformation of workers is of equal violence to the abstracting of raw materials into "natural resources." It transfigures individuals—tearing asunder their personhood, communal ties, and entanglements with environments—into dematerialized assets, serving the needs of the extractivist state.

III. Extractivism: A Narrative Necessity

In *The Politics of Style: Towards a Marxist Poetics* (2016), literary theorist Daniel Hartley explains how an attention to emplotment, the process by which authors convert the "raw material of social experience into literary works" and the ways in which those works use plot to invest necessity, causality and logic into events, allows Marxist critics to trace the ideological assumptions literary texts mediate (4). As opposed to mere *mimesis*, or the imitation of human activity, *muthos* names "the operation of organizing events into a system or synthesis." Through an attention to *muthos*, or emplotment, critics can "reconstruct[s] the precise coordinates of the historical situation in which the work arose and to which it was a response, seeking that elusive point at which the 'inner' necessity of the work coincides with the 'external' necessity of the historical situation" (4). By this process of pinpointing causality at the confluence of narrative and historical necessity, it is possible to deduce that certain historical realities are *prescribed as necessary* for narrative completion (Hartley 5). Analyzing how these novels explain Canadian labour struggles, I find a recurring pattern in which workers' failure to adapt to Canada's resource economy is framed as the core problematic. With this, these novels depict Canada's extractivist state as a narrative necessity—a political given, like Aristotle's *polis*, which workers must become integrated with or face negative consequences.

By representing Canada's resource economy as immutable and sublime, these novels reflect *extractivist* beliefs and values. In this dissertation, I draw from Canadian political economic theory as well as the critical theory of extractivism to understand the adjustments to worker life these novels paint as necessary. While political economic studies articulate the crucial role of Canada's resource economy across all aspects of life, the critical theory of extractivism reveals the ideological backbone that sustains it. For example, a descriptive account of Canada's resource economy informed by Canadian political economy highlights the way in which each of its foundational resources—fish, furs, timber, wheat, minerals and fossil fuels—and their cultural and social impacts, might be understood as successive chapters in Canadian economic and social history (Stanford 80). It highlights how the particularities of staples extraction have had a controlling influence across any representation of Canada, especially by way of the civic, political and geographic infrastructures and technologies that developed as a result of the need to export and sell these resources (Innis 385; Ray vii; Watkins 141).⁸ And it notes the importance of staples export for the structure of the Canadian state itself, referring to it as a resource regime.⁹ A descriptive account of Canada's resource economy, especially one that

⁸ For example, The Canadian Pacific Railway was built with the financial backing of Alexander Tilloch, the founder of Northwestern Coal and Navigation Company, whose aim was to bring settlers to remote regions to work in the mines (*Dictionary of Canadian Biography*).

⁹ As resource sociologist Brenden Haley notes, Canada's political and infrastructural centralization was compelled by the vicissitudes of each resource wave: "Steamship facilitated centralized organization and traced Canada's geographic boundaries. The timber staple brought canals, immigration, and political union of the central Canadian colonies. Wheat development was linked to railroads, Confederation, and western settlement. In the twentieth century, the mineral, oil, and hydroelectric staples expanded development towards the Precambrian Shield

documents labour struggles, suggests how issues like unemployment or perpetual employment precarity arise from Canada's "export-led" economy, which is dependent on the vicissitudes of external markets, fluctuations of the global market and their permanent impact on demand for exports (Innis 385-386; Watkins 157).

But extractivist critical theory, an emancipatory orientation, emphasizes the constructed nature of extractivist states and the ideologies that must relentlessly uphold them.¹⁰ This makes extractivist theory useful for understanding *why* workers might be represented more as resources in these novels, and what politics we might infer from this literary transmutation. The critical theory of extractivism originates in Latin American development studies of the late twentieth and earlier twenty-first century, in which central figures like Ecuadorian economist Alberto Acosta argued that the European conquest and colonization of Africa, Asia and the Americas put in place what he understood as an "extractivist" world economy (Willow 3). This economy demanded "the plunder and looting of a society's wealth and natural resources, and the transfer of this wealth to the center of the system to the benefit of capital and empire" (Veltmeyer and Petras, 2014 quoted in Willow 3).¹¹ Terms like *extractivismo* were used by scholars and activists

and the Western Sedimentary Basin—contributing to a more regionally based political economic configuration. (98).

¹⁰ Canadian political economic theory, of course, should not be expected to operate as a *critical* theory. As Imre Szeman notes, "Critical theory would profess not only to understand the forces and processes that shaped social forms and practices, but to do so for emancipatory purposes" (*On Petrocultures* 9)

¹¹ While the original object of study for those analysing extractivism was societies that made mineral mining and fossil fuel removal central to their economies, "The sectorial focus has

to understand and help further Indigenous peoples' resistance to ways of life that continued beyond European colonial rule, and to help imagine "post-extractivist" ways of life (Chagnon et al 760).¹² While "resource economy" might be in some sense be a neutral word, "extractivism" broadly connotes plunder, destruction of local environments, ecologies and Indigenous societies, often including violent colonialism and unfair or brutal labour conditions.

I define extractivism as the removal of raw materials from their environments on a mass scale and the beliefs and values that justify it; this removal requires a justification because it often causes depletion and damage to the overall environment and has the potential to immiserate animals, people and natural environments at the site of extraction or broadly in society. In "What Do We Talk about When We Talk about Extractivism?" (2021) Imre Szeman and Jennifer Wenzel make the distinction between *bare extraction*, the "physical practice" of wresting raw materials from the earth, and *extractivism*, "the cultural and ideological rationale that either motivates extraction or is the consequence of it" (508). This distinction clarifies that extractivism

expanded...to agrarian or agro-extractivisms of different types, including forestry extractivism." (Chagnon et al 760). Mineral and fossil fuel extractions are notably different from agro and forestry extraction because the former are non-renewable resources. However, industrial farming and forestry like those practiced in Canada in the present and past can produce depletion and damage to ecosystems and these practices have been used as justification for the forced removal of Indigenous groups (See Ye et al 1).

¹² Within Canada, extractivism has become a key term that unites groups in opposition to pipelines, unwanted mines or resource developments, evident in such movements as Idle No More and Land Back, used to united Indigenous movements in opposition to extractive projects "from as far back as the fur trade right up to the current moment of tar sands expansion and pipeline development" (Gobby et al 2).

as a mode of critique does not condemn simply the removal of resources from the earth—an essential part of human life on earth—but is instead critical of the destructive and violent capacities of communities based on extraction and the ideology of extractivism that forms its rationale. As Willow notes, “Unlike extraction, extractivism is both principle and practice”; it is both the removal of natural materials from the earth and the justification, or “principle” that supplies the exigence for that action (2). In this way, extractivism as an ideology is *required* as a rationale because of the overwhelmingly evident destructive capacities of large-scale extractive political economies.¹³ Like resource discourse, extractivism is both *productive* of beliefs and practices as rationales, and *suppressive* of other beliefs and practices which do not contribute to the profit-making goals of extractive elites (Szeman and Wenzel 509).

Resource logic names the operation by which extractivism produces resources, and suppresses ecologies, including the human role in ecologies (Szeman and Wenzel 509). A “logic” is a perspectival lens that colours the way reality is understood; a set of beliefs and values about the world that influences what adherents of that ideology actually see, and what they believe is real. When a person or a society perceives the world via the lens of a “resource logic,” they see the complex earthly ecology formed of human and non-human life as if those things are “resources.” In this way, to interpret the world according to resource logic means to read life as inputs into an extractivist circuitry. And, through this operation, natural resources are produced, ecologies are suppressed, and a hierarchy is enforced: humans are dominant, and see

¹³ As Chagon et al note, “Extractivism as a concept forms a complex ensemble of self-reinforcing practices, mentalities, and power differentials underwriting and rationalizing socio-ecologically destructive modes of organizing life through subjugation, violence, depletion, and non-reciprocity” (760).

“nature primarily as something other than themselves, disposed for their use, and subject to their control” (Szeman and Wenzel 509). “Extractivism,” Gobby et al note, “erodes not only landscapes and their potential for recovery, but also relationships, cultural knowledge, and other ways of living, a process inseparable from ongoing patterns of dispossession and assimilation” (1). In this way, extractivism and its resource logic suppress the human role in earthly ecosystems, separating out natural and human functions and placing these two realms in opposition to each other.

The novels I study register to varying degrees the core tenets of extractivist ideology: humans are stripped of their role in ecosystems, reduced to “human resources” which support various functions in the extractivist state. These novels communicate the idea that to “fit” into an extractivist state as a worker, one must be made into the right *kind* of worker, produced in certain ways that require a repression of certain aspects of oneself. As Szeman and Wenzel write: “When nature appears before us solely as natural resource, other kinds of relation and value – ecological (including human flourishing within ecosystems) spiritual, cultural, aesthetic – are disregarded, becoming unthinkable and sometimes even materially unavailable, when ‘tak[ing] without giving back to the soil’ becomes the norm” (509). If a person sees nature only as something from which to “take and not give back,” this means that they are also repressing cultural, spiritual or affective ideas, practices, traditions or beliefs including ideas of, for example, interspecies or intercultural solidarity.

Sociologist Éric Pineault writes that in Canada a complex of actors, including a capitalist extractive class, political elites and resource workers and their communities, “exercise[s] a strong political and cultural hegemony to the point where national identity can be reconstructed around an extractivist imaginary that legitimates extractivism as a desired economic destiny” (144).

Imbued with mythic power, this destiny informs Canadian national identity in a way that yokes natural resources to human resources, as exemplified by Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper's 2006 declaration that Canada was to become a "twenty-first century energy superpower" or the Justin Trudeau government's declaration that building new pipelines is in the "national interest" (144). Extractivism, then, provides a meta-theory that can be used to understand how Canadian identity congeals around natural resource extraction, settler-colonialism, and the types of workers that are valued in its society.

As Pineault's examples suggest, Canadian extractivism reaches its nationalist apogee with the hegemony of the fossil fuel industry, with this resource surmounting all others in importance to Canadian identity by way of fossil energy's centrality to modern life, encapsulated by the term "petromodernity" (Szeman, *On Petrocultures* 225).¹⁴ The critical theory of extractivism became prevalent in the 2010s and 2020s in conjunction with the energy humanities, a concerted theoretical and cultural political attempt to resist and thwart what lies behind the devastation of climate change (Szeman, *On Petrocultures* 11; Szeman and Wenzel 515). Historicizing fossil capitalism in Canada within the trajectory of extractivism explains one facet of why a move *away* from fossil fuels is so difficult. And equally important, placing fossil fuel extractivism in contrast with other extractivist ideologies makes manifest what is so peculiar about petrocultures.¹⁵ This dissertation contributes to this trajectory by helping to trace the

¹⁴ Szeman notes in *On Petrocultures* (2019): "The modern subject, for example, has had her capacities radically redefined by cheap energy. The petrocultural subject's life is configure around the energies of millions of years of dead matter; what she understands as banal quotidian reality is in fact a bending and stretching of time to give the subject powers of movement, vision, and knowledge akin to that of the demigods found in ancient myth" (10).

cultural imaginary that made extractivism appear to be an immutable and sublime part of Canadian identity.

Literary critics who employ the critical theory of extractivism attend to the ways in which “literature, language, and discourse actively participated in the creation of an extraction-based society and of ideas of an extractable Earth” (Miller 405).¹⁶ These critics do not “take resources for granted,” or make “the landscape itself appear[s] inert: ready to be dismembered and packaged for export,” as Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing cautions against (1500). Instead, they foreground the co-constitution of natural and human resources, and the role played by human labour, a literary operation Wenzel refers to as the “improving eye” (5). In “Afterword: Improvement and Overburden” (2016), she argues that ostensible depictions of nature by authors frequently mask an underlying fantasy of nature’s *improvement* by human labour. She notes that the “logic of improvement joins its accounting of facts on the ground with prodigious imaginings of what will be” (Wenzel 5). This is the resource aesthetic identified by Wenzel, in which resources appear in a literary work via an “improving eye” or an “extracting eye” (5). She explains that it is this “trick of the eye [that] allows Columbus to look upon a river mouth and

¹⁵ While other forms of resource extractivism like fur, fish or minerals have had foundational impacts on Canadian society, fossil fuel extractivism has been more central to the expansion of capitalist modernity as well as mythologies of what constitutes “the good life” in Canada (Brunton 12-18).

¹⁶ For literary studies of extractivism, see Wenzel (2016); Rogers (2019); de Onís (2021); Hoyos (2021); Miller (2021) and Smith (2021). See Serafini (2022) and Andermann (2023) for studies of visual culture. For explorations of extractivism and Canadian literature, see two special issues of *Canadian Literature* entitled “Poetics and Extraction,” edited by Max Karpinski and Melanie Dennis Unrau (2022, 2023).

imagine a bustling harbor town, or Steinbeck's farmers to gaze longingly on empty fields and feel in their bones the satisfactions of labor and sustenance they might bring" (5). As a rhetorical figure of extractivist ideology, the improving eye names a literary move authors make to convert the natural spaces they depict into resources, and paint labour as the vitally necessary human resource required to fulfill these imaginings. Wenzel's notion (via Mary Louise Pratt) of the improving eye exemplifies the analytical affordances of an extractivist lens which I utilize in this study.

IV. Incomplete Adaptations: From Worker to Human Resource

Realist novels evince a contradictory tendency to both demystify and entrench prevailing modes of production (Jameson, *Antinomies of Realism* 4-5). In the classical Marxian understanding of the term, a mode of production is the way in which society is organized so as to provide sustenance to people, which means using the raw materials of nature to support life. As Marx writes, "all production is an appropriation of nature on the part of an individual within and through a specific form of society" (*Grundrisse* 87). In this way, a mode of production is not merely the technical production of the objects required to sustain life in a given era but is in fact a way of organizing society that impacts culture in a fundamental way. As Marx notes, "all epochs of production have certain common traits, common characteristics" (*Grundrisse* 85). And these epochs have particular social relations and particular subjects. "Production is not only a particular production," Marx writes, "Rather, it is always a certain social body, a social subject" (*Grundrisse* 86). As Fredric Jameson notes, literary realism betrays a vested ideological interest in "adapting its readers to bourgeois society as it currently exists, with its premium on comfort and inwardness, on individualism, on the acceptance of money as the ultimate reality" (*Antinomies of Realism* 5). As critics of realism, we witness not only the dramatic process by

which realism compels its characters to adapt to prevailing modes of production, but also how those characters' resist and defy that pressure to adapt.

In any given era, realist novels make character adaptation or maladjustment to the vicissitudes of capitalism synonymous with narrative closure. This adaptation is facilitated by *anagnorisis* (recognition), by which realist novels depict a character's realization of their place within their social world. This recognition sparks a personal change that can either align them more closely with that world or drive them further from it. This alignment can be understood as a *configuration* to a particular mode of production, in both places of work and in society more generally. As theorist Joshua Clover notes, "*Real Subsumption*, the tendential completion of the process by which the labor force is configured to and disciplined by the dictates of the industrial workplace and mode of production, provides the scene for any number of the era's great narratives" (243). For example, novels like Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854), with its satire of the parallel structures of utilitarian education and factory work that produce workers in still-industrializing Coketown, or Emile Zola's *Germinal* (1885), narrate the contested adaptation of workers to the conditions of industrial capitalism in both factory and mine.

The novels I study capture the tenuous adaptation of workers to a confluence of precarious working conditions in early twentieth century Canada. This includes the relentlessly precarious extractive sector, but also the emerging conditions of industrialized agriculture and irregular growth in the manufacturing sector. Even with National Policy measures meant to spur manufacturing, its development was uneven before and during the interwar period, impeded by the global Long Depression of the late nineteenth century, the First World War, and the Great

Depression (Heintzman 2).¹⁷ And as Canada became a feeder-site for resources fueling industrial growth outside its borders, industrial development and domestically-oriented manufacturing was put in service of the resource-led economy, making it unstable and greatly affected by global markets (Haley 104).

These novels signal the illusive and unstable character of Canada's mode of production in the 1919-1945 period, in which several modes of production might have appeared dominant to these writers at a given time. As instantiations of both realism and modernism, they communicate their characters' struggle to adapt to these circumstances both socially and psychologically. As Clover explains, "realism is the literary mode adequate to the struggle over the working day, and over the balance of power between human and machine, variable and constant capital. Once these decisive battles in the class struggle are won, which is to say lost, literary realism is not so much exhausted as lacking an object; the site of antagonism leaps to that of consciousness, and Western modernism asserts itself with abstract ferocity" (243). These novels invoke both realism's struggle to adapt the worker to the dictates of industrial capitalism, and modernism's sense that the battle against the destruction of traditional forms of social life caused by industrialization was to be waged internally.

Not a worker, but a human resource – this is the form of subjectivity these novels exhort us to perceive as the most suitable to understand people in Canada. And to be a human resource is to be endlessly adaptable and capable of embodying the inherent contradictions that underly working conditions in much of Canada at the time, especially the need to be both settled and

¹⁷ While manufacturing rose in the 1920s, it declined during the Depression and until World War II, and especially outside of Ontario and Quebec was in decline across the period of study in this dissertation (or until 1940) (Statistics Canada Table 36-10-0387-01).

mobile (Pineault 136).¹⁸ As labour and resource geographer Katie Mazer has pointed out, this is a constant feature of a confederated Canada, and has resulted in generational attempts by governments to solve this “staples-labor problem.” She explains this problem as the feature of Canadian resource industries in which “irregularity” has “posed challenges for managing the labor supply” (“Making the Welfare State Work for Extraction” 22). The root of this problem, she writes, is that “Production is often fixed in places far from major population centers and temporalities of work are shaped by the seasons, the rhythm of crisis, or both” (22). The staples-labour problem is then the “entwined spatiotemporal mismatch between labor power and production, which demands constant management but can never be fully resolved” (22). The staples-labour problem, a dynamic of settlement and dispersal of resource workers deeply impacted by Canada’s staples economy, is managed by the state through “poverty policy, colonial policy, and resource policy,” though these policies are “difficult to delineate” (Mazer 23). To these varied attempts to manage labour flows, I offer a theory for understanding the cultural dimension of this process, exemplified by these novels. They present workers’ adaptation to Canada’s economy as an embodied process, in which the precarious and endlessly adaptable human resource becomes the *Charaktermaske* (socially-prescribed persona) required for Canada’s extractivist state.

As an example, in Gabrielle Roy’s 1945 novel *The Tin Flute*, the character Jean Levesque awakens to the sensory whiplash of Canada’s extractivist state crisscrossing his bed:

¹⁸ Jody Mason addresses this in *Writing Unemployment*, where she contrasts labour mobility and what she (following Liisa Malkki) refers to as “sedentarist” communities. Mason argues that these are key factors for understanding depictions of unemployment and mobility in twentieth century Canadian literature (12).

The house where Jean lived was opposite the drawbridge at the corner of St. Augustin Street. Flatboats passed before his door, tankers reeking of oil or gasoline, lumber barges, coalers, all hailing him with three powerful blasts on their sirens—a salute in passing and a cry for liberty, for the open sea they would reach some day when they had left the cities behind and dipped their keels into the waters of the Great Lakes.

But the house lay not only in the path of the freight boats. It was also on the railway line, at the crossroads, so to speak, of the East-West railroads and the shipping lanes of the city. It was on the road to the ocean, the Great Lakes and the prairies.

To the left of the house the rails gleamed through the night, and directly across the street red and green signal lights twinkled gaily. At night the house was bathed in coal dust, and shook to the reverberation of wheels, the frenzied gallop of locomotives bracing itself to meet the long-drawn-out steam whistles, the clipped puff of tugboats, the sustained drone of propellers, threaded through with the spasmodic tinkle of the danger signal. Waking in the night in the middle of all the uproar, Jean often had the sensation of being on board a steamer or a pullman car in motion; he had closed his eyes and fallen asleep under the illusion of being in flight, in constant flight. (17)

Here, Jean is simultaneously settled and mobile—in bed at home, yet “in constant flight,” and lulled to sleep by the hovering reverberations of Canada’s extractivist state. This passage epitomizes the extractivist sublime these novels attribute to the Canadian resource economy, evoking Burkean elements such as extremes of light and dark, sensory clarity and obscurity,

excessive loudness, intermittent sounds, intolerable smells, and an overall sense of vastness and “grand sensation” that imbues this economy with power (Burke 53-79, 78). I locate this evocation across these novels, as well as the imperative implicit within it, which is that workers must adapt their capacities, functions, bodily rhythms, geographies and personal expectations to fit into Canada’s overall resource-led society.

V. Methodology

In this thesis, I employ three main literary critical approaches to understand the texts I examine. The first of these is literary critic Anna Kornbluh’s notion of “literary thinking.” In *Realizing Capital: Financial and Psychic Economies in Victorian Form* (2014), Kornbluh insists on the need to consider how a novel may “think” or the “contemplative agency leveraged by literature” (49). She writes that as critics we must eschew “reducing literature to false resolution of systemic contradictions or to flat-footed iteration of a putatively prior and already fixed discourse” (49). In this exhortation Kornbluh channels a critique of the two poles of literary criticism that have become popular in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. For example, a critical approach that assesses how far extractivism is challenged or reinforced in a novel may assume that a text either resolves conceptual problems inherent to conceiving raw materials as resources (thereby reinforcing or challenging extractivism); or, conversely, they may consider how far an artwork “expresses” or denies already established ideas and discourses of extractivism, mouthing the words of this discourse or cursing it, so to speak. An earlier iteration of this binary was famously enunciated in Jameson’s *Political Unconscious*, where he warns against the “structuralism” of a criticism that would “overemphasize the active way in which the text reorganizes its subtext” as well as the “vulgar materialism” of those who “stress the imaginary status of the symbolic act so completely as to reify its social ground, now no longer

understood as a subtext but merely as some inert given that the text passively or fantasmatically “reflects” (67-67).

How can these two approaches be avoided? Kornbluh suggests critics linger with the performative aspect of literature and its “contemplative agency” to understand more fully what it is that literature *does*, and what, in a specific instance, it is trying to say. By labelling this approach “performative,” Kornbluh draws from J.L. Austin’s linguistic imperative that to understand the meaning of language we must contend with its “total speech act” (52). Austin asks us to consider not only denotation (which he does not simply throw away) or connotation, but the broader context of linguistic performance, where a “speech act” includes many more facets including actor, actant, response, and reaction (or, for Austin, the three “acts” of communication: phonetic (sound), phatic (language) and rhetic (speech) (120). The primary lesson of Austin’s linguistics is that we cannot distill linguistic meaning by separating out one aspect as more important than another—it is the whole *dance*, in its entirety, which we must apprehend to truly get what language is trying to tell us. The same goes for literature—which we should understand as a mode of thought with its own “contemplative agency”—in that it does what it wants, irrespective, at times, of authorial intention or referential sense.

I make the comparison to dance to show how the performative theory Kornbluh employs conceives of literature as an artform inherently in motion. While the novels I study exhort the transformation of workers into human resources, and sometimes depict this, the *movement* of literature means that what we receive as readers is a record of flux—of transformation—and never a calcified reflection or a pat synthesis. Kornbluh’s idea that literature can “think” highlights this point:

Literary thinking elucidates problems in different registers, reframes concepts so that other ideas may emerge. Literary language—even in the high realist novel—works not instantiatively, but performatively. Literature is a mode of thought structured by juxtaposition and condensation, by sensuous synthesis and syncretic sedimentation” (50). “Literary thinking” is reminiscent of Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia, in which novels have the capacity of putting different ideas in conversation via the mechanisms of narrative emplotment, and novelistic dialogization (263).¹⁹ A dialogue, like a dance, is only comprehensible in process, kinaesthetically, through following its movement and flow. This is what Kornbluh means when she says, “when literature thinks, it asks us to cock our heads and think with it, to think in a distinctive and oblique mode, to perambulate the web rather than toeing the line” (51). Conceiving of literature in this way makes us more inclined to allow a literary text to guide our thinking and see where it takes us, rather than awkwardly attempting to suture together its contradictory elements or, conversely, rend them apart.

Walter Benjamin’s theory of *correspondences* is also a performative approach to literary criticism but with a more specific function—a portal into how an epoch’s mode of production impacts a text. I use this theory to understand how the modes of production prevalent in earlier twentieth century Canada act as a palimpsest within these texts, imprinting their dynamic traces performatively across the novels. In his 1938 essay “On Some Motifs on Baudelaire,” Benjamin observes how central images in Charles Baudelaire’s poem “Correspondences”—such as “fear,

¹⁹ As defined by Bakhtin, this is fundamental to how discourse operates in a novel: “Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional units which help heteroglossia [*raznorecie*] enter the novel, each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized)” (263).

revulsion, horror” and sublime reverence towards figures like the flâneur, the gambler, and the prostitute—capture an affect that embodies the subject’s reaction to nineteenth century industrial modernity (174). According to Benjamin’s theory, the technologies of the factory, particularly the assembly line, *correspond* with social and cultural aspects of everyday life, impacting the symbolism of poetry, the reception of film, the movements of crowds in streets, or rides in an amusement park.²⁰

Benjamin draws directly from Marx’s analysis in Chapter Fifteen of *Capital Volume I*, in which Marx explains how the factory system inverts the relationship between worker and machine (Benjamin 175–176; *Capital* 548–549). Marx writes, “In handicrafts and manufacture, the worker makes use of a tool; in the factory, the machine makes use of him” (*Capital Volume I* 548).²¹ Because of this inversion, workers must adapt to the machine, and “coordinate their own movements with the uniformly constant movements of an automaton” (175). Benjamin extrapolates from Marx that “coordination” and “uniformity” are crucial social values in capitalist modernity. Because of this, according to Benjamin, “technology has subjected the human sensorium to a complex kind of training” (175). This “training” is observable in literary

²⁰ Many other Frankfurt School critical theorists were influenced by this argument. For example, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer write that the experience of amusement can be conceived of as “afterimages of the work process itself” (137).

²¹ The full quotation is illuminating; “In handicrafts and manufacture, the worker makes use of a tool; in the factory, the machine makes use of him. There the movements of the instrument of labour proceed from him, here it is the movements of the machine that he must follow. In manufacture the workers are part of a living mechanism. In the factory we have a lifeless mechanism which is independent of the workers, who are incorporated into it as its living appendages” (548).

works, Benjamin notes, like a short story by Edgar Allen Poe, “The Man of the Crowd,” where uniformity and discipline in the movements of the machine in the factory correspond to “the absurd kind of uniformity that Poe wants to saddle the crowd” (175). For Benjamin, Poe’s pedestrians “act as if they had adapted themselves to machines and could express themselves only automatically” (176). I notice a similar “complex kind of training” in the novels I study here, which illuminate workers’ adaptation to the vicissitudes of Canada’s resource economy.

In *Marxism and Literature* (1978), Raymond Williams explains how for Benjamin correspondences are more than “resemblances” and “analogies” but also include “a sense of corresponding *forms* or *structures*” and those may occur inside an artwork itself or with respect to aspects of life in the world (105). In this sense, correspondence can be understood as a process of art *speaking* whereby connections between symbols, words and ideas dynamically *correspond* within and outside a work of art. For Williams, these correspondences are evident in “superficially unrelated fields” and in total are representative of “a social process which is nowhere fully represented but which is specifically present” (106). Benjamin’s theory of correspondences allows me to read, for example, the noisy circuitry of resource circulation permeating the walls of the Lacasse home in *The Tin Flute* as a gesture to the omnipresence of Canada’s resource economy, even if the “whole social process” of resources is not fully represented. Although Benjamin’s theory of correspondences encompasses many valences, including mystical and ritual properties, I use it as a conceptual map for the close readings I perform in this thesis, which focus on the harmonization of workers to Canada’s extractivist state via literature and rhetoric.

I use the methods of literary thinking and correspondences to elucidate these texts’ resource rhetoric. What I call *resource rhetoric* are the discursive tools novelists use to depict

working people as assets to Canada's resource economy rather than members of a working class. Building on rhetoric scholar Keith Lloyd's concept of rhetoric as the "shaping of what and how," I examine the strategies these novels use to produce new truths about workers (4). Resource rhetoric directs a dematerializing gaze upon workers, winnows them down into mere assets, and exhorts them to transcend bodily limitations to aid and support Canada's extractivist state wherever and whenever that is required. The tropes of resource rhetoric, in concert, "make" human workers into human resources, reveal how human labour fits into a larger resource regime, and suppress the category of class, even while depicting workers' movements.

These tropes include: (1) images of groups of working class people given a sublime characteristic—as something beyond comprehension, with frequent meshing and mixing of worker bodies into a mass, without a clear intent or focus, and sometimes with a violent or threatening affect; (2) a minimization of free will and agency in individuals, including capitalists; (3) the depiction of failed labour movements, lack of class consciousness and overall negative portrayal of communist activists; (4) the relative absence of industrial workers or people working in factories; (5) frequent depiction of migrant workers and their displacement, often framed as something unexceptional and normative; (6) an emphasis on psychological frailty, with the novels often containing a main character who goes mad or whose sense of identity disintegrates, which is then linked to an affective aspect of the resource economy that comes to pervade or infiltrate the mind of the person and wreaks havoc.

The transformation of workers into human resources also involves rhetorical framings of capitalists and the state. Tropes used in the depiction of capitalists include portrayals of a highly cohesive class, imagined as people who have the same goals and a shared culture, and who manifest an ability to cooperate. Canada's extractivist state is rhetorically framed as something

sublime, using Burkean tropes. In many cases in these novels, the state is positioned as a remedy to conflicts between workers and capitalists, a trope that positions these novels as precursors to the post-war welfare state. These multiple tropes and tendencies, both in concert and in contradictory ways, shape how these novels imagine the possibilities open to people struggling against oppressive labour conditions in Canada in the earlier twentieth century. Rather than finding shared meaning and purpose with each other, or developing solidarity, class consciousness or class formation, working class people are rhetorically framed in these novels as if their primary form of solidarity is with the extractivist state, not with each other.²²

VI. Chapter Breakdown

I have divided this dissertation into two parts. The first looks at Canada's two most famous strike novels from the interwar period. In these novels, I explore how a shape is given to the Canadian human resource, and how Canadian extractivism is portrayed as something immutable which this resource must adapt itself to. The first chapter, "Strikers, Grain Traders and 'The Machine' of Speculation in Douglas Durkin's *The Magpie*" examines Durkin's 1923 novel, which documents the period surrounding the Winnipeg General Strike and the social unrest that existed in Winnipeg at the time. *The Magpie* narrates the life of Craig Forrester—a

²² This idea is similar to the way Marx depicts workers in the factory as the "living appendages" to the machine (*Capital Volume 1*, 548-549). Nancy Fraser explains this as the primacy given to the "self" of capital: "Every one's efforts to satisfy their needs are indirect, harnessed to something else that assumes priority—an overriding imperative inscribed in an impersonal system, capital's own drive to unending "self"-expansion. Marx is brilliant on this point. In a capitalist society, he says, capital itself becomes the Subject. Human beings are its pawns, reduced to figuring out how they can get what they need in the interstices while feeding the beast. (4)

trader on the Winnipeg Grain Exchange and WWI veteran—and the lives of commodity traders, extractive entrepreneurs, wealthy Winnipeg manufacturing magnates, unemployed veterans, modernist artists and the revolutionary activists involved in the strike. I argue that rather than finding class hierarchy to be the all-pervasive logic that drives the labour conflicts the novel depicts, *The Magpie* makes financial speculation the unifying feature that structures all aspects of life, demonstrating attributes of what Alison Shonkwiler refers to as the “financial imaginary” that underlies economic novels (7). My chapter shows how *The Magpie*’s financial imaginary, rhetorically structured around Craig’s grain trading, is fundamentally linked to Canada’s extractivist state and the ideologies that propel it. I examine how the novel both exposes the dangers of resource logic and puts this logic to use to structure its rhetoric. In doing so, I argue that *The Magpie* renders Canada’s extractivist state into something immutable, and makes the strikers’ revolutionary aims appear futile. Durkin’s novel provides the insight that the imperative to become a human resource means that worker agency and identity are diminished. And with the worker’s agency stripped away, *The Magpie* suggests that taking on the guise of the human resource means shedding the very parts of human experience that make class formation possible.

In Chapter Two, “Bloody Sore”: Eugenic Rhetoric and the Production of Canada’s “Universal Worker” in Irene Baird’s *Waste Heritage*,” Baird’s novel allows me to sketch out with more specificity the qualities of the Canadian human resource as an embodied being. This chapter examines the novel’s depiction of the unemployed men involved in the sit-down strike that occurred at several locations in Vancouver and Vancouver Island in 1938. The novel utilizes modernist techniques and naturalist reportage to narrate the men’s struggle to bring attention to the plight of the unemployed at the time. I explore the following questions in this chapter: what kind of *thinking* does this novel invoke in its creative figuration of unrest against labour

conditions in 1930s Canada, and how does this thinking communicate an evolving notion of Canadian workers as bodies to be used in Canada's resource economy? To what degree does the book's negative representations of disabled and racialized characters suggest a pervasive connection between eugenic rhetoric and resource rhetoric?

I contextualize my argument about Baird's novel by examining the history of migrant labour in resource industries, labour strife in Depression-era Canada, and eugenics during that period. I attend specifically to how progressive social movements of the first part of the twentieth century in Canada drew on scientific positivism, biological determinism and eugenics when addressing unemployment and labour unrest. My argument is that *Waste Heritage* represents a eugenicist response to Depression-era labour problems. By attending to the way undesirable worker bodies are construed as biological "waste," I argue that labour organizing is pathologized and class struggle deemed ineffective. As a narrative that frames unemployed resource workers as "defective," "degenerate," and measured against a racial hierarchy, *Waste Heritage* indexes an unsettling, eugenic dimension within Canada's evolving twentieth-century discourse of human resources.

The second part of this dissertation focusses on a different aspect of labour inequality: the field of social reproductive labour and representations of women performing domestic work in the home. In the introduction to this section, "New Sites of Struggle: Social Reproduction and the Canadian Novel," I explain the importance of social reproductive labour from a Marxist feminist perspective and perform a literature review of how this topic has been addressed in critical responses to twentieth-century Canadian literature. In Chapter Three, "'Working women of all ages': Social Reproduction and Resource Rhetoric in *The Tin Flute*," I explore Roy's novel and its depiction of social reproductive labour within the context of Montreal's economy on the

precipice of World War Two. Despite its empathy towards the Depression-era poor, this novel nonetheless positions Canada's extractivist state as a sublime necessity and extends human resource discourse to encompass social reproductive labour. As theorist Sarah Marie Hall has argued, social reproductive labour can be understood as infrastructurally important for the maintenance of capitalism, and the infrastructural significance of domestic work underlies my reading of this novel (87). Here, I reinforce my claim that when workers are conceived primarily as assets to extractivist infrastructures, rather than as members of a class, they are rendered powerless to remedy their situation.

In the conclusion to this dissertation, I consider the lessons that can be drawn from these works in light of developments in the relationship between Canadian workers and the extractivist state since 1945. I briefly survey contemporary literary texts that portray labour struggles in Canada, particularly those that narrate the intersection of natural resource extraction and oppressive working conditions. Like this dissertation, comics like Kate Beaton's *Ducks* show the opposition between the aims of the extractivist state and the aims of those desiring working-class dignity, drawing links between labour injustices and the inequalities inherent to extractivist states engaged in colonial dispossession in Canada's resource hinterlands.

The importance of transforming nature into "natural resources" and the role of this transformation in the success of Canada's colonial consolidation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century cannot be overstated. But, as this dissertation argues, and as figures like Charles Hamilton Mitchell insist, the success of the Canadian extractivist state required a parallel transformation of people living and working in it into "human resources"—the kind of people who could make this resource economy thrive. My argument is that these novels participate in the discursive framing of workers as "human resources" which was developing across Canada in

the first half of the twentieth century. They do so through distinctive rhetoric and by imagining workers to be *like* human resources. And by doing so, they repress other ways in which workers could be represented: as members of a working class, or collective who could achieve goals for mutual betterment. By the end of World War Two and commensurate with the postwar compromise between labour and capital, spontaneous forms of class power such as general strikes, sympathy strikes and radical worker agitation were legally suppressed, and the designation of “worker” was stratified and limitations based on gender, citizenship and race were legally enforced. Did these novels influence these governmental policies? Most likely no, with the exception, perhaps, of *The Tin Flute*. But they do powerfully capture the beliefs about workers and their societal role in Canada’s resource economy circulating at the time. More than that, they convey a scepticism towards the possibility of overcoming the negative circumstances workers faced as a result of extractivist ideas at play in society. And most centrally, these novels index the suppressive power, still with us today, of conceiving working classes as “human resources” who, as Mitchell insists, must “march together” with natural resources to fulfill Canada’s extractivist destiny.

Chapter 1:

Strikers, Grain Traders and “The Machine” of Speculation in Douglas Durkin’s *The Magpie*

The guys on the other side of the business, the big fellows who called out the Mounties and had the streets cleared with bullets, don’t worry any about how we think. It’s how we feel that’s got them worrying. They can think rings around us and they know it. They think in terms of policemen and reserves and penitentiaries and deportations. That’s the machinery that does their thinking for them and it’s dead easy, Cap, dead easy.

—Douglas Durkin, *The Magpie*

Thinking objectifies itself to become an automatic, self-activating process; an impersonation of the machine that it produces itself so that ultimately the machine can replace it.

—Theodor Adorno and
Max Horkheimer
Dialectic of Enlightenment

There is little doubt that the newly connective bands of the railroads, the linking of local markets to Wall Street, and the consolidations of monopolies, trusts, and financial markets all contributed to the developing perception of a “symptomatic network” of causes and effects. The market offered a powerful figure for the displacement of causality from the level of individuals to the level of systems.

—Alison Shonkwiler
The Financial Imaginary

I. Introduction

Over the course of four decades, Winnipeg transformed from a sparsely populated colonial settlement into a semi-cosmopolitan financial hub, colloquially known as the “Chicago of the North.” Immediately following the violent suppression of the Red River Resistance, led by Métis resistance leader Louis Riel, the Canadian government settled the region of present-day Winnipeg in earnest. This led to a remarkable population growth: from just 300 settlers in 1870, to 175,000 in 1919 and a position as Canada’s third largest city (Kraft 1; Nerbas 43).

As traced by historian Scott Kraft in his article “Writing Immigrant Winnipeg: A Literary Map of the City through the First World War” (2006), settler authors in the region began mythologizing the city in its early days. One such settler was Reverend Charles William Gordon, an Ontario-born missionary who migrated to Winnipeg and was an early booster of the city. He wrote in his 1909 book *The Foreigner* that Winnipeg was “the cosmopolitan capital of the last of the Anglo Saxon Empires” and that “Out of breeds diverse in traditions, in ideals, in speech, and in manner of life...one people is being made. The blood strains of great races will mingle in the blood of a race greater than the greatest of them all...[I]n Unity of our world-wide Empire, we fuse into a people...for the honour of our name, for the good of mankind, and for the glory of Almighty God” (Kraft 1). Despite Gordon’s attempt to frame Winnipeg as a place of unity in which “one people is being made,” the city in the early twentieth century was, in reality, profoundly fractured. It was marked by a pervasive social instability, an uncertainty about how best to forge this “one people,” and a confusion about what values this nascent Canadian settlement should uphold and possess. The political landscape was equally unstable, marked by a remarkable convergence of modernity’s most characteristic political-economic forces: colonial expansion, primitive accumulation through resource extraction, industrialization, and financialization intertwined with global markets.

Contributing to the city’s fraught landscape was another quintessential twentieth century upsurge: a communist worker’s movement with links nationally and globally. The Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 was at the definitive centre of what Canadian labour historian Craig Heron has termed “The Worker’s Revolt in Canada,” spanning the years 1917-1925 (7). From traders on the Winnipeg Grain Exchange, real estate speculators, extractivist entrepreneurs, factory owners to communist organizers, Douglas Durkin’s 1923 novel *The Magpie* embodies

the many aspects of Winnipeg in the era. *The Magpie* tells the story of Craig Forrester, a trader on the Winnipeg Grain Exchange, who sees his life unravel at the tail end of the strike. Through the course of the novel, Craig is torn between his connections to upper-class society and marriage to the daughter of an extractivist entrepreneur, and a desire for a more meaningful life beyond the pervasive instability he experiences in Winnipeg. A novel which brings to life an auspicious cultural moment, or what Jameson terms a “cultural revolution” in which “the coexistence of various modes of production becomes visibly antagonistic, their contradictions moving to the very center of political, social, and historical life” (*The Political Unconscious* 95), *The Magpie* speaks directly from the immensely revolutionary year it documents. This was a year when 320 strikes were fought in Canada, more than any year previously (Palmer 173).

Critical attention to *The Magpie* has largely centred on its depictions of city and countryside, considering how far it aligns with genres such as prairie literature, social and urban realism, left modernism, and Durkin’s portrayal of art and artists (Hill 96, 144-145; Vautour 66-79). While *The Magpie* has been understood as ostensibly about the Winnipeg General Strike, scholars have rarely noted that it contains no scenes set in industrial factories or working-class districts—aside from a short scene at a North End rally—and have largely overlooked the pivotal narrative role of the Winnipeg Grain Exchange and Craig’s occupation as a trader.²³ In my examination of the politics of the novel, I take up these latter aspects of *The Magpie*, interpreting them as key narrative details. I argue that this book should be read as an economic novel that

²³ Kraft notes that “the North End is never entered in the novel and only mentioned three times in total. Rather, *The Magpie*’s geography is along the wide, busy streets of Winnipeg’s financial heart: the grain market” (25).

critiques an extractivist society increasingly dominated by financialized capitalism, a development which the text presents as its central problem. This chapter examines how *The Magpie* portrays the pervasive “unreality” that financialized economies engender, demonstrating attributes of what literary critic Alison Shonkwiler refers to as the “financial imaginary” (7).²⁴ This imaginary pervades *The Magpie*’s depiction of Winnipeg’s class hierarchy just after the strike, showing up as the speculative profit that unites Winnipeg’s extractivist elites, and as the dematerializing tendency that makes worker subjectivity seem like something which cannot be embodied or represented. In this, Durkin’s novel illuminates the negative permutations of Canada’s extractivist state in its financializing form, as well as a pervasive anxiety about how, if at all, workers could adapt themselves to this environment and become the human resources required by the state. Forming a part of the resource discourse developing in Canada in the interwar period, I argue that this novel’s resource rhetoric deems the extractivist state immutable and implies the ineffectiveness of the working-class forces seeking to oppose it.²⁵

²⁴ A financialized economy is one in which speculation on financial products like stocks, bonds, future contracts, or short-term investments are of great importance to the overall wealth of the economy. While capitalist profit still accrues through production and sale of commodities, financialization means a greater share comes from the exchange of financial products. Financialization is a contested term (see Lapavitsas, “Theorizing Financialization” 2011).

²⁵ Durkin was not alone in recognizing the failures of the strike and the reasons for those failures. Palmer notes with regard to the aftermath of the strike’s failure: “Across Canada the lesson of 1919 was brought home to the working class in blunt and unequivocal language: to fail to take into account the combined power of capital and the state was to court decisive defeat. The class stand of 1919 thus proved as unsuccessful as the eclectic radicalism of a previous era. It also faced stronger opposition” (180).

In *The Financial Imaginary: Economic Mystification and the Limits of Realist Fiction* (2017), Shonkwiler focusses on American realist fiction from the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These were periods in which the American public and its authors were becoming aware of a shift towards a more financialized economy. Works that employ the financial imaginary, according to Shonkwiler, have protagonists that are involved in financial speculation, rentier capitalism or trading of some sort at a time when this was becoming more prevalent in their respective milieus. These works include new character types, such as the entrepreneur, the financier, the capitalist, and the trader; and they evince some sort of skepticism or critique of finance capitalism, projecting an anxiety about a disintegration of the self, especially the increasing groundlessness of worker subjectivity. She looks at works such as William Dean Howell's *the Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) and Henry James' short story "The Jolly Corner," (1908), as well as more contemporary works like Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* (2003) and Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013).

Shonkwiler's analysis is influenced by world system theorist Giovanni Arrighi, who popularized the idea of capitalism's *longue durée* (long duration), an idea first developed by historian Fernand Braudel. Rather than breaking down the history of capitalism into distinct, progressive periods, viewing it as a *longue durée* means reconceptualizing those periods as *fluctuations* between dominant phases in which capital might "specialize." Importantly, this theory clarified that we should not classify forms of accumulation as different in kind, as the term "period" might suggest. Rather, Arrighi's analysis revealed that in general capitalism is better characterized as "flexible" and "eclectic," with periods of material expansion and financial expansion alternating in dominance but always existing concurrently (Arrighi 4-6).

This theory has been influential for literary scholars like Shonkwiler, because it allows for an understanding of why literary forms, like the economic novel, may appear in non-chronological or historically disparate periods, as she explains:

I insist on the usefulness of “finance” to specify the difference between the dematerializing tendencies of the two ends-of-century as opposed to the material expansion of the middle. In my argument the “middle” of the twentieth century—including, in the United States, the wartime mobilizations of the 1910s and the 1940s, the economic boom of the 1920s, and the stable affluence of the postwar 1950s—all belong to a Fordist, production-based growth economy, where even the stock market volatility of the 1920s did not indicate a systemic slowing of production or an urgent need for capital to compensate by seeking abstract outlets externally or internally. (xxvii)

Here, Shonkwiler utilizes systems-theory insights to link two historical periods in which financialized forms of capitalism were predominant. By linking these two periods, Shonkwiler is able to point towards “an original mismatch between the experience of abstraction and the vocabularies of realism” (xvii). This mismatch, or the “problem of representation” faced by economic novels, comes about because realist categories like individual agency, “the explanatory power of class” and the virtue tied to hard work, cannot be easily represented when finance appears to have more agency than individual actors, and appears to be actively taking their power away (xvii). Studies of novels from the neoliberal era, when financialization was becoming dominant, have readily acknowledged the representational challenges it poses for the realist novel. By identifying these challenges in older novels from the U.S. Gilded Age, Shonkwiler is able to point to this as a more generalizable problem for realism, whose generic conventions face

“structural pressures” when they must accommodate the more abstract “financial imaginary” (xx).

I locate a financial imaginary at play in Durkin’s 1923 novel *The Magpie*, written in a time frame Shonkwiler links to more production-based economies. In Winnipeg, however, this was a period when finance was becoming more significant to the economy of the region, and writers like Durkin grappled with a sense that speculative, “dematerializing” and finance-based forms of capitalism were subsuming more stable, production-based forms. In *The Magpie*, financial logics are presented as the root cause of Winnipeg’s social problems in 1919. But more than just a cause, financial capitalism appears to take on an agentic dimension in this narrative, exerting significant power over the city through the infrastructures and financiers who replicate its thinking. Through this, Durkin reveals the inherent difficulty of challenging or moving beyond a system that has become, paradoxically, endowed with agency, yet is also dematerialized and difficult to grasp.

What is meant by the financial imaginary’s “dematerializing tendencies,” and how does this inform the literary affect of *The Magpie*? In classical Marxist thinking, capital accrual occurs in one of three ways: on the basis of primitive accumulation (i.e., the expropriation of land, people or resources); through commodity production and sale; and/or through financial speculation. In this final way—and final phase of the cycle of accumulation—money is created through bets made on the rise and fall of prices or via other financial operations. Jameson labels the dematerializing affect of finance as “free-floating.” When it becomes free floating, he explains that capital

separates from the concrete context of its productive geography...It was cotton money, or wheat money, textile money, railroad money, and the like. Now, like the butterfly stirring

within the chrysalis, it separates itself from that concrete breeding ground and prepares to take flight...This free-floating capital, in its frantic search for more profitable investments...will begin to live its life in a new context: no longer in the factories and the spaces of extraction and production, but on the floor of the stock market, jostling for more intense profitability. (“Culture and Finance” 251).

This “free-floating” characteristic of financial capital is very much alive in *The Magpie*. However, it is tethered to the particularities of Canadian political economy. In this economy, material expansion is not fundamentally linked to the production of commodities in factories, but to the extraction of raw materials and commodification of them on markets. The extraction and sale of raw materials is inherently risky, of course, but it is imagined as a more *material* process, with a more stable imaginary than the “free-floating” affect of producing money from money.

The instability associated with the financial imaginary, the ways in which it confuses our sense of “how and where we as individuals are situated in a field of economic relations, where the agency of the system is located, and what change could possibly be effected” (Shonkwiler xiv) takes a tremendous personal toll on Crain Forrester, the main protagonist in *The Magpie*. What gnaws at Craig, as he strives to maintain his sanity on Winnipeg’s grain-trading room floor, is the eclipse of the “concrete breeding ground” of raw material extraction and trade by “free-floating” speculation. In Craig’s perception, the growing dominance of financialized forms of capitalism plays a central causal role in the chaos he perceives in himself, and the society he inhabits. Craig’s anxiety, and the chaos he perceives, are cultural responses to what I have identified as a general trend in Canadian society in the earlier part of the twentieth century—the social conditioning of workers to their role as human resources within Canada’s extractivist state. *The Magpie* fixates on financialization, but its depiction captures foundational dimensions of

Canadian extractivism, and the resource discourse developing at the time. Most powerfully, it illustrates the paradoxical struggle of trying to embody the “human resource” identities required by this state, when to do so, the novel suggests, means to be faced with one’s own unreality and a stripping away of one’s personhood, agency and autonomy.

II. Unreal Finance, Unreal Winnipeg

Craig’s gnawing sense of “unreal” finance supplanting more stable forms of economic life accurately reflects the profound shifts occurring in Winnipeg’s social fabric during that period. Durkin was witness to the dizzying pace at which Winnipeg became the “Chicago of the North,” a massive transformation which by 1919 included a growing financial sector. Manitoba had very recently made the switch from being a monopoly economy based on fur, to an economy more reliant on grain, a shift aided by advancements in machine industry, steam and rail travel. Winnipeg’s status as a commercial centre, with massive rail yards and warehousing capacity combined with proximity to central river shipping routes, made it a portal for the movement and storage of minerals, coal, and wheat (Hiebert 57-58).

The city’s rapid expansion led to the need for investment and lending, which propelled the growth and development of the financial sector in the city (Nerbas 48). As Stanford has pointed out, a defining aspect of extraction in Canada was the early development of highly integrated, domestically owned and federally supported financial institutions that backed the extraction of raw material, and the infrastructures required for its movement and export (81). Extractive expansion in Manitoba was made possible by Canada’s “strong domestic financial capacity” which put a premium on the “viability and profitability of domestic financial firms” – a phenomenon that dates to before Confederation (Stanford 81). These firms were owned by elites in Montreal and Toronto, but local Winnipeg financiers also had an important stake in the

financial market. In its first forty years, Winnipeg was a burgeoning financial hub, with homegrown lending banks like the Northern Trusts Company and commodity trading at the Winnipeg Grain Exchange flourishing (Nerbas 48-49).²⁶

The growth of Manitoba's financial sector relied upon the dispossession of Indigenous lands and the rapid settlement of those lands with people working in extraction, circulation and commercial development, all of which occurred in the fifty years prior to 1919. In 1869, what is present day Winnipeg had less than 200 settlers (Nerbas 43). The founding of the province of Manitoba in 1870, and the signing of Treaty 1, removed Métis and First Nations land claims to the area and led to an era of increased colonial settlement. What followed was the development of extraction and commerce (Nerbas 43).

Not all the money stayed in Winnipeg or in Manitoba. As historian Don Nerbas writes, the express purpose of development in this region was to enrich central Canadian elites: "The Canadian government acquired the Northwest intent on creating...a new 'investment frontier' that would open the west and enrich the east in one fell swoop" (Nerbas 43). Investment in large-scale grain agriculture and mining, mass migration from other parts of Canada and Europe, and the huge undertaking which was the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway, permanently altered the landscape of Manitoba. Winnipeg was incorporated into a city in 1873, bringing together Fort Garry, a Hudson Bay Company trading post, and St. Boniface, a Métis and French settlement (Nerbas 43). Located at the convergence of the Assiniboine and Red Rivers and long a nexus for cultural meeting and exchange between First Nations groups like the Anishinaabe,

²⁶ Nerbas notes that at this time the "growing power and affluence of Winnipeg's bourgeoisie was such that central Canadian capitalist Joseph Flavelle commented in 1911 that Winnipeg's banking business would outstrip Toronto's within five years" (48).

Cree, Dakota, Dene, Oji-Cree and Métis Nations, Winnipeg's status as "gateway to the West" was afforded by these established networks of trade that were expropriated by European invaders and settlers to aid in expanding their extractivist economies (Artibise).

By the 1910s, Winnipeg's economy had developed to include a varied array of industrial and commercial ventures, including flour mills, iron works, industrial wholesaling and manufacturing of various sorts. The city was managed by a "citizen's council" of business elites—if not by official decree, then through the affordance of wealth and power—who lorded over municipal politics to serve their own interests. Mayors and other administrators were also often local business owners who collaborated to fund and build major industrial infrastructure projects, such as the CPR Bridge across the Red River and various depots and ports, all administered and funded by the municipal government (Nerbas 49). In 1913, a massive economic downturn hit the city, greatly increasing unemployment. This, in combination with voting restrictions like property qualifications, severely marginalized the working class (Nerbas 49). The region's working classes were an ethnically diverse, largely mobile and seasonal group of workers, almost all recent migrants to the region, employed in building, railway maintenance, and the largest share, in seasonal farming and lumber camps (Kraft 18-23; Hiebert 58).

The appellation "Chicago of the North" does not quite capture what was unique about Winnipeg of this period, because it elides how profoundly new this settlement was, and how profoundly fast it became a centrally important commercial and financial hub in the region. Durkin's novel does, however, capture the unreal and bizarre quality of this frontier settlement, which was a site not only of colonial expansion and extractivist settlement, but of modernist ennui, communist agitation, and characters pulled, seemingly, from Wall Street trading room floors.

III. Winnipeg, with New York Characteristics: Durkin's Life and *The Magpie*

What led Durkin to capture these aspects of Winnipeg and to envision it as the location for an economic novel set amid a communist uprising unlike any other before seen in Canada? His path to Winnipeg and life prior to writing the novel provides some insight into this. Durkin's early life is marked by continuous migration, initially as part of the waves of settlers taking up resource work in Manitoba. He was born in 1884 in Parry Sound, Ontario, and soon after his birth his family moved to rural southwestern Manitoba (Treaty 2 Territory) and to the Minitonas, a temporary settlement connected to a logging site. In 1898, his family moved to Swan River, part of a wave of settlers from Ontario in that era who came to work in logging, mining and grain farming (Arnason and Mackintosh 79; "Memorable Manitobans"). From 1901-1917, Durkin travelled and taught regularly, eventually graduating with a BA from the University of Manitoba. He taught English and History at several colleges in Manitoba (including Brandon College from 1911-1915) and lived for a year in Spokane, Washington (Rider xvi; "Memorable Manitobans"). He began lecturing at the University of Manitoba in 1917, where he taught literature in the English department. Durkin became an assistant professor in 1919—the year of the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike. (Rider xvi). According to an interview with Durkin's brother conducted by author and literary scholar David Arnason, Durkin had no connection to the strikers and did not participate in the strike (*David Arnason Interview* 23).

While Durkin began his life a resource migrant, his later career saw him become an itinerant educator and writer.²⁷ In 1920, he went to New York to teach a summer course at Columbia University, and went on to move there permanently, teaching a course from 1920 until

²⁷ This appellation could be applied to Irene Baird and much of Gabrielle Roy's early life, as well.

1923 called “The Technique of the Novel” (Arnason, *Prairie Realism* 100). Since *The Magpie* was published in 1923 and documented events which occurred in 1919, it is likely the novel was written while Durkin was residing in New York and teaching at Columbia. During this time, he also separated from his wife in Winnipeg and began living with Martha Ostenso, a writer whom he had met when she was a high school student in Brandon Manitoba, who was also a student at UM while he taught there. She would become his lifelong companion and collaborator, eventually marrying Durkin in 1944 after the death of his first wife (Rider xvi).

In addition to his work as a travelling teacher and lecturer, Durkin was a prolific writer of journalistic pieces for Manitoba publications, usually on culture and literature. He would later publish work in popular American magazines like *Harper's*, *Liberty* and *Century* (Rider xvii). He wrote novels and poems prior to *The Magpie* as well, including the poetry collection *Canada's Fighting Men* in 1918 and the novels *The Heart of Cherry McBain* (1920) and *The Lobstick Trail* (1921). After 1921, he worked as a (secret) writing collaborator with Ostenso, writing only one novel without her, *Mr Gumble Sits Up* (1930). The couple initially chose to assign her name as the author for a series of books, including her acclaimed *Wild Geese* (1925). They later signed a legal agreement that states “all of the literary works of Martha Ostenso commencing with the publication of *Wild Geese* in 1925 were the results of the combined efforts of Douglas Leader Durkin and Martha Ostenso” (Hammill 19). What these biographical details reveal is a prolific writer conversant with the cultural and social currents of his age, who also chose a radically different life path than most.

The influence of Durkin's unusual and exciting life, which included integration into artistic milieus in the US, and work as a Hollywood screenwriter, has not been addressed in detail in the limited scholarship on him. What makes his biography pertinent to this study is

Durkin's cosmopolitanism at the time he was writing *The Magpie*, as it suggests his awareness of the pressing debates of the day.²⁸ While little archival information is available from this time, there can be no doubt that Durkin was influenced by Jazz Age New York City, and was undoubtedly interested in changes in the global economy, centred in Wall Street, presumably close by during his sojourn there.²⁹ One important biographical detail that informs *The Magpie* emerges in an interview Arnason did with Durkin's brother, who worked for more than thirty-five years at the Winnipeg Grain Exchange ("Clipped from the Winnipeg Tribune"). Though never mentioned in any of the existing critical responses to the novel, this insider access to the life of the Grain Exchange likely played a significant role in shaping Durkin's depiction of the Exchange and its workers in *The Magpie*, as well as his development of the novel's protagonist, Craig Forrester.

The novel narrates the life of Craig—a grain-trader at the Winnipeg Grain Exchange and World War I veteran. Recently returned from the war, he starts work at the Exchange and gets involved in the lives of the Nason family, whose patriarch is a real estate investor, mining and railway financier, and factory owner. Craig becomes engaged to and marries Nason's daughter,

²⁸ There are no extant archival holdings of Durkin's manuscripts or personal correspondence. The University of Manitoba holds the most substantial files on his work, compiled in the David Arnason Fonds. The UM archives also hold a letter from Durkin to the Toronto painter Bertram Brooker, dated to the mid-1930s. In this letter, Durkin recommends contemporary American literature for Brooker to read (ostensibly) in advance of writing his novel. This letter suggests that Durkin was very up to date on contemporary American works and was in active correspondence with authors and writers of the period.

²⁹ After leaving Winnipeg, Durkin and Ostenson found a home in literary Greenwich Village of the 1920s (See Hammill and "Harry Ransom Center").

Marion. The novel dramatizes Craig's social activities with the elite Winnipeggers that comprise Nason's social milieu, as well as his work at the Exchange and the people employed there. Over the course of the book, Craig befriends several communist organizers who had been involved in the Winnipeg Strike, most prominently Jeannette Bawden, a wealthy war widow and "parlour Bolshevik" (41), and Amer, an ethnically ambiguous striker whose surname is never given. Craig's social circle also includes Lasker Blount, an anti-strike financier, who plots against the communist organizers planning another general strike.

Craig aligns himself with the strikers but is nonetheless torn between his commitments and his bourgeois lifestyle, job and social milieu. He frequently complains about "the machine," or the underlying logic that propels the society in which he lives, which he had hoped would be abandoned after the devastation of World War I. Important to the novel is Martha Lane, Craig's old flame and a sculptor who still lives in rural Manitoba. The novel culminates in Martha Lane's art show, where Lasker Blount proposes that her sculpture be mass-produced in Nason's factory, offering her a shockingly large amount of money to make this a reality. She rejects this offer and a confrontation ensues. The final scenes involve a rally of the strikers in front of City Hall, in which Craig is injured in a violent conflagration. He wakes up three weeks later to learn that while he was in a coma the conflict had been suppressed, with Blount orchestrating the deportation of Amer—an event that echoes the actual history of the Winnipeg General Strike.³⁰

³⁰ This final instance of "mob" violence, depicted very briefly in a 1–2-page episode, is a protest in front of Winnipeg's city hall, occurring, like the rest of the book, in the month after the strike had concluded. It should be understood as a residual outburst stemming from the strike but not the strike (and work stoppage) itself.

The book ends with Craig returning to his father's farm and joining Martha to live there permanently.

As mentioned, Durkin taught a course at Columbia University from 1920 until 1923 on the theory of the novel, and at the same time he presumably wrote *The Magpie*. While there is no known archival documentation as to specifics of what he taught in his Columbia course on the theory of the novel (e.g., course syllabi), it is clear that *The Magpie* is written with a classical narrative structure in mind. By this, I mean the principles of storytelling derived from Aristotle's *Poetics*—principles of plotting such as the establishment of the status quo or exposition of a problem, a rising action leading to a climax or conflict, and the dénouement and resolution that brings closure to the story. Particularly noticeable in *The Magpie* is the Aristotelian principle of recognition (or *anagnorisis*), in which a character comes to discover a vital piece of knowledge that brings the plot towards its climax (Aristotle 1470–1471). There are several such points of recognition in *The Magpie*, each of which constitute a crucial stage in Craig's growing awareness of the meaning of the concept of "machine" and its role in shaping his reality.

IV. Extractivist Anxiety and Class Antagonism

The geography of *The Magpie* is suffused with images of Winnipeg's class hierarchy, especially its upper-class districts and domestic spaces. Most of the book's scenes take place in the newly built neighbourhood of Crescentwood, an affluent suburb where the Nason family, Craig, and his new wife reside. The bourgeoisie of Winnipeg in the 1910s lived outside of the bustling urban core, in an area which became known as "The South End." As a bourgeois novel of manners, much of *The Magpie* takes place in the domestic realm: at the breakfast table, over dinner, and in after dinner discussions, all of which take place in this affluent South End. The city's commercial core is represented in scenes at the Grain Exchange, Craig's workplace and

office, and the surrounding area near the financial hub of Portage and Main St., famous for being the site of the main clashes between strikers, union busters, and Royal North-West Mounted Police (RCMP) during the General Strike. There are also two scenes that take place in the vacation home of the Nason family in Minaki, which became connected to Winnipeg via rail in 1910 and was a three-hour trip from the city. Also outside the city is Martha Lane's farm and studio, which Craig often visits by car. In the initial thirty pages of *The Magpie*, Craig expresses dissatisfaction with his position within this wealthy upper-class milieu and expresses anxiety about his role as a worker within this space, which is contrasted with several telling fantasies of unalienated agricultural labour.

The location for these fantasies and the place where the novel's problematic becomes clear is the suburban home of Craig's friend Jimmy Dyer, a fellow World War I veteran who fought in his platoon. Located in the "sparsely settled suburbs" on the "outskirts of the city," Jimmy's home is in the St. James neighbourhood, which was built just before the war (21–22). In this neighbourhood, homes prices were artificially inflated due to the "rampant realty speculation and the municipality's zoning regulations" which pushed Winnipeg's cost of living much higher than other Canadian cities at the time (McFarlane 96). Despite its inflated price, this neighbourhood was intended to be a "a bedroom-community retreat from the downtown core where housing units were being demolished to create more space for warehouses, factories, and trains" (McFarlane 96). While Jimmy's home may be a retreat from the noisy circuitry of Winnipeg's compact resource-riven space, its furnishings are sparse, and the men refer to it as a "shack" in "a little straggling suburban village" (24) notable for its "bareness" (26). "In spite of the bareness of the place," Craig notes, "there had crept into it the tender, unmistakable feeling of home, a feeling [he] had not experienced in many another house where he had been welcomed

among luxurious surroundings” (26). In the novel, Jimmy’s house stands out as a limbo zone where the unfinished project of colonization and development is on full view. As a metaphor for Manitoba’s sprawling settler state and a settler fantasy where even working-class veterans can find modest happiness, Jimmy’s home is an expression of the *Terra Nullius* trope, a blank canvas onto which Craig imagines a picturesque and morally pure future. It also puts into relief Craig’s general anxiety with regard to his current life choices, particularly his work, which takes a more concrete form as the book progresses.

Jimmy’s garden symbolizes Craig’s yearning for a return to the serenity and unalienated abundance of farming life, in stark contrast with his current work in the speculative realm of the Grain Exchange. While visiting the garden, Craig wistfully describes “The low afternoon sun, striking the wild cucumber vines that cloaked the tiny porch, and pinning a bright disc of light on the stove-pipe that rose from the brick chimney, lighted a picture that touched [him] to the heart” (25). This suburban pastoral, replete with clichés such as the “lusty yell” of Millie Dyer, and Craig filling his lungs with “pure air,” becomes the location in which he can wax nostalgic about a return to the farming life of his father (24–25). Jimmy’s small garden reminds Craig of the kind of work he could be doing, exclaiming that he’d “rather work a nice farm out there on those plains than take the place of the Prince of Wales” (24). “The luxuriance of the growth,” Craig thinks to himself, “was something good to look upon” and perceiving it causes him to be overcome with “the old desire to be back again to the soil and the rich, free, growing power of it” (28). Evoking both the beautiful—“the low afternoon sun, striking the wild cucumber vines”—and the sublime— “the rich, free, growing power” of returning to the soil—this passage allows Durkin to establish Craig’s philosophically rooted malaise with his job, home, and life path. Craig’s romantic visions of subsistence farming persist throughout the book, acting as an ideal

counterpoint to his work in resource speculation at the Grain Exchange. This counterpoint can also be understood as the primary ideological juxtaposition that produces tension in the novel—a tension about how best Craig can actualize his role as a worker within Canadian society. This tension, resulting from Craig’s sense that he does not currently embody the human resource identity that Canada needs, also creates an interpretive tension, as Craig’s “visions” of idealized extractive work are ill-defined, imbued with nostalgic unreality and appear in contradictory ways.

This is not the only occasion when Craig’s dissatisfaction with his chosen career is communicated through imagery that compares different ways of relating to (and taking from) the environment. In the opening pages of the novel, Craig is initially characterized through a comparison to an immigration poster. In another life, Craig could have been “painted as a man in shirt sleeves, guiding a plow across a field at the other end of which a blood-red sun sinks in a sky of pale amber” (14). In this hackneyed pioneer get-up, “the British emigrant would then recognize him immediately as a Canadian” (14). Alternatively, “he might take on the form of a sturdy figure hewing his way through giant forests, guiding a frail canoe on its perilous course down a treacherous river with walls of granite on either side, battling his way through blinding blizzards with a half dozen pelts slung over his shoulder” (15). Finally, he might be seen “dancing a jig on a log that leaps down the rapids and threatens him with instant destruction at every whirl of the current” (15). These fantasies, voiced in the conditional tense of “could be” and “might be,” compare idealized visions of extractive Canadian pioneers with what Craig actually is, a trader on the Winnipeg Grain Exchange. This was a position he was forced to take on by his father, who was another caricature of Canada’s extractive past: a “railroad contractor in the days when the West was still young and had invested some of his money in a section of land

as an earnest faith in the country's future" (15). But his father wanted Craig to have a different life, on the Exchange, where Craig could "learn the business of bringing the wheat to the people of other lands that can't grow it the way we can" (15).

Durkin clearly aims to cast aspersions on these allegorical renderings of Canada's burgeoning mythos, rendering them fantastical via the exaggerated imagery used to sell the Canadian pioneer experience. Importantly, then, this section introduces a narrative problem for Craig that persists throughout the book: his struggle to determine which version of worker subjectivity is the right one for him to embody. He also questions whether there are actually any satisfying roles beyond the myths and propaganda used to sell Canada to new immigrants, suggesting a nascent perception that these myths might represent a "human resource identity" that is, itself, an unreal category.

Juxtaposing the brave journey of pioneers across Canada's rugged terrain to the stale, sterile and modern confines of the Grain Exchange grants more stability, materiality and contemporary relevance to the Exchange. At the same time, this comparison muddies the fact that the Exchange is itself also an extractive zone, part of the same resource infrastructure as the courageous settler. This comparison thus initiates a paradox that continues through the text: the Grain Exchange is both a symbol for the dematerializing affect of the financial activities that take place within in, but also something which is granted more reality and stability through its position as part of Winnipeg's infrastructure. The contradictory connotations accorded to the Exchange resonate with Shonkwiler's contention that in the financial imaginary, capital is represented as if it were an autonomous subject, in that it can appear as "abstract and concrete, real and fictitious" and because of this it can "assume agency while deflecting responsibility" (xxv). The Grain Exchange symbolizes the ability of capital to maintain a subjectivity, agency,

and paradoxically, a reality in comparison to the characters in the novel, especially Craig, who are made more and more “unreal” as the book progresses.

The opening pages of *The Magpie* thus register a key attribute of the economic novel to which Shonkwiler draws attention: it is a genre that often features a sustained struggle to “define the real against the ephemerality of capitalism” (xvii). Craig desires more “real” work, but the various ways he tries to imagine it are all deemed unsatisfactory, offering only various shades of unreality. In this, *The Magpie* indexes the prevalence of financial forms of value acquisition in Winnipeg’s economy, making workers and working classes progressively less important for the production of value. As Shonkwiler notes, “In generating a sense that there is no *there* there in capitalism, finance threatens to disconnect social, political, and class-based modes of legibility” (5). This, in turn, impacts the representation of work, with the economic novel’s apprehension that “unproductive accumulation changes the cultural meanings of work, the value realizable through work, and the terrifying and/or exalting possibility that a direct correspondence between the two might not be maintained” (6). In these early sections of *The Magpie*, various myths of productive work in Canada’s resource economy are put into contrast with one another, though part of the point of doing so is to highlight that no existing form of labour identity can be fully inhabited by Craig. This, in turn, destabilizes one of the foundational tenets of the realist novel: its linkage of character to class and labour—the real which the realist novel purports to represent.

The implication that financial capitalism in Winnipeg has caused Craig’s estrangement from his work should not be taken as an endorsement of the communist stance of the strikers. Rather, the novel’s dematerializing gaze—its resource rhetoric—*extends* to working class conflict itself. We see this in the novel’s superficial depiction of the strike, but also through Craig’s ambivalent perspective on it. While he attends several working-class protests and

organizing meetings, his stance on them is contradictory and participation in them inconsistent and equivocal. Working class movements, in the logic of the financial imaginary, are shrouded with unreality just as much as Craig's nostalgic fantasies of unalienated labour. As a manifestation of an emergent resource discourse, *The Magpie* shows how workers and working classes lose their legibility when extractivist logic in its financialized form holds sway.

In the initial scene of the novel at Jimmy's home, Craig's ambivalent stance towards working class struggle is established. In this conversation, a contrast is made between the class harmony experienced in the World War I trenches and Winnipeg's current state of class conflict embodied by the strike. Craig and Jimmy's conversation is framed as an argument about differing notions of revolution. While Jimmy uses the communist-inflected language of the "dictatorship of the proletariat," Craig longs for a world without class distinction, resembling the unity experienced by soldiers in the trenches, a well-worn cliché of the post war novel. Craig and Jimmy want to return to this classless relationality, but Jimmy feels the injustice of poverty more viscerally, stating "Well, damn it—who has a better right to a turn at the top than the poor beggars who waded through filth to keep the top on the damned system" (23).³¹ In contrast,

³¹ Jimmy's views reflect the prevalence of radical Marxist revolutionary ideas among labour groups, working class people and especially among veterans at this time in Winnipeg and throughout Western Canada. As Peter Campbell (2009) and Gregory Keeley (1984) have shown, "In the aftermath of World War I the dictatorship of the proletariat became a key principle feeding the labour revolt of 1919" and was adopted as a resolution with mass support at the convention of the British Columbia Federation of Labour and the Western Labour conference conventions in March 1919 (Campbell 51). Campbell has shown that this notion was accepted outside the socialist vanguard very much present in Western Canada at the time, inspired directly by revolutionary ideas emanating out of Russia, the US and Western Europe, and could have

Craig argues against the Russian revolutionary example, and the idea of the “dictatorship of the proletariat.” In the car on the way to Jimmy’s house Craig notes:

After what we’ve been through it seems to be there ought to be a new sense of justice, a new intelligence, a different ordering of things, somehow. This business of throwing one class against another ought to be left where it belongs. It ought to be left to the history of the days before the war. The world is looking for something else now. It’s looking for men who will forget class distinctions at home just as they did in the trenches. There were no sects there—there should be at least less of that kind of thing now that the lesson has been learned. There was no Labour and Capital there—they should get together here.” (23)

Craig’s longing for a “different ordering of things” conveys one facet of his perspective, which is that he longs for class conflict to be done away with. But his disavowal of the more radical strike actions occurring at the time gains force as the book progresses, as he disagrees with views supporting the strikers espoused by Jeannette and the activist Amer. Rather than working with them to organize ways to “forget class distinctions at home,” Craig becomes increasingly obsessed with “the machine” that he believes congeals elite class interests into an unstoppable force, with consequences for class society that cannot be gainsaid or avoided.

V. Elite Social Cohesion meets Labour’s “Messy Multidimensionality”

quite plausibly been uttered by people like Jimmy who never encountered Marx, read a socialist pamphlet or attended a meeting (52).

Residing in South-End enclaves like Crescentwood, Winnipeg's business elite—primarily Anglo-Saxon Protestants recently migrated from Eastern Canada—were remarkably integrated socially, politically and economically. As Nerbas has shown, this unity should not, however, be construed as representative of an allegiance to the city of Winnipeg, as these elites' ties to the city were tenuous at best, as Nerbas points out in his characterization of the Winnipeg bourgeoisie:

They live in common residential areas, they went to the same social and cultural clubs, and engaged in the same leisure activities, and they were a politically cohesive group. In a word, Winnipeg's elite shared a lot more in common with elites in other Canadian urban centres than they did with a substantial portion of the population in their own city; and, indeed, familial and business relationships connected Winnipeg's elite to the other urban elites in Canada, primarily central Canada. (42)

In *The Magpie*, this elite group is represented by the figures of Lasker Blount, Gilbert Nason, Corker, Sir Henry Wilton and Reverend Bentley who gathered at the Fort Garry Hotel to determine what to do about an impending strike action (212-215). The elite in *The Magpie* closely mirror the historical elite's disdain for the working classes and the place they called home. As Nerbas writes, "the city's elite did not, first and foremost, fight to guard their city's economic stature" (50). Instead, he writes, "they sought to guard their own wealth within the context of a national economy that was consolidating in Central Canada" (50). In this way, these elites had "pretensions to community responsibility" which, Nerbas writes, "lasted [only] as long as they were economically viable" (Nerbas 42).

This disdain of community was not how elites understood their own outlook or practice. On the contrary, in *The Magpie*—just as in Winnipeg's actual history—the city's elites frame

their opposition to the strike as stemming from a sense of “community responsibility,” rather than from the desire to safeguard financial interests. In the novel and in strike-era propaganda, the strike is described as an ideological affront, orchestrated by “enemy aliens” who want to undermine the wellbeing of the still-growing and developing city. Gilbert Nason was in England while the strike in Winnipeg occurred, in the late spring of 1919. While there, he remembers that there was “talk of revolution everywhere,” with mass riots, looting, rampant unemployment and an escalating war with Ireland. Lasker Blount portrays the strike as part of an imminent revolutionary threat spreading throughout Canada. Durkin writes:

For more than half an hour Blount reviewed the unsettled conditions in Europe, that seething cauldron of unrest and near-anarchy...He spoke in great detail of the radical menace in England, working through the trades unions for the overthrow of authority and perpetrating every kind of outrage against law and order. Wherever there was disruption and upheaval he saw it in the work of long-haired propagandists who were the paid servants of Lenin and Trotsky. Finally he turned to Canada. He had made a careful study of the situation as it existed between Halifax and Vancouver...There was a nation-wide conspiracy, financed, as he had said, by aliens who sought the downfall of western civilization and the overthrow of the Christian religion. (216–217)

Blount’s assessment of the strike as a foreign “conspiracy” led by “the paid servants of Lenin and Trotsky” could have been ripped from the pages of *The Winnipeg Citizen*, a paper founded during the strike by the Citizens’ Committee of 1000. In historical Winnipeg, those who were against the strike formed the committee, which was composed of politicians and powerful

leaders in business and banking.³² Via opinionated articles in the *Winnipeg Citizen*, the Committee engaged in an effort to counter the perspectives being circulated in the striker's daily newspaper, the *Strike Bulletin* (Balawyder 2).

Through the xenophobic conceit of a foreign conspiracy designed to subvert Canada's cities, Winnipeg's elites were able to garner political and military support to put down the strike. From May 15th until June 25th, 1919, 30,000 workers in the city, including 18,000 un-unionized workers, stopped doing their jobs and going to work, and instead attended mass protests, rallies and demonstrations in the city.³³ While the strikers had many demands, the most prominent were "union recognition, wage parity...and the eight-hour day" (Bercuson 111). A vast array of

³² Most of the members of the Citizens' Committee of 1,000 had ties to resource industries. A key member was Alvin Keyes Godfrey, who had served as President of the Winnipeg Grain Exchange from 1913-1914 and of the Board of Trade from 1917-1918 (Manitoba Historical Society, "Memorable Manitobans"). The committee was supported by Winnipeg's so-called "Iron masters" (sometimes "metal masters"), a term that referred to the owners and upper management of Winnipeg's metalwork industry. These included the owners of Winnipeg's largest metal shop, the Vulcan Iron Works, which produced a wide variety of metal goods that help bolster the extractive industry in the area, including grain elevators and mill machinery (Manitoba Historical Society, "Historic Sites of Manitoba").

³³ Notably, the strikers did not mobilize to include members of the region's disenfranchised Métis and First Nations groups. These groups had recently been terribly affected by the building of the Winnipeg Aqueduct, completed in 1919. As Adele Perry explains in *Aqueduct: Colonialism, Resources, and the Histories We Remember* (2016), its construction was built through an expropriation of reserve lands (Shoal Lake 40 First Nation), which resulted in the community being without clean drinking water for two decades and being marooned on an artificial island.

professions ceased work entirely, including those working in stores, restaurants, barbershops, bread and milk deliverymen, bookkeepers, CPR and CNR workers, and public officials such as telephone operators, police, firemen, and postal workers (Balawyder 2).³⁴ For the most part, the Citizens' Committee refused to negotiate with the strikers and labelled the movement a radical insurrectionary attempt to overthrow the government fronted by "illegal aliens." The Committee worked immediately with the federal government to amend the Immigration Act, allowing for a quicker deportation process than was previously possible in law (Penner x). The protracted confrontation between workers and elites culminated on the 17th of June, when the federal government arrested ten leaders of the Central Strike Committee. Four days later, a battalion of Royal North-West Mounted Police charged into a crowd of strikers, who were leading a peaceful demonstration led by pro-strike war veterans—prominent strike participants—resulting in thirty casualties and two deaths. This day became known as "Bloody Saturday," and it ended with federal troops occupying the city's streets. The strikers returned to work on June 25th, a consequence of unrelenting political and legal pressure maintained by the Committee and government officials.

Despite the ultimate failure of the strike to achieve its aims, the solidarity it was able to activate across factions, ethnicities and professions was remarkable (Kealey 315). In contrast to anti-strike propaganda that construed the strikers' ideology as "foreign," Winnipeg's strikers were in fact influenced by North American "One Big Unionism" (OBU). The idea behind OBU was to organize all Canadian workers into one labour movement, a tactic originating in the U.S., specifically amongst supporters of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). In line with the

³⁴ The uneasy coalition of working classes during the strike, in combination with the unified power wielded by elites, is just one of the reasons the strike was swiftly crushed (Palmer 180).

universalism of OBU, Winnipeg's strike and its demands appealed broadly, even if its wide popularity among the city's working classes was short lived (Kealey 315-316).³⁵ It is therefore surprising that in *The Magpie*, Durkin portrays the working-class organizers and activists as atomized and isolated from community, family and class. The novel's negative portrayal of working-class formation highlights the significant power and prominence the novel grants to elites, and the hue of unreality its resource rhetoric imparts to working class movements. Elite power is construed as a narrative given, rather than something that could be challenged by a remarkable, if short-lived, labour uprising.

Through Craig's eyes, the novel explores Winnipeg's class dynamics and the strike's eventual shortcomings, with Amer, the worker organizer and prophetic outsider, serving as Craig's astute guide. Amer is first introduced immediately following Craig's visit to Jeannette's apartment, after a heated argument pitting Craig's more temperate views towards revolution with Jeanette's more strident ones. "I would turn the world upside down, if I could," Jeannette

³⁵ The strike involved many of the city's recently arrived Eastern European immigrants, including large numbers of Ukrainians, Jews, Hungarians, Germans, and other ethnic groups. There were also members of the first Black worker's collective in Canada, the Black Sleeping Car Porters union (Calliste 39). The ability to activate a variety of ethnic groups in the city to work together in one organized action is a significant aspect of the strike. This is because at that time in Canada, labour was fractured into unions which sometimes excluded non-British Isles-descended workers, which led to the growth of ethnically organized labour groups. As Craig Heron explains, while ethnic diversity within unions was growing in the period, "A number of unions were organized primarily along ethnic or racial lines - for example, the Chinese Shingle Weavers' Union and Japanese Camp and Mill Workers' Union in British Columbia, the Finnish loggers in northern Ontario, the Jewish clothing workers in Montreal and Toronto, the black sleeping-car porters on the CPR, and the Italian construction labourers in several cities" (271).

exclaims, “I would put the Nasons where their pampered daughters and their degenerate sons and their faddist wives would have to work for a starvation wage or go begging” (180). Craig counters with “I don’t see what advantage would come from putting the top on the bottom and the bottom on the top” (180). Immediately following this disagreement, Craig walks across a bridge over the Assiniboine river, and while admiring the view an imposing “giant of a fellow,” approaches, who is later revealed to be Amer:

“I’ve been looking at that for the past hour from the other end of the bridge,” he said, pointing to the river. “Yes?” Craig replied. “I don’t often stop to look at things merely because they’re beautiful, but I couldn’t pass this without—” “Beautiful?” the stranger said. “Well, I might have thought so once myself. I know better. It’s ugly, my friend. Muddy water—stinking sewage—and fog! Just like your God-damned world!” The stranger walked off and Craig watched him till his towering figure was blurred and lost to sight in the dense fog. (181)

Here, Amer’s perspectival acuity allows him to discern the ugliness of environmental pollution and of Winnipeg’s society, underscoring the need for revolutionary change. This is contrasted with Craig’s wistful envisioning of nature and oblique stance towards social transformation. Craig’s romantic stance towards nature was perceptible at Jimmy’s house, where the thought of abundant nature and the capacity to cultivate it through labour provided Craig with a rare (but tenuous) sense of hope, in contrast to the intractable labour strife ongoing in Winnipeg. But in their conversation on the bridge over the Assiniboine river, Amer suggests that the natural world is not as pristine as Craig would like to imagine, and that it also has been tarnished by the same “God-damned world” Craig hates. Moreover, Amer alerts Craig to the fact that perceiving the river as “beautiful” is a kind of false apprehension, tantamount to ignoring

reality. This revelation injects greater anger, uncertainty and unease into Craig's vision of the world. Thus, this passage marks a stage in the dialectic originally established in the opening passage at Jimmy's house, where Craig envisions an idealized natural environment untrammelled by industrial progress. Now, Craig is forced to recognize more dimensions of Winnipeg's resource regime and its effect on his world. This marks a decisive step in his perception of what truly afflicts his society, and intensifies his malaise with his job at the Grain Exchange.

Amer is a multivalent figure in *The Magpie* and his character acts as an allegory for various aspects of strike-era worker subjectivity in Winnipeg. While he is imagined as a sage-like presence able to perceive the problems plaguing Winnipeg with more perspicacity than Craig, he is also depicted as isolated, peripatetic and dejected. In his subsequent appearances in the novel, Amer often appears suddenly and alone—first, at a meeting of the business community, and then later at a rally of workers in Victoria Park. Indeed, his appearance is always a shocking surprise, with his frame commented on as “massive” and “giant like” at least four times in the text. While not described in terms of his ethnicity, Amer is characterized as physically different because of his frame, dark eyes, shaggy eyebrows and ethnically ambiguous single word name. Amer clearly registers the “enemy alien” and “rootless cosmopolitan” tropes, readily used in anti-strike propaganda of the era. He is described in the novel as arriving in Winnipeg in 1918 and is deported to England when taken by the police after the riot in the novel's final scene.³⁶

³⁶ On June 6th, 1919, amendments were made in the Act to Amend the Immigration Act, which specifically targeted the British-born leaders of the strike and “enemy aliens.” It permitted deportation without trial of anyone accused of sedition and not born in Canada (Dupuis 71).

As Durkin represents him, Amer also represents one faction of the workers involved in the strike—those with no permanent employment and transitory connections to the city. As migration geographer Daniel Hiebert points out, Manitoba’s economy during the period of the Winnipeg General Strike relied on both skilled and unskilled workers, with a high proportion of the latter working in building, railway and civic works. Unskilled workers were hired seasonally by farmers in the spring, returning to Winnipeg in colder months, or turning to work in lumber camps (Hiebert 58). The high prevalence of seasonal work meant the city would be flooded with jobless workers at certain points of the year. Like Amer, these workers might seem to appear out of nowhere, with no clear connection to a workplace or community

While embodying aspects of the “foreign agitator” cliché, Amer’s character clearly symbolizes the structural obstacles preventing the strikers from overcoming the tightly unified class of bourgeois owners, investors and statesmen. While the strikers were bonded together long enough to share a common aim and purpose, they were nevertheless disparate, drawn from a vast array of professions, including a high proportion of seasonally employed resource workers. In this, they were defined by a “messy multidimensionality” that proved no match for united front of the Canadian state and business elite, the containment efforts they imposed, as well as the capitulations of established labour unions (Siemiatycki 293). As a labour organizer with an unknown provenance (where does he work? what does he do?), Amer is of the same ilk as the many precariously employed resource workers in Winnipeg at the time. Unlike the faceless factory workers threatening strike in Nason’s factory, he is presented as untethered to a workplace, as was the case with many members of Winnipeg’s working classes during this period. In this, we might imagine Amer as a liminal figure—one who represents aspects of the

malleable human resource required by Canada's extractivist state, but who also maintains an allegiance to worker identity, and the ideals of class struggle and formation at the same time.

Amer's character is therefore crucial in illuminating the novel's identification of limitations on class formation among resource workers and how this limit contributes to labour's "messy multidimensionality" in facing elite class cohesion. He represents Winnipeg's migrant workers, who existed in a landscape where multiple modes of production were propelling the economy concurrently. These workers came together briefly to demand their rights, but they were no match for their highly cohesive opponents. Amer is also pivotal as a foil for Craig. While Amer is hopeful that Winnipeg's extractivist elites can be overthrown, even if the city's working classes are riven by tactical disagreement, Craig understands elite power in Winnipeg as incontrovertible—a "machine" whose logics are replicated far and wide, creating both class inequality and environmental degradation.

VI. Capitalism Thinking: The Meaning of "The Machine" in *The Magpie*

In his introduction to the Invisible Books edition of *The Magpie* (2018), Bart Vautour notes that Craig "comes to identify the sinister character of the compulsive drive towards progress and efficiency as the 'machine'" (4). Craig identifies "the machine" as the fundamental cause of the failure of the strike, the general societal malaise in Winnipeg, and his own personal distress. In *The Magpie*, "the machine" connotes the logic and material structures that live out the goals of capitalism and keep its power intact. The machine, crucially, lives out the goals of capitalists without their needing to perform any decision making on their own. In this way, *The Magpie* again fulfills the generic capacity of the economic novel to show capital's ability to "assume agency while deflecting responsibility" (Shonkwiler xxv). While capitalism, of course, cannot "think," artists writing during periods of heightened financial activity often portray it as

possessing cognitive ability and agency. The subjectification of capitalism, as we have seen, is a running theme in this book, as is the way human thinking is overwhelmed and diminished by it. The machine, as a metaphor, points to this very process.

The novel first links “the machine” to this idea of “capitalism thinking” through Jimmy Dyer. Dyer, Craig’s WWI platoon member, refers to Craig as “Cap” despite their ongoing friendship. Jimmy tells Craig, with reference to the strikers:

Those fellows made mistakes—of course they did. They’re only men, after all. But their hearts were right, Cap, whatever their heads did for them. Don’t make any mistake about it, the reason these fellows were branded as Reds and Bolsheviki was because of what they had in here”—he struck his breast as he spoke—“not because of their wrong thinking. The guys on the other side of the business, the big fellows who called out the Mounties and had the streets cleared with bullets, don’t worry any about how we think. It’s how we feel that’s got them worrying. They can think rings around us and they know it. They think in terms of policemen and reserves and penitentiaries and deportations. That’s the machinery that does their thinking for them and it’s dead easy, Cap, dead easy.” (22)

This key passage identifies the “machinery” enforcing the will of capital in remarkably Althusserian terms. The philosopher Louis Althusser famously characterized the ways in which capitalism reproduces its mode of production (its base) through infrastructures of the state known as Repressive State Apparatus (RSA), working in tandem with and Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) (141). In this passage, the “policemen and reserves and penitentiaries and deportations” that perform the “thinking” for the “big fellows” are like Althusser’s Repressive State Apparatuses, reproducing Winnipeg’s mode of production. In his essay “Ideology and

Ideological State Apparatuses” (1971) Althusser specifically uses the metaphor of the machine to explain this process, stating, “The State is a 'machine' of repression, which enables the ruling classes...to ensure their domination over the working class, thus enabling the former to subject the latter to the process of surplus-value extortion (i.e. to capitalist exploitation)” (138).

In *The Magpie*, this machine is distinctly Canadian, encompassing the reserves that enforce colonization and facilitate settlement and resource extraction; the Mounties, who uphold this system and suppress labour unrest through policing and incarceration; and the forced deportation of settlers who turn against capital to advocate for better working conditions. In this key passage, then, the novel identities “the machine” as both a material and an immaterial manifestation of the intertwined interests of the state and capitalists. The machine is state infrastructures, but also “capitalism thinking”—it makes decisions, logical deductions, and, as many thinkers in the Marxist tradition have identified, appears to have its own subjectivity, which takes both a material and an immaterial shape.

Craig repeatedly returns to the metaphor of the machine with this same referent, transposing it onto the various traumas that have haunted his existence up until this point and naming “the machine” as the cause. For example, he identifies “the machine” as the driving force behind the advanced German society opposed by Canadian troops in World War I—troops who sought not to replace one machine with another, but to establish what he calls “the cause”—or, a “new order” not governed by “the machine” (153). This is in contrast to those who, Craig argues, want to re-establish British economic and political dominance by force and “restore the order of things that prevailed before the war” (153). Craig claims that, on the front, Canadian troops “regarded the German nation as the last word in the old order” and that this nation “was the very symbol of Progress and Efficiency.” In response, he and his soldiers “went out to defeat that—

that machine. And we did defeat it—not by a machine of our own, but by something else—something that we knew only as the spirit that was in us.” (153). On the front, he states that “The men who faced the German armies on the west front died for something they were taught to call ‘The Cause’ ... It was The Cause against The Machine” (153).

This idea of the cause versus the machine is then transposed onto the struggle between labour and capital in Winnipeg. In this struggle, labour is driven by the “spirit” and emotions of embodied workers, while capital operates and sustains itself not through the actions of individuals, but through “the machine”—a metaphor for the “thinking” instruments and infrastructures of power. Craig accuses Blount of this directly, saying, “You are doing your best to consolidate your forces, the forces of wealth and property, in a fight to the finish against the forces of revolution and radicalism... You may have the machine, but the men you fight have the spirit” (155).

“The machine” becomes an increasingly abstract symbol as the book progresses, delighting Craig who is “pleased with himself for having thought of the metaphor” (159). This remarkably capacious (and overdetermined) metaphor can explain a multitude of his personal ordeals, and also points to his deteriorating mental state. Most importantly, overall, the machine for Craig is not a “logic” that can be argued with; it is not people, or places, that can be toppled down—it is a mystical and supernatural force that guides society, invades his mind, and from which flight is the only option.

And it is flight from the machine, literally and metaphorically, that comprises the book’s definitive climax. Much like the guts and feelings of the troops and strikers, Craig idealizes Martha’s art and positions it as the emotive counterpoint to the machine. He praises her sculpture “Chrysallis” as “tenuous, unfolding forms, arresting in their simplicity, quite beyond the power

of words to describe—two bold, clear strokes in symbolic impressionism...then, incongruously enough, his mind turned to Blount... the Machine... the exact antithesis of Chrysallis” (191-192). Not surprisingly, given this sentiment, Craig responds in contempt and violence to Blount and Nason’s proposal to mass produce one of Martha’s bronze sculptures as “replicas” in Nason’s factory, turning them into metal paper weights (313).³⁷ The violence that this proposal incites in Craig is so momentous that it causes him to end his marriage and flee the city entirely. It is his reaction to the machine as both a symbol of “capitalism thinking,” but also the literal tool used to strip Martha of a connection to the material embodiment of her work as an artist, that forces him to dramatically alter his life course.

VII. Escape from the “Stir of the Market”: Winnipeg’s “Machine” and its Effects

The most obvious interpretation of the climax of *The Magpie* is that it symbolizes an aversion to the growing prevalence of manufacturing and industrialization in Winnipeg. This industrialization, as the proposed mass-production of Martha’s sculptures exemplifies, would distance the worker from the fruits of their labour, an alienation Craig recoils from throughout the book. Vautour reads *The Magpie* in this light, in which Craig’s dissatisfaction with the capitalistic “machine” leads him to a leftist politics expressed most readily in modernist art, symbolized by Martha’s sculptures. He argues that it is “the complex construction of artistic practice that aids the protagonist in resisting incorporation into bourgeois subjectivity” (62). For Vautour, Craig finds an alternative political subject in Martha Lane and seeks an anti-capitalist

³⁷ See Vautour (2011) for a discussion of this and modernist cultural criticism like Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1935).

bohemian life with her outside of Winnipeg's fraught urbanity.³⁸ Significantly, for Vautour, Craig and Martha's final move to the farm is not akin to nineteenth century romantic anti-capitalism, an interpretation championed by critic James Doyle, who sees it as a version of an "idealized nostalgic pre-industrial pastoral vision of the world" (47). Instead, Craig's move to live with Martha is read as a modernist, cosmopolitan remaking of rural life, in which artistic practice, work and political activism align (Vautour 79).

Without more evidence about the life Craig and Martha create after the end of the book it is difficult to speculate on exactly how we are to understand the relationship of the rural to the urban. But what is abundantly evident is that it is not just industrialization or class conflict that Craig flees in Winnipeg, but the specifically speculative capitalism epitomized by the Grain Exchange and encapsulated in the metaphor of the machine. When Craig yearns to leave the city permanently and return to an idealized pastoral setting of his family farm, it is the "stir of the market" that he would like to flee, "where he could find time to think quietly by himself" (186). And the villains of the novel are those most aligned with finance, not manufacturing. While there are corrupt factory owners, the primary source of animus is not there. Literary realism of the nineteenth and early twentieth century often exhibits an aversion to the growth of manufacturing, depicting the city as the malfeasant world of smokestacks, crime and moral turpitude. *The Magpie*, instead, evinces an anxiety about the "the market," the growth of a financialized resource economy in Winnipeg at the time, and the eclipsing of worker subjectivity with the more amorphous, more unreal, human resource.

³⁸ Although not developed by Vautour or other critics, this mirrors Durkin and Martha Ostenso's biographical trajectory. Martha Lane is, or most likely must be, a character modelled upon Martha Ostenso.

The character Gilbert Nason is a prime example of this novel's suspicious perspective on extractivist speculation above all else. He is morally-suspect not because he is an owner of factories, but because he dabbles in speculation and investment to make profits across a wide swathe of extractivist businesses in Canada. Durkin writes:

As a man of affairs, Gilbert Nason was too enterprising to place all his eggs in one basket. He was a director in at least a half dozen of the leading industries of the city. He had invested his money in a pulp and paper mill in Northern Ontario, drew a yearly dividend from a successful venture in copper mining in Northern Manitoba, was known to have a voice in the direction of a substantial shipping enterprise with boats plying between Fort William and eastern points on the great lakes, and had been one of the first figures in a company formed to insure western farmers against losses from hail. But his pet enterprise was the Adanac Metal Works, a venture that Gilbert Nason spoke of with pride and that others invariably referred to as a "going concern." (206)

As a "man of affairs," the bulk of Nason's income comes from investments in natural resource extraction, processing and insurance. Meanwhile, his manufacturing factory is portrayed as a quaint anomaly—a "pet enterprise" about which he boasts of holding an enlightened stance toward his workers. Although industrial manufacturing was taking place in Winnipeg at the time, the novel consistently downplays its significance, portraying it as less central to the economy than investments in extractivist businesses. And while Nason is not portrayed here as engaging in speculation per se, the depiction of him as being "too enterprising to place all his eggs in one basket" satirizes his financial dabbling, an action treated with even more direct animus in the book's depiction of the Winnipeg Grain Exchange.

When Craig finally flees to his family's farm at the novel's close, it is only after the book has established a sharp juxtaposition between the farm's idealized pastoral setting and the frenetic pandemonium of the Grain Exchange. This is a function of the book's architecture, which interweaves pleasant visits to the countryside and Martha's artist studio with recurrent descriptions of market volatility at the Exchange. Scenes set on the trading room floor recur refrain-like between scenes that advance the action of the plot, with the feverish tone of these passages propelling the tensions and conflicts that move the plot forward. The novel is divided into three parts: "Marion," "Martha," and "The Madman." The latter section presumably refers to Craig, as he becomes more embroiled in the worker's movement, grows further estranged from Marion, and inches closer to fleeing his life in Winnipeg. Within these parts there are five to six longer chapters, subdivided into smaller sub-chapters, of which at least one almost always occurs in the Grain Exchange. In each of these scenes set at the Exchange, Craig ruminates on the opacity of financial speculation or attempts to explain his perspective on it to others.

Craig's ambivalence towards his work as a trader takes various forms, including explicit articulations of a negative perspective on speculation. This occurs, for example, in a fraught conversation with Marion, in which she urges him to "do a little speculating in the market" and notes that there's something "rather romantic about it—the idea of taking risks and staking fortunes to win on a chance turn of the market" (115). To this, Craig responds in a tirade of negative aspersions on speculation. But first, he imbues normative early twentieth century extractive capitalism with a morally superior hue:

"I'm beginning to think there are very different ideas of romance in the world," he said.

"I seem to see a little romance in keeping close to the export end of the business. To buy a bushel of wheat from a farmer in some little valley in northern Alberta and to carry it

across a continent and across an ocean and sell it to some hungry man or woman waiting to receive it in a village in southeastern Europe—isn't there romance in that?"

Marion mocks Craig's exaltation of the "export end of the business," deriding his dislike of risk which serves as a reminder of the way in which, in the genre of the economic novel, risk is internalized as a noble quality or personality trait. She intones:

You get your thrills by long distance, don't you, Craig?" she replied with a laugh...I got more real excitement the day the Mounted Police drew their guns on the mob on Main Street in front of the city hall than I got out of the whole war... And that's the way I feel about your work. I don't understand the kind of romance you profess to get out of it. I really believe I'd sooner stand in the visitors' gallery in the trading-room and see you lose your last dollar than sit at home and watch you make a fortune by what you choose to call legitimate methods. Life is a gamble no matter how you treat it. The dramatic moments make it worth living." (115-116).

Marion's mockingly termed "legitimate methods" are contrasted with the more "dramatic" forms of commodity market speculation, such as shorting and future trading. This contrast is framed as an ideological argument between the thrill of risk-taking and the satisfaction of having a hand in producing use values for people who need them. Bringing to the fore Craig's aversion to speculation on a philosophical level, this passage captures how critical the debate between productive extractivism, and its financialized form, is for Craig, and how it infiltrates all aspects of his life, including influencing the trajectory of his marriage.

In the book's imagistic portrayal of the Grain Exchange, speculative extractivism is portrayed as a "financial sublime," a rhetorical framing that imbues this form of capitalism with

a mystifying power by way of a tumult of multi-sensory imagery (Shonkwiler 75). This imagery transforms market speculation into an overwhelming and violent force:

He glanced at the clock. Only ten minutes were left before the gong should sound again for the close. Five minutes later, with the price at fifty-seven, Cartwright came into the market once more and bought everything that was offered him, in a last determined effort to turn back the enemy. Fordyce's men fell upon him in a mass, the din rose to a deafening climax, collars and ties were torn away by clutching fingers, men hurled themselves bodily into the thick of the conflict as if their lives depended upon the fortunes of the next few minutes—and then, clear across the tumult of cries came the note of the gong! The market was closed! (325-326)

In this stirring passage, Durkin frames speculation as a bloody struggle, employing language like “turn back the enemy” and depicting men falling “in a mass,” “clutching,” and hurling themselves “bodily into the thick of the conflict as if their lives depended upon the fortunes of the next few minutes.” The way speculation is portrayed here can be contrasted with idealized visions of productive agricultural and artistic labour elsewhere in the book. Even more strikingly, the grain market imagery symbolically links Craig's experiences on the battlefields of France and the violent frenzy of market speculation. This connection is a further condensation of the “machine” trope, which casts capital's financialized form as the fundamental logic governing his world.

In the Grain Exchange, the traders in the pit are swept up into a thronging mass, evoking the way in which a “financial sublime” overtakes human agency and abstracts financial activities into disembodied forces:

Fully fifty men were already standing in the pit waiting for the gong to ring as a signal that the day's trading had begun...Suddenly the gong clanged and a deafening chorus broke loose from the throng in the pit. Arms were up, fingers spread, hands clutched and tore madly, men hurled themselves half a dozen at a time upon a trader whose voice barked but once from the very centre of the pit, the red figures flashed upon the dial—the first trade was made! For fifteen minutes, then, the tumult was deafening. (92-93)

With jarring, filmic shifts in focus, spasmodic movement, and frenetic noise, “the pit” evokes the Burkean sublime, suggesting disorientation, and a dissolving of concrete individuality into a “chorus” and a “throng.” In this, “arms” “fingers” and “hands” come together as one mass, and as individual traders, they are swayed towards action in a way that obscures their own agency, with the “machine” of the market sweeping them up in one deafening tumult. The throng in the pit become one body, united in the pursuit of profit that helps maintain Canada's resource regime.

VIII. The Ascendence of Capital's Subject

In the literary realism of the financial imaginary, financial activity and its dematerializing tendency undermines the agency and identity demarcations that define personhood. (Shonkwiler 2). When the financialized form of capitalism is predominant, money is derived from speculating on financial products rather than through commodity production and sale, made possible by labour power. Because of this, the “agents” driving capitalism, whether that be workers or business moguls, are less visible and available to authors, or to use Shonkwiler's words, are more “difficult to personify” (2). In *The Magpie*, characters such as Old Dad, Amer, and Jimmy are Durkin's attempts to personify “labour”—and with them he creates either caricatures or wistful odes to bygone personae, who operate more as symbols than characters endowed with

“personhood.” In Marion, Nason, and Blount, we encounter financial characters with more heft and durability, yet their personhood and agency seems to have been consumed by “the machine.” This suggests they have as little autonomy as the novel’s worker subjects. The subject of capital, again, appears to displace human subjects in this novel—with Canada’s resource economy rising as an omniscient and sublime force. And in the wake of the collapse of worker subjectivity—a subjectivity that is effaced by the novel’s resource rhetoric—we may imagine the rise of human resources, who like the traders in the Grain Exchange combine as assets to support the machine’s “thinking.”

The book begins with a juxtaposition of a traditional worker subject and a financial character: Marion’s brother, Dick Nason, a financial character living off his father’s money, and Old Dad Robinson, the janitor who works at the Grain Exchange and the only character in the novel who is clearly a wage earner. Craig describes him as follows:

Dick is just twenty. I confess I felt a little uncomfortable with Dick. I always do. Dick doesn’t know there has been a war. He insists that life is pretty rotten and that nothing really counts. Dickie says that we need a few Oscar Wildes and a few Shelleys to bring the world back to form. He thinks the world ought to be psychoanalyzed... Dickie talks a great deal about—mostly about talk... (9)

By contrast:

Old Dad Robinson, the janitor, thinks the world is lost and that civilization is crumbling. At least he says the world is shaking. The war was a blight and peace, he says, is “is a disease.” He looks for an act of God to restore the world to its happy condition of five years ago... For my part I think I like old Dad’s view-point pretty well...A man of fifty may be wrong in what he thinks about the world, but he’s probably right in what he feels. There’s

something wrong in the way Dickie feels, though perhaps he thinks a little more clearly on some things than I did when I was twenty. (9-10)

An outlier from an old world, Dad is aligned with nostalgic feeling, and Dickie, thinking.

Although Dickie “feels” wrong about the state of the world, he “thinks” correctly about it, while Dad “feels” right about the state of things, but perhaps thinks wrongly. While Dickie is denigrated, his status as a financial character aligns him closer to the financial thinking that guides contemporary Winnipeg, while Dad, an aging wage-earner, aligns himself with the world that is lost.

The moral accounting performed in this passage by Craig exemplifies his propensity to assess, rank, denigrate, or extoll the virtues of those around him according to the kind of work they do and their relationship with that work. He sorts people into two camps: the few who engage in wage-earning or productive work (such as janitor, sculptor, and farmer), and the majority of characters in the book, who survive via investment, real estate, trading, or living off inherited familial wealth. The novel valorizes workers in recognizable trades or jobs as morally superior, linking this superiority to their engagement in work that is knowable, readable and productive of a use value or service. Conversely, *The Magpie* positions the trader, finance capitalist, and entrepreneur as morally suspect, not solely due to their unproductive roles, but also because they are, to some extent, just extensions of the “machine,” whose agency and moral compass have been compromised.

In the example of Nason, we can see this morally compromised extractivist entrepreneur in action. But even more compellingly, in his Adanac Metal Works, we can observe an ostensible representation of human resources in the “men” who work there. While actual class formations do not register at all in the novel’s imaginary, appearing only as the mob in the

book's final scenes, Nason's "workers" are one of few mass groups of working-class people referred to in the book. Epitomizing the propensity of resource rhetoric to de-corporealize and glom together working-class people, Adanac's workers are spoken about but never represented. They are just referred to as "the men" on Nason's payroll at the Works, an idealized space that is notably an anadrome of "Canada." Through Adanac, Nason's "pet project," he aims to prove that he can "treat his workers *as if* they were human beings and yet make a handsome profit out of the business" (emphasis mine, 127). While ostensibly "workers," these unseen individuals are better understood as depersonified human resources, ceded to their role as a scaffold to capital. Craig describes Adanac in the following way:

It was his City of Refuge to which he flew every time Jeannette Bawden set upon him in defense of the "system." When she had driven him from a self-respecting defence of his mining schemes, when she had called him a robber and a thief in his defence of freight rates on the great lakes, when she had harried him without mercy on what she called his "insurance swindle," he had still a comfortable retreat behind the Adanac Metal Works.
(127)

As a fantastical "city of refuge," Adanac barely registers in comparison to Nason's much more substantial finance-based schemes and extractive investments, which are lumped together in this a bitter caricature. But the example of Adanac still serves as an emergent representation of how resource rhetoric, represented by Nason's perspective on workers and how they fit into "Adanac," or, "Canada," transforms working class people into human resources. The factory's "men" are imbued with the sheen of humanity but are fundamentally conceived of as nothing more than assets, fulfilling their role as the resources Canada, or Adanac, needs.

Over and over in *The Magpie*, personhood seems to crumble under the “disembodied market forces” that take an agential role in Winnipeg society (Shonkwiler xxxii). Craig’s madness exemplifies just that. The more he understands the pervasiveness of speculative logics, the more a concomitant personal breakdown occurs, which culminates in the “Madman” section of the book. We see this in the chapters of the book where sections detailing Craig’s fraying mental health are interspersed with chapters depicting increasingly fevered and risky trading on the Grain Exchange, and conversations among the traders about the connection between risk, speculation and their work there. For example, at the end of Chapter Two of Part Three, Craig senses his marriage falling apart alongside his heightened mental disarray, noting: “One thing mattered...only one. He must get back to the centre of things...he must not lose his grip there...” (289). After a gap of about one month, the next chapter opens with two of his trader colleagues discussing that “he’s not there...something’s eating at him,” recalling that Craig recently said “Croker, where’s it all going to end” (291). This first section cuts dramatically to Craig observing the trading room floor: “From the upper edge of the pit, Craig watched the milling mass of traders scrambling beneath him” (293). The narration continues, “Craig stood and listened to the chaos of discordant voices without moving a muscle in his face. Occasionally he narrowed his eyes slowly, fervently he glanced suddenly one side to the other as someone attempted to undersell the market” (293). From this climactic terror the book moves to a form of resolution, with Craig and Martha’s final move to the country.

With this conclusion, *The Magpie* portrays Winnipeg’s financialized extractivism and its “free-floating” affect as inevitable and immutable facts. If Craig is to hold on to his self, and forestall a collapse of his personhood, flight is the only option. I read this flight as an overall acquiescence to the rise of resource discourse, and its imperative of transforming the worker into

the human resource—a vessel for profit production whose primary affiliation is with the extractivist state. While this novel certainly critiques this process, it also frames it as an incontrovertible given. Moreover, it leaves open the possibility that there may be workers more capable than Craig of adapting to Canada’s extractivist state, more capable of embodying its contradictions, and offering of less resistance to its dehumanizing tendencies.

IX. Conclusion: “Giving the World Back Something When he is Through”

Magnifying financialization’s effects of abstraction too often blurs a dynamic operating within capital per se. The commodity form under industrialism is no less “abstract,” despite its thingly countenance — the fetish being just that facet. What if we presumed instead that the naked abstractions of finance expose, rather than obscure, capital as a process?

—Aaron Carico and Dara Orenstein.
“Editors’ Introduction: The Fictions
of Finance”

For Marx the impossible indeterminacy noted by the House of Commons report (which he cites) opens onto the prospect that the fictitious cannot be isolated from the ordinary transactions, that capitalism is always already a machine of virtualizations, that something within all capital is fictitious. In the critical discourse around our present financial crisis, there is an unfortunate tendency to overlook this constitutive dimension, romanticizing the integral real of prelapsarian prefinancial capitalism. By contrast, in his fluency with the Victorian fictitious real, Marx had no question that earlier periods of capitalism were inherently speculative.

—Anna Kornbluh, *Realizing Capital*

In *The Magpie*, Durkin has his characters contrast profit-making from speculative trading on wheat commodities to more simplified forms of agriculture. While a grain exchange could feasibly be a centralized locale for grain merchants to coordinate the purchase of Manitoba wheat farther afield in Canada or overseas, it was more than this in both *The Magpie* and interwar Winnipeg. Rather, the Winnipeg Grain Exchange was Canada’s sole agricultural futures market and continued as such under various names until 2018. “Futures” are contracts, where a seller

agrees to sell a commodity at a set price and for a set amount in the future (Kearns). Speculation on wheat futures might occur when a contract is bought with the hope that the global price of wheat will increase or decrease. In actual wheat futures trading, *no wheat is actually exchanged*, just contracts that either bet on the price rising or falling. Craig, and the traders he works with, are profiting from these speculations, a fact that disturbs Craig greatly.

Take, for example, this passage in which Craig and another trader, Charnley, debate the degree of speculation inherent to agricultural commodity trading:

Charnley moved uneasily. "If it comes to that, everything in the business is a gamble, Magpie. The farmer is the biggest gambler in the whole system. We gamble on the price fluctuations. He gambles on the weather for about ninety days out of the year and then has to gamble on the price as well when he comes to market his stuff. I don't get your argument at all. I've never heard you object to farming on the basis that it was pure speculation." Craig busied himself again with the ink bottle and the paper weight. "It's funny how a lot of you fellows can see your own side of a question so damn clearly," he said slowly, "and are blind as bats when you look at the other side of it. The farmer can't help taking the chance that he takes. His chances are part of the conditions under which he works. But he puts his back into the work he does and gives the world something when he is through." (227-228)

Craig's veneration of agriculture that terminates in the production of a use value in contrast to "pure speculation," exemplifies the way in which, in economic novels, finance is represented as "a destabilizing force" which is "unaligned with anything productive" (Shonkwiler xxxi). Craig appears to categorically deny Charnley's contention that markets, speculation and risk are inherent to all forms of agriculture. However, Craig's response indicates a veiled acquiescence to

Charnley's contention, as if he knows it might be true. For farmers, participation in the inherently speculative market is redeemed by the satisfaction they get through the production of an actual use value, a satisfaction not afforded the speculative trader. From Craig's perspective, while the farmer does "go to market" with his products, the conditions of that market, specifically prices, are determined by circumstances, often global, outside of his control. They represent the "conditions" under which he works.

But for Craig, the farmer's work is of a higher morality than the traders because he "puts his back into it," and "gives the world something when he is through," despite the limitations to his autonomy placed by the global wheat market, in this case. Here, then, a discussion of the immorality of speculation leads to an apprehension about capitalism more broadly. That is, that there are "conditions" that a farmer must acquiesce to that are determined by a global market, beyond the control of local farmers. And on a deeper level, in this market, there is a necessity to abstract an exchange value from a use value—a dematerializing operation that occurs even when futures trading is not directly involved.

In this example, Durkin's novel intimates that the simple operation of selling wheat on a local level implicates the local farmer in a broader, global system of speculation and abstraction whether or not the farmer realizes it. Durkin's exhortation follows in the footsteps of many nineteenth century fiction writers, who responded to a growing cultural understanding of the predominance of "fictitious capital" in an era when the "speculative begetting of money from money" was becoming codified in law through various acts and schemas determined by state and business (Kornbluh 17). Many of these authors, as Kornbluh notes, used their economic novels to shed light not only on financialization, but also on the underlying speculative nature of all forms of capitalism. While Durkin's novel is replete with anxiety about the growing dominance

of the speculative capitalism recently implanted in Winnipeg, it simultaneously compels a consideration of financial speculation's importance to all phases of capital's cycle. In this context, where speculation is inherent to any form of work Craig could potentially do, the best he can muster (and how the book concludes), is to "put[...] his back into the work" and give the "world something when he is through" (228).

Is this a form of capitalist realism that accepts Manitoba's resource regime as something immutable, imposed from without, and impossible to reverse? Cultural theorist Mark Fisher defines capitalist realism as the central attitude of the neoliberal era, in which life cannot be imagined without capitalism. For Fisher, this attitude acts as an "invisible barrier constraining thought and action" (20). Cultural critics Shonkwiler and Leigh Claire La Berge point out that capitalist realism can be understood as a "widely accepted brand of Gramscian "common sense"—or a form of hegemonic thinking in which to envisage reality means to envisage capitalism (6). Craig's shrugging acceptance that "The farmer can't help taking the chance that he takes. His chances are part of the conditions under which he works," clearly demonstrates a form of capitalist realism, emanating from a period in Winnipeg, like neoliberalism, when financial speculation was particularly prevalent.

Realism and practicality are closely related words, and throughout *The Magpie* Craig critiques a discourse of "practicality" that he sees as justifying the elevation of profit over personal fulfillment, justice and fair treatment. Durkin uses the term "practicality" as another way of demarcating those acting according to the logics of "the machine" and those whose moral compass aligns with more "pure" forms of work and labour in the book. When Nason advises Craig to have a concrete plan for social change in the face of Blount's red-baiting, Nason states that Craig's socialist-imbued ideas seem "a little ridiculous in the eyes of men who are

concerned with practical affairs” (165). To this Craig responds: “I’m just about fed up with the practical men,” and “If the best thing practical men can do is to make war and send the youth of the world out to serve as cannon fodder, their practical affairs aren’t worth much respect” (165). When Blount and Nason offer Martha five thousand dollars to mass-produce her sculpture as paper weights, this is framed as a “practical” option for an artist, with Nason commenting that “We have all agreed that your work is worthy of some practical recognition” (311) and Blount later adding that “Realizing that we are a practical people and that art, if it is to have any real place in modern life, must have its practical application” (312).

Craig’s aversion to the discourse of “practicality” is equivocal. He clearly sees the capitalist common sense implicit in it as discursive trickery and a dishonest attempt to replicate status quo inequalities. Overall, however, Craig frames Winnipeg’s capitalist common sense as a political given in various ways in this novel, and while it causes him deep distress, he accepts it as an irreversible “condition.” This characterization aligns with the resource discourse becoming prevalent in twentieth century Canada, in which extractivism appears as an immutable and sublime aspect of Canadian identity. Not quite workers, and not quite human resources, the characters in *The Magpie* face negative consequences for not being able to fully adapt to Canada’s resource regime. Craig, and presumably Durkin, attribute many of the challenges they face to Winnipeg’s financializing economy. With no apparent “labour” to countervail capital, or the dematerializing forces increasingly pervading society, Craig appears resigned to the immutability of the “thinking machine,” and its ability to “think for” Winnipeg society and its inhabitants, and so exits the city. Speaking in reference to globalization in the twenty-first century, Eric Cazdyn and Imre Szeman note that “capitalism itself now constitutes a very real limit to thought” (7). This statement sums up the constraints to thinking outside of capitalism that

this book suggests need to be recognized. When logic and realism are categorically also capitalist, human thought, and the ability to think beyond capitalism—to think beyond “the machine”—is made impossible.

The next chapter will introduce another facet of the discourse of human resources that is evident in Canadian interwar novels depicting labour unrest. I will analyze *Waste Heritage*, Irene Baird’s 1938 novel, and its eugenically-tinged depiction of Depression-era unemployed men engaged in sit-down strikes. In a similar way to *The Magpie*, the resource rhetoric so prevalent in *Waste Heritage* obviates the novel’s capacity to represent the humanity and autonomy of embodied workers. Instead, an idealized and eugencially-construed “universal worker” takes shadowy shape in the book. As I will show, Baird encourages her readers to recognize this universal worker as the ideal human resource for Canada’s extractivist state.

Epigraph to Chapter 2:

Myrtle Bergren and the Stakes of Worker Subjectivity in 20th Century British Columbia

A relatively obscure figure of British Columbia's cultural political milieu, the labour activist Myrtle Bergren wrote short stories that offer telling vignettes of life among resource workers on Vancouver Island in the first half of the twentieth century. In her short story collection, *A Bough of Needles: Eleven Canadian Short Stories* (1964), Bergren brought themes of social reproduction, racism and the social unfolding of labour organizing to readers in B.C. and throughout Canada. These stories illuminate the quotidian impact of human resource discourse in the postwar period, and show how cultural, social and legal conceptions of worker subjectivity impacted real people's lives.

A journalist, oral historian and resident of Lake Cowichan, Bergren's stories were published in newspapers in Western Canada and nationally, with her first appearing in the *Vancouver Daily Province* in 1946. Others were published in the *Victoria Colonist* and the *Western Producer*, and read on the air on CBC radio. *A Bough of Needles* was put out by Progress Books, the publishing company of the Labour-Progressive Party (LPP), which in addition to "party policy statements, ideological pamphlets, and reprints or translations of Russian and other foreign publications," also published original Canadian scholarly and literary works (Doyle 165).

Bergren was born in England in 1919, but grew up in Kelowna, B.C., working in the women's division of the RCAF during the war, and spending the rest of her life living in the logging community of Lake Cowichan on Vancouver Island ("Bergren, Myrtle"). There, she married Hjalmar Bergren, a member of Local 1-80 of the International Woodworkers

Association, who was also a prominent organizer among loggers on Vancouver Island in the 1930s and 1940s (“Bergren, Myrtle”). Known colloquially as “The Logger’s Wife,” Bergren did inventive work as an oral historian, conducting hundreds of hours of oral histories with coal miners and loggers. She published *Tough Timber: The Loggers of British Columbia - Their Story* in 1966, which was partially based on interviews with loggers on their struggle to form a union in B.C. (“Bergren, Myrtle”).

Comprised of fictionalized memoirs, Bergren’s *A Bough of Needles* offers personal snapshots of her life alongside stark renderings of Vancouver Island’s resource worker communities from the 1920s to the 1960s. These stories are noteworthy for their portrayals of workers in their social milieus, such as “The Strangers,” which details a night out among mine workers in Ladysmith, B.C. They also portray the particularity of life among working-class women in the region. For example, the story “When I was Seventeen” is set in the spring of 1937 and focusses on domestic and service workers in rural farming communities near Penticton, B.C. This story, like many of Bergren’s, contextualizes its subjects’ struggles within the international socialist movements of the day. In this particular example, the protagonist compares her experiences in Penticton to those of people involved in the Spanish Civil War.

What connects all Bergren’s stories is their portrayal of labour struggles among workers existing outside the confines of the Standard Employment Relationship (SER) or whose lives were not improved by new legal protections awarded to workers in postwar era Canada. The idea of a SER became prevalent in Canadian political economy as a means for understanding *non-standard* employment, a category that would not become fully recognized until the last three decades of the twentieth century. In this period, due in part to feminist labour activism, there was a growing recognition of domestic labour as a form of work, as well as the struggles of migrant,

non-citizen workers. There was also a growing awareness of the decline of stable employment overall, which was the result of neoliberal austerity measures and the waning power of organized labour (Cranford et al 7; Vosko, “Feminist Political Economy” 46).³⁹

In their quest to understand the “new” category of non-standard employment, scholars came to recognize that this category had existed all along, and that postwar labour laws, previously considered a major victory for workers, were exclusionary and served to further entrench prejudices. These scholars revealed how these laws formalized unfair labour practices impacting women, non-citizens, and racialized workers, as well as low-wage workers engaged in piecemeal employment like seasonal contract work in resource sectors (Cranford et al 7; Vosko, *Temporary Work* 45-66). As Vosko notes, feminist political economists in Canada who studied this phenomenon “demonstrated that this employment model took the native-born male industrial worker as its central subject” showing “that the employment norm was gendered, racialized and shaped by national citizenship and immigration status” (Vosko, “Feminist Political Economy” 46).

Postwar labour laws and the formalization of the SER legitimated and strengthened already established discriminatory labour practices based on race and citizenship. Before 1947 and the establishment of Canadian citizenship, non (British) citizen migrant workers, especially those employed in resource and construction sectors, were subject to dangerous and unfair working conditions, including infamously the Chinese “guest workers” employed in the building of the transcontinental railway. As Vosko (2000) notes, “the federal government tolerated the unethical and unlawful practices of the railway companies and other companies in the resource

³⁹ See also Luxton (1982) and Bakan and Stasiulis (1997).

sector because the bulk of the workers that they recruited either came as guest workers, or, by virtue of their occupation, were not fully protected as citizen-workers in Canada” (5). What Vosko, Cranford and other labour historians revealed in their scholarship on the development of the SER was that rather than being a boon for labour, it formalized and ossified discriminatory labour practices and kept in place a regime of prejudice based on race, gender and citizenship.

Bergren’s story “A Hard Pull” illustrates how postwar labour legislation did little to improve the lives of Punjabi workers employed in the B.C. lumber industry. Some of these workers were most likely naturalized as Canadian citizens, while others were more recent migrants. In both cases, the continuation of a race-based hierarchy in worker communities in postwar Canada is fully on display in this story. Most of this it takes places at a Sikh wedding reception populated by sawmill workers and their families in an unnamed British Columbia mountain community. The location may have been based on a mill in the Cowichan Valley, where Bergren lived and where there was also a history of migrant workers from the Punjab region working at the mill (Old Hastings). The reception is attended by several generations of the Singh family, as well as both white and Punjabi community members, of whom the former were attending either through “genuine friendship” or “to build up political influence among the East Indians” (60).

The story’s main focus is the deep divisions between the Punjabi workers and the white workers, and how despite attempts to make conditions more equal for the former, a racial hierarchy with white workers on top prevailed. The culture clash between the two groups is emphasized in the story, often through the topic of food, and the conversation quickly turns to the history of the Punjabi workers employed in B.C. sawmills, the racism they faced upon settling in the area, and how the establishment of a union helped change some of the more

glaring examples of racism they experienced. At the party is the local union president, store owners who “never employed East Indians,” and both Liberal and Communist party provincial candidates, all of whom are depicted as enjoying the festivities.

The deep-seated prejudices rife in the community are hinted at through a reference to the American Civil Rights movement, which also serves to date the story. An initial mention that the local union president has been in the role since the late forties, dates it to the 1950s (60). But when Herbert, one of the white lumber workers and the story’s focal character, mentions Arkansas, a more specific dating in the mid-1950s is likely. Herbert, in such awe of the bi-racial event proclaims, “If only those Yanks in Arkansas could see us now, uh?” (62). This references the Little Rock Nine and the fallout from the 1954 *Brown Vs. Board of Education* ruling, which judged segregation in U.S. public schools unconstitutional, and brought international attention to the Civil Rights Movement and the goals of racial integration in the US south. Later in the story, the Little Rock example is deployed to point out racist hypocrisy, when after an instance of racial violence Tara Singh exclaims, “they talk about equality...and they talk about Little Rock, Arkansas” but then discriminate against “another a worker because his skin is different” (66). The Little Rock allusion conveys the fact that two sharply different perspectives existed between workers with regard to postwar advances in labour, and points to the way racial hierarchies remained even among actively engaged union members.

The story’s narrative arc further emphasizes this point: the older Punjabi characters portray unions as a solution to the racism they experienced, while the younger generation views the situation differently. Banta Singh, the family patriarch, details some of the improvements brought about by organized labour over the course of his lifetime: “Sure, my father came to Canada in 1904 and worked on the CPR.” He turned to Herbert, who worked at the same mill as

he. “Cheap labor”” (60). Banta then explains the casual racism they experienced, “Well, I can remember, before the war, right in this town, our people couldn’t get a haircut in the white barbershops” (60). But after, he exhorts, “It was the union that stopped that,” Banta went on righteously... “They boycotted those barbershops!” (6). The younger generation, however, point out the flaws in this logic: Tara, a younger worker, says that Punjabi workers at the mill are discriminated against, and that even within the unionized workplace “they wouldn’t give a better paying job to one of us, even if we were next in seniority” (62). Tara insists that conditions are bad for many in the mill and other workplaces. Later in the story, another depiction of racism occurs: Punjabi mill workers are obstructed from entering a company-supplied bus and then are violently attacked by white mill workers. While Punjabi workers may have been union members, they were not treated as workers, barely as people, and most definitely not considered worthy of class solidarity or support.

The entrenched racism depicted in “A Hard Pull” points to the weaknesses of the so-called postwar compact between labour and capital that was impelled to an important degree by cultural political agitation. By attempting to consolidate the needs of both Canada’s extractivist state and working-class labour movements, this compromise left in place racial hierarchies intrinsic to that state, a topic I explore in the following chapter. In the interwar period, novels like Irene Baird’s *Waste Heritage* valorized some workers over others, and portrayed a hierarchy of Canadian worker subjectivities that bears remarkable similarity to the government policies, business practices and labour regulations that would become legally entrenched postwar. Bergren’s story reveals the stakes of interwar literatures like Baird’s, and points to its significance for understanding the development of human resource discourse in twentieth century Canada. Bergren’s story also exposes the fundamental contradiction between Canada’s

extractivist capitalist ideology and the labour movement's pursuit of equality and fair treatment present within the "postwar compromise," showing how this tension affected real people in this era with lasting consequences.

Chapter 2:

“Bloody Sore”: Eugenic Rhetoric and the Production of Canada’s “Universal Worker” in Irene Baird’s *Waste Heritage*

As the moon cleared, the sheds the mess of empty barrels and junk on the opposite sidewalk showed up like sores.

—Irene Baird, *Waste Heritage*

Theodore Roosevelt... voiced fears of ‘race suicide’ as ‘degenerate’ stocks from Eastern Europe flooded in. He lent official sanction to the view that the conservation of human as well as natural resources was the key to resolving the broader problem of promoting national efficiency. This depended on the favourable condition of the physical environment (conserving natural resources), the social environment and human resources, the latter covering the physical, mental and moral characteristics of the people. In an official Department of the Interior Bureau of Education publication, reference was made to ‘waste in health and strength’, as well as waste in materials, as ‘far-reaching evils.’

—William E Marsden, “Conservation Education and the Foundations of National Prosperity: Comparative Perspectives from Early Twentieth-century North America and Britain”

I. Introduction

Set in Vancouver and Vancouver Island in 1938, Irene Baird’s 1939 novel *Waste Heritage* depicts labour struggles at the close of the Depression era. Awash with detailed imagery of urban decay, poverty, police violence, and the injustices of class, race, and gender disparities, the book portrays attempts to pressure the government to provide relief for the unemployed in 1930s British Columbia. Considered one of Canada’s few strike novels, *Waste Heritage* emerges from a cultural-political moment characterized by artists and writers using their crafts to directly intervene against the injustices wrought by the Great Depression and the government’s choice to ignore the unemployed poor amid the crisis. As noted by Jody Mason in her study of this era and its cultural-political stalwarts, “cultural producers such as Irene Baird were actively involved in negotiating the emerging fault lines between concepts of class and nascent, liberal ideas about

citizenship” (*Writing Unemployment* 11). At times hailed as an epic of socialist realism, Baird’s novel was also famously derided by the socialist poet Dorothy Livesay for its weak commitment to revolutionary change (Doyle 119). Both an important historical document and an original and impressive work of literary artistry, Baird’s novel and its fraught political stance in the face of Depression-era labour strife has been of interest both to literary scholars and those in the field of Canadian labour history.

In comparison to *The Magpie*’s depiction of interwar labour strife, *Waste Heritage* sets its gaze on the side of labour in much more precise, colourful and compelling detail. And rather than targeting the financiers, moguls or “machine” of capital that populate Durkin’s imaginary, the unemployed of *Waste Heritage* aim their protest at the government, “to force the authorities to provide ’em with a program of work an’ wages” (Baird, *Waste Heritage* 5). Baird’s depiction is historically congruent in this way: the 1938 sit-down strike, a protest demanding government intervention, enhanced protections for the unemployed, and increased relief, pitted the unemployed against the Canadian state, with the influence (and animus) of capital backgrounded. But *Waste Heritage* presents no neat contest between a class of unemployed men and the state; in fact, rather than appearing as an actual struggle, the strike unfolds as a conflict with a preordained outcome: failure on the part of the unemployed men. This is because the unemployed are framed not just as people lacking work, but are from the outset treated as “defective” human resources, unable or unwilling to embody their role as “assets” to Canada’s extractivist state.

As a narrative that frames unemployed workers from resource industries as “defective,” “degenerate” and measured against a racial hierarchy, *Waste Heritage* serves as an index for a disturbing dimension of the evolving discourse of human resources in early twentieth century

Canada: its eugenic dimension. As this chapter explores, Baird characterizes some of the unemployed men involved in Depression-era labour protests as worthy of state-funded unemployment relief. However, her metric for worthiness overlaps with eugenic ideology. The striking men's ultimate failure to enact political change, pressure the government cohesively and without violence, and secure adequate government assistance can be interpreted as predetermined by the novel's pervasive eugenic framework. Within this framework, collective organizing by “unfit” characters is doomed to fail, as, on their own, they are incapable of bringing about a viable solution to the problem of unemployment. The sole remedy, following this logic, would be a state-imposed, top-down system of governmental reforms designed to improve and “better” the men in ways they could not achieve via their own class formation and class struggle.

Eugenics is a scientific and cultural movement for racial “betterment,” emerging in Canada in the context of settler-colonialism and increased extractivist expansion in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century. In Canada, eugenics was specifically a movement for “Canadianization,” and reached peak popularity alongside an attempt to constitute “Anglo-conformity” from the three million immigrants who arrived between 1896 and 1914 (McLaren 41). The initial popularity and enduring legacy of eugenics were particularly pronounced in the prairie regions, where a fevered attempt to populate these resource-rich territories converged with firmly established and pervasive racial prejudices (McLaren 7; Strange and Stephen 529). At this time, eugenics proponents in Canada assumed that white Anglo-Saxons were racially superior, an assumption that led to discriminatory policies and the enforcement of racial hierarchies that claimed the inferiority of Southern and Eastern Europeans as well as non-European immigrants (McLaren 47). An infamous example of this is the race-based restrictions

that from 1885 (with the completion of the trans-continental railroad) systematically curtailed Chinese immigration to Canada, culminating in the 1923 federal statute, the Chinese Immigration Act (commonly known as the Chinese Exclusion Act), which explicitly barred individuals of “Chinese origin or descent” (Strange and Stephen 530).

To understand how eugenics stems from an already established regime of racial hierarchy in Canada, it is helpful to remember how this logic inheres to settler colonialism and its goal of territorial dispossession that makes way for extractivist profit. As historian Patrick Wolfe has shown, settler colonial regimes employ the “organizing grammar” of race to achieve their goal of unfettered access to land and labour (“Settler Colonialism,” 387). With regard to Indigenous people, the goal of settler societies is the “dissolution of native societies” for the purpose of access to territory, and the implantation of a “new colonial society on the expropriated land base” (388). In the case of these societies, race was not applied as a ready-made doctrine but is “made in the targeting” (388). The purpose of racialization in the case of Indigenous populations is to eliminate, by the use of racial logics, claims to territory by Indigenous groups by various tactics of assimilation or elimination (388). Following the end of the frontier, “elimination turned inwards, seeking to penetrate through the tribal surface to the individual Indian below, who was to be co-opted out of the tribe, which would be depleted accordingly, and into White society” (399). Strange and Stephen provide a disturbing portrait of how this played out in Canada:

Selective breeding was a modern idea foreshadowed in nineteenth-century colonial population policies designed to isolate some Aboriginal people and to assimilate others, in an attack against characteristics that Euro-Canadian legislators defined as markers of Aboriginal racial inferiority. By separating children from their families and forcing them to adopt “civilized” habits, so-called residential schools discouraged students from

returning to their communities where they might propagate. Furthermore, the now-infamous Gradual Civilization Act of 1857 and the Indian Act of 1876 and its subsequent amendments authorized Indian agents and missionaries to police unions likely to result in the birth of children. Canadian eugenicists rarely addressed the question of Aboriginal peoples in part because the far greater number of suspected inferior immigrants preoccupied them, but also because the colonial “civilizing” regime imposed on the indigenous was already firmly in place decades before eugenicists proposed similar forms of selective breeding for non-native Canadians. Thus race-based reproduction management efforts established a prior logic for eugenic policies concerned to shore up the fitness of Canada’s Euro-Canadian majority. (525)

Strange and Stephen reveal how racialization, followed by the deployment of eugenic practices, not only facilitated Indigenous dispossession but also forged the template for a “civilizing regime.” This regime, rooted in a racial hierarchy, was used to mold non-native Canadians into the human resources the nation required.

Eugenic policies and discourses manifest the performative nature of racialization. This manifestation is enacted through practices that incessantly calibrate, gauge and assess how closely individuals conform to an ever-evolving standard of normativity—what I call the “eugenic gaze” in my analysis of *Waste Heritage*. As Wolfe notes, “race is colonialism speaking” (*Traces of History* 5) and racialization is a procedural, non-ontological tactic used to produce “severally racialized” subjects in an “ever-shifting hegemonic balance” in colonial regimes (19). In Canada, race and colonialism “speak” through the eugenic norm, a norm that correlates race with the performance of ability, masculinity, heteronormativity and citizenship, metrics which form the eugenic lens authors like Baird utilize to “rank and sort” the unemployed. The “ranking

and sorting” logic of *Waste Heritage* exemplifies the *rhetoric* of eugenics, as the narrative eye of the novel apprehends the bodies of the unemployed across a morally weighted spectrum of praise and blame.⁴⁰ *Waste Heritage* was written at a time when public support for eugenic policies promoting so-called racial betterment was waning. This was not because of the negative reputation of similar practices in Nazi Germany but was the result of the impact of the Great Depression and the financial drain these policies were perceived to have on the country (Strange and Stephen 533). Despite this, eugenic sentiments remained, and in 1938, the same year Baird wrote *Waste Heritage*, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario Herbert Alexander Bruce urged Canada “to undertake a thorough ‘biological housecleaning’ along the lines of Germany, which he praised for sterilizing ‘300,000 useless, harmful, and hopeless people’ (Strange and Stephen 533).

In my analysis of *Waste Heritage*, I focus on the rhetorical features and narrative strategies that indicate a worldview defined by biological determinism, reliant upon carcerality, and indicative of a social strategy that aims to “heal” what “ails” society. Drawing from the work of disability theorists Lennard J. Davis and Jay Dolmage, as well as historian of eugenics Angus McLaren, I use notions like the “universal worker” and the bodily “norm” to explain how the unemployed are represented in *Waste Heritage*, a novel which, I argue, pathologizes them as a sickness in need of a cure. I explore how the discourse of eugenics weaves its way through the novel’s imaginary, and, in turn, how a discourse of the universal worker is shaped and developed in the context of a resource extraction economy in Western Canada of the earlier twentieth century. In this novel, I claim, eugenic rhetoric becomes intertwined with resource rhetoric as the novel etches out the contours of the ideal worker in Canada’s extractivist context. Rather than

⁴⁰ What Aristotle refers to as “epideictic” rhetoric.

simply enumerating how this book evinces eugenic tropes, I hope instead to illuminate how this novel's eugenically tinged representation of unemployment frames the problem of the ideal Canadian human resource more generally, by animating how all bodies narrated in this book (and all bodies in general) fall short of this ideal.

II. “Almost Anti-Red”: Navigating Praise and Blame in Critical Responses to *Waste Heritage*

The eugenicist lens I note in this novel has not been identified explicitly by scholars of the book. What fuels my approach to *Waste Heritage*, however, is where the focus has been: critical recognition of Baird's naturalistic impartiality, as well as her centrism and disdain for communist movements of the day. Many of the analyses of the novel in the latter part of the twentieth century aimed at bringing it to critical attention—one of the numerous novels “resurrected in the 1970s as part of the ‘canon’ of great Canadian literature” (Sangster, “North and South” 284). This is reflected in the titles of essays addressing the novel from the 1970s until the 1990s, such as Roger Leslie Hyman's 1983 essay “Wasted Heritage and *Waste Heritage*: The Critical Disregard of an Important Canadian Novel” or Robin Mathews' 1997 article “Canada's Hidden Working-Class Literature.” Both interpret Baird's portrayal of class inequality as necessarily a broad challenge against prevailing class structure, with the novel advocating for what Mathews' terms, in an earlier essay on the novel, “a significant change in the social order” (Mathews, “*Waste Heritage*” 66). More recent criticism attempts to differentiate between the apparently opaque politics of *Waste Heritage* and more overtly partisan works, with a focus on genre and a sustained attention to Baird's literary historical archive, the novel's publication and

reception history, the context of left radical bibliography and comparison with other works depicting Depression-era poverty and labour strife.⁴¹

By far the most pressing debate about *Waste Heritage* among literary scholars has been how “red” Baird is in her depiction of the strikers and whether the book is sympathetic to their plight.⁴² Overall, from the period of its critical reassessment in the 1970s until the present, there has been a gradual move from considering the book a justification for socialism to a more nuanced view where most scholars do not consider it a particularly radical text. In the introduction to the 2007 critical edition of the novel, Colin Hill offers the following view of its politics:

Baird’s novel . . . resists the “leftist” label that critics often apply to it. While *Waste Heritage* is generally sympathetic to the cause of the unemployed, it is not fundamentally a radical or revolutionary text, and in some ways it is overtly critical of leftist politics of the 1930s. To be sure, Baird admired some of the leading leftist writers of her day, including Steinbeck and agitprop playwright Clifford Odets, and her personal sympathies were certainly with the sit-downers and their cause, but she did not consider *Waste Heritage* to be a radical novel. As she later wrote, “I have never been connected with Communism and I have never thought of myself as a radical if being a radical means wanting to overthrow the system we live in in favour of another political system. [But] I

⁴¹ See Mason (2013); Hill (2007; 2012) and Rifkind (2009). Hill and Doyle attend to the novel’s genre, as does Wylie.

⁴² See Matthews (1981); Hopkins (1986); Doyle (2002); Wylie (2007); Rifkind (2009); Hill (2012); Mason, (2013).

don't praise or condemn some of the most important people in the novel who are obviously connected with radical politics." (xxv)

Baird's remarks, quoted by Hill, are from "Sidown, Brothers, Sidown," her 1976 reflection on *Waste Heritage* following its reissue in 1973. There, Baird crafts her ethos as a wily journalist-observer eager to objectively represent the story, "colour" and "talk" of the strikers, striving to "do it right" in her depiction of these men, whom she raised up from "non-persons" to "the special status of characters who are the first to speak in chapter one of the novel" (83). As she notes, "The living of the novel, the writing of it, was an adventure" that involved following the jobless men through many of the scenes depicted in the novel, including into their lodgings in Victoria in the company of her family doctor and disguised as a nurse (83). Baird's self-representation as a swashbuckling adventurer-writer eager to communicate the plight of the unemployed from an impartial, though "angry," position should be read in light of her career in journalism, public writing and the Canadian civil service following the publication of *Waste Heritage*, where her skills in journalism and reportage-style narration were put to use (Sangster, "Irene Baird's 'North and South'" 287–90).⁴³ Whether considering her creative works or output during her time in the civil service, most critics of Baird note that a quest for objectivity and authenticity was a key feature of her artistic practice. Knotted into this quest is an implicit

⁴³ See Candela (2023) for a compelling account of Baird's work to promote federal initiatives in the Arctic as a civil servant in the 1950s. These initiatives, were, as Candela notes, an example of a "mid-century internal-colonization." Baird's work as communications director meant she was responsible for the "Meet the Arctic" program—a program to legitimize Arctic colonization. Candela describes it as "a mobile, ethnographic display of domestic, Inuit life... part museum exhibit, part fair attraction... a visual manifestation of government ideological imaginaries and realities."

assumption that it might be possible to produce a cultural object that does not in any way “praise or condemn” its subjects but rather presents them in a form disarticulated from cultural and political dispositions and biases.

Baird may understand, or want her readers to understand, her narrative gaze as perspicuously objective and lucidly disinterested, but does *Waste Heritage* really provide an even-handed depiction of labour unrest? Or does it instead downright “condemn” it? While attention to the historical archive, especially with regard to the editing and publishing of *Waste Heritage* in the 1938 to 1939 period, has yielded important insights about the novel and the influences that constrained Baird’s depiction of labour strife, this chapter offers a re-assessment of the book’s portrayal of its central characters and the spectrum of praise and blame the narrative navigates with regard to their plight. Specifically, I explore how they are embodied, what vision they are accorded and how they are constituted by the novel’s narrative gaze.

Colin Hill’s 2007 critical edition of the novel and his 2012 monograph *Modern Realism in English-Canadian Fiction* situate Baird’s depiction of labour strife within the generic confines of Canadian “modern realism.” This genre, with similarities to modernism proper, is characterized by the use of “idiomatically correct language” and a tone of “narrative objectivism” (Hill, *Modern Realism* 7). It is also marked by a propensity to depict technological innovation, urban and industrial life, and a myriad of social and political themes including the great wars and the Great Depression (7). Hill understands Baird’s political ambivalence as an effect of the tradition within which she writes: modern realists, in contrast to socialist realists, “appear convinced that a kind of moral and spiritual ambiguity is a defining feature of the modern human condition. The modern realist neither sees this state of affairs as a problem nor

seeks to analyze it in an endeavour to find ‘solutions’” (172). In his introduction to *Waste Heritage*, Hill notes the novel’s naturalism, particularly its social, environmental, and biological determinism, writing that “Matt’s ‘rage blindness’ and Eddy’s mental deficiencies are innate faults, arising from hereditary and environmental factors, that cannot be overcome through the exercise of free will. These deterministic forces lead to the tragic and inevitable conclusion of the novel” (xxix). Hill’s conclusion, which he arrives at from a discussion of the novel’s generic tendencies, is similar to my own; however, I explore the novel’s hereditarian fatalism through the lens of disability theory and with reference to the tropes of eugenic rhetoric, the latter of which Hill fails to recognize as a defining element of the novel.

The novel’s biological determinism appears to condemn working-class men to their fate. This bias against the communist organizers depicted in the book was noted when the novel was first published. As Hill writes, “Carl Eayrs, who prepared a reader’s report on *Waste Heritage* for Macmillan, reassured his brother Hugh that the book could safely be published in Canada as it is ‘almost anti-red’” (xxvi). While the significance of the latter might be tempered by considering how Baird’s depiction of communist political activity was constrained by censorship in the highly fraught pre-war period, a fact amply demonstrated by Mason (“Sidown, Brother” 147–60), that the book was perceived as “almost anti-red” suggests its more overtly anti-worker inclinations. Candida Rifkind’s analysis of the novel hints at something similar, noting that while other Depression-era works by women often resist traditional gender roles, *Waste Heritage* superficially performs such a resistance but, in the end, re-inscribes gender, racial, and settler-colonial hierarchies. In sum, the most recent critical turn in the novel’s reception has been to interpret it as more and more “anti-red,” ascribing a deceptive quality to its ambivalence.

What are the stakes of Baird's depiction of unemployed workers in *Waste Heritage*? Mason has illuminated how interwar literatures helped carve out the categories of the Canadian citizen and Canadian worker, oftentimes in conjunction with one another (see Mason, *Writing Unemployment* 12; 45–129). She argues that these works, their authors, and the cultural milieus surrounding them may have indirectly influenced then-Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King's establishment of unemployment insurance in 1940 and definitely mediated cultural thinking regarding who was understood as an "unemployed Canadian" and what subsequent protections and rights such people should be provided via citizenship, which emerged as a legal concept in Canada only in 1947 (68). As Mason points out, activist artists and writers in the interwar period produced works that called for state protection for unemployed workers, and in so doing helped set up the binary of individuals "inside" and "outside the state," with state protections eventually afforded by citizenship (68). Mason shows how these creative works were pivotal in constructing notions of citizenship and the state, solidifying Canadian national imaginaries by arguing for more enduring notions of citizenship that would bind together all "native sons" who might not be tied to fixed residences or employment.

I take up Mason's claim that Canadian literatures shaped and mediated the evolving national conversation about which workers were deemed worthy of state protections, but I draw more significance from the way this novel categorizes and sorts workers to ascertain said worthiness. I find in Baird's depiction of the transient unemployed the belief that their failure to advance their aims is more rooted in aspects of embodiment, biology, and heredity than has been previously examined by critics. Pushing more forcefully on the novel's naturalism, ambivalent stance and purported objectivity, I show how traces of the presence of eugenics in Canada at the time inflects Baird's rhetoric and the discursive framing of her depiction of the 1938 sit-down

strike in British Columbia. I focus on how an ideal worker subject is abstracted and given a spectral bodily form in the negative space surrounding the flawed and suffering victims of Depression-era unemployment depicted in *Waste Heritage*. In this, I explore how proximity to an idealized, abstracted Canadian worker-subject functions as a metric for empathy and the meriting of rights and state protections, and link this figure to the entangled discourses of eugenics and extractivism in Canada at the time. By investigating this, I hope to illuminate how attitudes about embodiment infuse hierarchical labour relations in Canada and undermine visions of redress and repair.

III. Irene Baird and the Unemployed in Depression-Era British Columbia

Baird wrote her novel during a time of Depression-era destitution, rapid settler expansion in the Canadian West, and surging labour militancy. She was born in a middle-class family in Cumberland County, England, in 1901, and with her family immigrated to Qualicum Beach, Vancouver Island, in 1919 (Hill, Introduction xiii). Shortly after, she married and moved to Vancouver, where she worked as a teacher. Her and her husband resettled again on Vancouver Island in 1936 or 1937. At this point, she dedicated herself fully to working as a novelist (Hill, Introduction xiii). *Waste Heritage* is her second novel and documents a historical event that took place immediately before it was written and published: the 1938 Vancouver sit-down strike.

A labour tactic now uncommon and in most cases illegal, the sit-down strike massed unemployed workers from across Western Canada in Vancouver to protest the lack of a meaningful strategy by federal and provincial governments to grapple with widespread unemployment during the Depression years. Upwards of one thousand unemployed men occupied the Vancouver Post Office and Art Gallery in May 1938 for one month, after which they were forced to leave, in a brutal and bloody manner, by the RCMP. The strike had the

backing of the Communist Party of Canada, which helped organize the strikers through the Relief Project Workers' Union. The novel begins shortly after the men have been evicted, and documents their re-grouping and trek across Vancouver Island to Victoria in July of 1938.

In 1938, the economy of Western Canada was still dealing with the effects of the 1929 stock market crash and the Great Depression. The ramifications extended late into the decade due to the dual impact of severe environmental factors. The Western provinces were devastated by droughts, grasshopper plagues, crop diseases, and falling wheat prices (Rifkind 76). At the time, Rifkind writes, "modern life on the Prairies began to unravel. Farmers starved for cash incomes and stretched beyond their credit limits had to give up telephones, radio, and automobiles, while the school boards crumbled and agricultural self-sufficiency was replaced by an embarrassing dependence on inadequate federal relief (77). While this was already devastating in the early 1930s, it was only in the later part of the decade that these themes would come to be understood as central not only to Western but to Canadian identity and cultural representation. Rifkind writes, "These changes on the Prairies assumed a symbolic weight in the leftist cultural imagination and the dustbowl began to replace urban streets as the metaphoric as well as the geographic centre of national concerns" (77). While nationwide unemployment was approximately 10 percent, a never-seen low, throughout the decade, the number was 12.5 percent in 1937 and rose again in 1938/1939 (Palmer 206). The majority of the unemployed received public and charitable aid to help them survive: more than 1.5 million in the decade out of a population of 10 million in Canada (Palmer 206-207). But unmarried urban dwellers were not eligible for relief, and strict barriers were put in place as to how the relief was spent, which was not rectified until the war-years production and the establishment of national employment insurance in August 1941 (Palmer 207).

A key factor in understanding the unemployed workers Baird depicts is the impact and legacy of the relief camps that sprang up in Western Canada during this period. The camps were set up in 1931 and were administered by provincial governments under emergency federal legislation (Griffin 23). Beginning in 1932, the camps were administered by the Department of Defence and overseen by General A. G. L. McNaughton with the aim of “breaking up...congestion of single homeless men in the principal centres of population” to pre-emptively “suppress disorder” (McNaughton qtd. in Griffin 24). Essentially work camps, these sites saw the men work eight-hour days preparing road grade, clearing brush, and digging up roots for airstrips (Griffin 24). Describing their situation as “tragic,” Palmer notes that one of the only groups who “courted” the single unemployed in work camps were the communists, who formed the Single Unemployed Workers’ Association to assist them directly, organizing Relief Camp Workers’ Unions for individual camps and the Workers’ Unity League (Palmer 210, 253).⁴⁴ Essentially protests, or “working against not working” (Palmer 206), tactics such as strikes, blockades, and occupations of businesses and circulation routes, were intended to provoke the provision of employment, rather than to better working conditions. Riots, parades, occupations of public and private buildings, pickets, and other protests resulted in concessions and victories on a regional level and often brought together workers of various political stripes, especially in work camp agitations (see Palmer 210–12).

This organizing had a lasting impact on the country. Unions and associations of unemployed formed, with concrete demands such as the right of franchise for camp workers.

⁴⁴ Mason notes the pointed absence of the word “communist” or mention of these specific groups in *Waste Heritage* (*Writing Unemployment* 116). Instead, Baird refers to it as “The Organization.”

They also pressed for old age pensions, non-contributory unemployment insurance, disability and sickness pay, and even an end to imperialist war—with the strike the chosen avenue for pursuing all these aims (Griffin 26). Organizing amongst relief camp workers culminated in the “On-to-Ottawa Trek,” which began in late 1934 with relief camp workers coming together in Vancouver, and later spreading to a mass walkout in April, 1935, with thousands of men riding the rods to Ottawa after the federal government refused to establish a commission to address the demands set out by the strikers (“On to Ottawa Trek”). The trek ended in a large protest in Regina (attended by 1000s of supporters) which became a violent riot when RCMP and police fired live ammunition at the protestors, leaving two dead (one trekker and one police) and hundreds injured (“On to Ottawa Trek”). This marked the trek’s end, but its militancy left a lasting impact on Western Canada for decades.

British Columbia in the 1930s was the site of some of the most aggressive outbursts of resistance from the unemployed and drew on a tradition of labour militancy among organized workers. As historian Sean Griffin notes, “The Post Office and Art Gallery sitdown of 1938 was a continuation of the 1935 campaign, dramatizing once again that the unemployed were not prepared to accept starvation without a fight” (10). Numerous strikes and labour actions arose in B.C. at this time, especially among resource workers in lumber, milling and mining. At the time, there were very frequent outbursts of violence directed at strikers from the RCMP and local police, such as the coal miners’ strike in Estevan Saskatchewan in September 1931, when RCMP fired on their parade, killing three and wounding fifty (Griffin 20). While the federal work camps were shut down in 1935, provincial camps remained in B.C. until 1938 and became feeder sites for transient unemployed people from all provinces at the time of the sit-down strikes, in part because of Vancouver’s clement weather. These men were unwelcome to the point of being

offered free train fare back home by the B.C. provincial government (Hill, Introduction xi).

While the government might have wanted these men “home,” many of them, like Matt Striker in *Waste Heritage*, did not have a place to return to.

Waste Heritage begins shortly after the men have been evicted from the work camp, and follows Matt, who arrives in Vancouver after riding the rails from Regina, or “Gath” (Baird uses invented, biblical names for the major locations). Matt joins other characters, including Eddy, a man badly beaten during the Vancouver eviction and disabled by this experience.⁴⁵ Together with the other strikers, Matt and his companions travel across the Georgia Strait to Vancouver Island, where they endeavour to initiate another sit-down strike in Victoria. This effort ends in failure and the dispersal of the men and, finally, to the violent arrest of Matt and the death, in an apparent suicide, of Eddy.

The strikers in *Waste Heritage* are generally depicted as unemployed resource workers, regularly performing work seasonally and with a transient occupational pattern that extends beyond the period of the Great Depression. In this sense, the novel’s central narrative problem is not employment transience per se, but the factors that vitiate the men’s ability to serve as the resource workers Canada needs. *Waste Heritage* begins with one of the characteristic tropes of resource rhetoric: a depiction of resource infrastructure that establishes it as an extractivist sublime, and something whose vicissitudes workers must conform to:

The freight steamed clanging into the yards. The engine bell swung backwards and forwards, the heavy tolling kept up even after the long line of cars had clashed to a

⁴⁵ Early reviews of *Waste Heritage* compared it to John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men*. Mason (“Sidown, Brother!” 120) discusses the similarities between Eddy and Steinbeck’s character Lennie.

shuddering standstill. The sun glared down onto the burnished maze of storage tracks, and off in the distance the grain elevators and the awkward span of the old bridge stood out against a hard blue sky. Closer in, on the far side of the tracks, the pier roofs, splashed white with dried gull droppings, cut between the smokestacks and masts of the waterfront. (3)

This cacophonous opening to the novel is marked by words like “clanging,” “swung backwards,” “clashed to a shuddering standstill,” and “splashed”—all words which connote haphazard and jarring propulsion in movements and sounds. These words invest the port lands with an affect of trudging resilience, connoting the idea that this infrastructure will endure despite the menacing abrasiveness of “heavy tolling” and sun which “glare[s] down.” As a synecdoche for the latticelike grid of Canada’s resource economy, this depiction of port lands infrastructure suggests that this economy must, and will, continue, despite Depression-era unease. This opening is also replete with visual iconography, training readers to gauge the landscape panoramically with filmic markers like “off in the distance” and “closer in.” It is also the location where Matt Striker first emerges, and where he is described as holding an “air of superficial immobility.” This description encircles Matt with the same “air” that characterizes the resource infrastructure he stands within, capturing him in the all-determining “standstill” of rail tracks, bridges, piers and masts built to circulate (4).

Consistent with the intractable permanence attributed to Canada’s resource economy, transient, mobile work is presented as a regular circumstance of employment. While Depression-era hardship undeniably exacerbated this type of work, it wasn’t its sole cause. The novel portrays the strikers’ primary struggle as a *lack* of employment, rather than the *conditions* inherent in the work itself. By 1938, many of these men, being in their late teens and twenties,

had spent their entire lives in the Depression and therefore had never secured steady work. Matt Striker, whose aptronymic name situates *Waste Heritage* within the realm of Dickensian social realism, hails from Saskatchewan and has never had a job (5). Eddy, when asked what he did before, states, “I don’t remember nothin’ except that sit-down now...I think once I worked out in the country at a job spreadin’ manure” (12). Again, the issue for Matt and Eddy, and the other strikers, is finding a job, not the conditions of work per se. Similarly, as one striker explains,

Say, I spent three months this spring trampin’ the country around Colynos, jungling up nights and snitching food where I could, tryin’ to land a job on a farm or at one of the mills. I’d hear of some job twenty, thirty miles away an’ hitchhike after it, an’ when I got there the first question would be, what experience did I have? Some places they didn’t even wait to ask that, they said they had a dozen tramps around every day after the same job. (24)

As labour historians Irving Abella and David Millar (1978) have shown, tramping and hobo life were foundational features of life in twentieth century Canada, and they are represented as such here (5–6).

Baird’s novel does not fundamentally problematize employment mobility, then. Indeed, by reinforcing the intractable nature of Canada’s extractivist state, this novel reaffirms the need for a populace who could easily adapt to both mobile and settled forms of employment, when, and if such work was available. As Mason notes, “occupational pluralism and geographical mobility characterized the labour market long before the advent of the Depression” (Mason, *Writing Unemployment* 13). These workers were unemployed, yes, but they did not exist in an economy where a permanent multi-decade employment contract would be expected. “The structurally entrenched problem of seasonal unemployment,” Mason notes, “was exacerbated

during the Depression years, especially because the sectors that depended on export and which were the most vulnerable to changes in international markets, such as coal mining, logging, and fishing, also tended to depend on pools of unskilled, often immigrant, labourers for seasonal employment” (47). In this sense, the employment mobility depicted in *Waste Heritage* should not be set against a norm of permanent worker stability, but rather something quite similar to the intrinsically mobile, extraction-dependent political economy of work which had been a constant feature of Canada as colony and state. While Baird allows her characters to long for more settled forms of employment, that is not the *modus operandi* of the book. Instead, *Waste Heritage* frames the problem of unemployment eugenically, emphasizing each character’s deviation from a “universal worker” ideal—the ideal human resource required for Canada’s national development.

IV. Eugenic Thinking in *Waste Heritage*

While peaking in popularity closer to the start of the twentieth century, eugenic theories were pervasive during Baird’s formative years. *Waste Heritage* initiates the eugenic gaze in the opening description of Matt Striker. In this initial character sketch, readers are encouraged to link Matt’s physical comportment to his character, with details of bodily description corresponding to innate behaviours and personality traits:

His skin and his wiry blond hair were dull with track dirt and his black shirt and jeans were grey with blown grit. The frayed cuffs of his jeans bellied down over his dusty shoes but higher up they fitted tight across his narrow hips and neat bottom. He walked back down on his heels with his pack slung over his shoulder and his hands hooked into the two front pockets of his jeans. He moved mechanically as though he had got so used to moving around that he could go on and do it in his sleep. His face wore a curiously

dead look, giving the impression that he was either doped or not properly awake. His eyes were grey and narrowed by sun and between them a crude scar dug deep into his freckled nose bridge, extending towards the left eye. Beneath the air of superficial immobility there was wary, half-animal watchfulness. (3–4)

Matt's skin, clothing, and hair are covered in dirt, and yet he walks forcefully and confidently "back down on his heels," suggesting normative masculine traits like fortitude and perseverance; the placement of his hands "hooked into the two front pockets of his jeans" implies the swagger and nonchalance of the hero in a cowboy Western. But the framing of Matt's vagrancy imparts a lack of agency: his "moving around" is so innate and mechanized that he "could go on and do it in his sleep." This seemingly automatic behaviour connotes a lack of self-consciousness, rational thought, and autonomy, which is also projected into his face, with its "curiously dead look," giving the impression that "he was either doped or not properly awake." In this way, while Matt might figure to some degree as a worker whose virility is being "wasted" as a result of Depression-era conditions and unemployment, he also exhibits traits associated with the eugenicist category of a "defective," in that his body appears broken, or not working properly.

Another eugenicist category, degeneracy, is signalled via a "crude scar dug deep into his freckled nose bridge," suggesting a violent past which may have produced his "wary half- animal watchfulness." Throughout the book, Baird uses animal metaphors when limning human behaviours like violence, promiscuity, or lack of empathy, a classic trope of eugenic rhetoric where certain bodies and behaviours are ranked below the human inasmuch as they resemble the animal.⁴⁶ This introductory passage initiates the novel's use of the rhetoric of physical appraisal

⁴⁶ These metaphors often apply to the crowd of strikers, whom Baird describes as insects (105), trained seals (123), or monkeys and rats.

for characterization, ranking and sorting characters according to their degrees of mental and physical fitness. Beyond its status as a stylistic tool for characterization, the motif of physical appraisal positions the reader to read eugenically, as they are encouraged to link each character's deviation from the bodily norm with their plot trajectory and ability to achieve their goals in the book.

Eugenics, or the pursuit of “good genes,” is a pseudoscience aimed at, among other things, producing good workers for state and empire. Francis Galton, a cousin of Charles Darwin, coined the term in 1883, and defined it as “the study of the agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations, either physically or mentally” (qtd. in McLaren 15). “[T]he aim of Eugenics,” he later elaborated, “is to bring as many influences as can be reasonable employed, to cause the useful classes in the community to contribute more than their proportion to the next generation” (Galton 38). In *Essays in Eugenics* (1904), Galton writes that “eugenics” means “good genes,” the “eu” in eugenics meaning “good” (35). The promotion of “good genes” extends to the workplace and influenced eugenicists' beliefs about the kinds of workers who would be advantageous to the state.

Angus McLaren, one of the foremost scholars of eugenics in Canada, emphasizes that eugenics is crucially a turn to biology to engineer society and its direction. As Daniel J Kevles explains “Eugenics began to flourish after the rediscovery, in 1900, of [Gregor] Mendel's theory that the biological makeup of organisms is determined by certain factors, later identified with genes. The application of Mendelism to human beings reinforced the idea that we are determined almost entirely by our “germ plasm.” (435). McLaren defines eugenics as “the study of the agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations, either physically or mentally” (15). Eugenicists looked to the biological sciences to

exert “social control,” and eugenicists such as Galton believed that “the statistical approach, if used to encourage such selective breeding, could solve the social ills that beset Britain” (McLaren 15).

Eugenics, from its earliest beginnings, was meant to encourage the reproduction of those deemed “useful” to society, and purge the genetic heritage of those not. Although Galton claims that he does not want to specify exactly which humans a society should strive for, he does give some parameters for what the “good” in eugenics means: “All creatures would agree that it was better to be healthy than sick, vigorous than weak, well-fitted than ill-fitted for their part in life. In short that it was better to be good rather than bad specimens of their kind, whatever that kind might be. So with men.” (36). Galton values “health, energy, ability, manliness and courteous disposition,” and frames those individuals who are most desired around the needs of the state and British empire (37-38). He sets out a plan as to how this can be achieved, by way of research into heredity with the specific aim of increasing birth rates in the classes of society which have the most “civic usefulness” (Galton 39-40). That latter approach is usually termed “positive eugenics” (Kevles 436). Galton also advocates for what is termed “negative eugenics,” which involved discouraging the birth rate in those deemed less “useful,” for example “habitual criminals” and their “low class offspring,” the “feeble-minded” and others (62). In sum, eugenicists were engaged in an attempt to expunge those who did not fit that mold of “good genes,” based on their physical and mental condition, race, social behaviour, obedience to laws, or social class.

While the specific attributes that were valued among eugenicists may differ depending on the society, industrial practices that valued standardization and norming among workers were broadly influential. Although this dissertation has used the term “adaptation” to name the

imperative that workers mold themselves into the human resources required by Canada's extractivist state, the eugenic objective of "norming" is a parallel concept with a shared heritage in industrial standardization. Disability theorist Lennard Davis uses the term "universal worker" to designate the ideal worker subject from the eugenicist perspective, which he links to industrialization, and the quest for the "average human" who could perform the tasks required in an industrial setting (4–9). Reflecting the influence of statistical concepts in the development of eugenics in nineteenth-century Europe, eugenicists believed that "a population can be normed" and divided into "standard" and "substandard groups," with "the aim of eugenics" being for the state "to norm the nonstandard" (6).

The universal worker possesses what eugenicists deemed to be a statistically average body, with uniform capacities making them "interchangeable" and therefore ideal from the perspective of industrial capitalism (5–9). Those not meeting this average included not only the physically disabled but also the eugenicist category of the "feeble-minded." This group subsumed racial, class-based, and criminalized identities, and formed the "defective class," which Davis calls "a conflation of depravity and disability" and included such categories as those labelled with "low intelligence, mental illness, and even 'pauperism,' since low income was equated with relative inefficiency" (9–10). Davis shows how eugenic world-making in the context of the modern novel involves sorting various categories of people hierarchically away from the norm, designating them as inferior humans whose presence would lead to a lack of "fitness" in the state (8–12). A key idea in eugenic movements is that populations can be "normed" through manipulation of genes (including negative eugenic practices like sterilization) (Kevles 435–36). It is therefore a belief in the supremacy of "the norm" that justifies the monolithic and hegemonic eugenic movements of the first half of the twentieth century,

movements that infamously performed the sterilization, institutionalization, and murder of “defective” classes.

V. Social Reformism, Eugenics, and the Roots of Depression-Era Inequality in Canada

Social reformers in Canada in the first half of the twentieth century advocated for eugenic practices as a solution to what were considered the problems of the era—poverty and inequality—by locating their causes in genetic factors and “defective” classes. In practice, this meant the incarceration and inhumane treatment of Indigenous people, people with disabilities, poor people, and racialized populations, as well as discriminatory immigration practices.⁴⁷ Proponents included notable left-wing social reformers in Western Canada such as Tommy Douglas, the renowned socialist and co-founder of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), himself an avowed eugenicist who wrote his 1933 master’s thesis on “social hygiene and public health” (McLaren 7–9). As McLaren explains, Douglas’ thesis asserted “the popular hereditarian argument that the mentally and physically subnormal were not so much the victims but rather the causes of a good deal of the distress of the depression” (8). They could be identified, Douglas argued, “as the low achievers on IQ tests, the delinquent, the venereally diseased, and the improvident”—in sum, what he deemed “the defective” (8). McLaren reports that Douglas was later frightened away from eugenics after a trip to Germany in 1936 (166).

Several characters in *Waste Heritage* fall into the categories of “defective” described by Douglas. Although the novel depicts some as relatively harmless, such as the unmarried and

⁴⁷ See Dowbiggin 600, 603–24; Grekul et al. 358–65, 375; Kevles 435–38; McLaren 46–67, 160; Revie 120, 135–37; and Wahlsten 187–96.

sexually active character Hazel, or the so-called delinquent characters Jim and Ted, others are treated as completely outside the bounds of sympathy and derided or abused, such as the “promiscuous” Widow Bannerman, or a sex worker with venereal disease who is beaten by Matt Striker. There is also the suggestion that Matt inherited his violent and unruly behaviour by way of a mother who abandoned him and a father who was a “dirty radical” that neglected his family in favour of his political activities (94). Although the novel never directly mentions eugenics, genes, or practices like sterilization, *Waste Heritage* is peopled by characters emerging from a eugenics-inflected imaginary, where the difficulties these characters encounter appear linked to their status as “defectives” or, to use Douglas’ language, “subnormals.”

Preventing immigration from countries with citizens deemed “degenerates” was very much a concern for Canadian hereditarians and eugenicists, including those with more progressive leanings. McLaren notes that James S. Woodsworth, one of the founders and first leader of the CCF, was an adherent of eugenics when it came to immigration, and “contrasted the Scandinavians and Icelanders (“clean bodied” and “serious-minded as a race”) to the Slavs and Galicians (“addicted to drunken sprees” and “animalized”)” (47). However, McLaren notes that, like Tommy Douglas, Woodsworth later disavowed eugenics because it was “being used as a stick with which to beat the working class” (66). Although conservative proponents of eugenics were certainly virulently against socialist, feminist and left causes, it cannot be denied that both groups shared much when it came to attitudes towards disabled people, “degenerates,” racialized peoples and immigrants from various countries (McLaren 81-82). I mention these examples to clarify that there was history, in Canada and outside of it, of eugenic ideology merging with socially progressive perspectives, and well-known Canadian socialists were frequently also eugenicists. In other words, these discourses and their rhetoric intersect continuously during the

period in which *Waste Heritage* was written. This may have produced a difficulty for critics to notice eugenic rhetoric in *Waste Heritage* in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, when these discourses were usually perceived as divergent and opposed.

Adding to the complexity is that eugenics aimed for societal improvement on a national scale. This collectivist approach could have been seen as aligning with other progressive goals, such as equality, fair treatment, and justice. But it is important to remember that a concern with the collective is not in any way just the reserve of the socially progressive. And, as McLaren explains, eugenics was a collectivist *biologism* that may have been associated with progressives, but which was appropriated by fearful traditionalists “who sought to turn to their own purposes the fears raised by the threat of ‘degeneration’” (27). This logic can be observed in *Waste Heritage*, as Baird’s rhetorical tactics exhort readers to attribute unemployment, labour and social unrest during the Depression to biological causes.

VI. Ranking and Sorting: The Eugenic Gaze in *Waste Heritage*

In its rendering of its characters, *Waste Heritage* situates readers in the perspectival position of its physiognomically minded narrator, whose eugenic gaze takes in, ranks, and sorts each character according to their deviance from the norm. The novel’s omniscient third-person narration, whereby the reader is given a detailed view of both external reality and the thoughts and motivations of the characters, plays a major role in affording this eugenic gaze (see Hill, Introduction xxxvi–xxxvii). The narrator’s roving view is evident soon after Matt meets his friend, the barkeep Harry: “Harry . . . stared at Matt. Matt never forgot that first look Harry gave him, measuring him, sizing him up. He felt there was something between himself and Harry right from that first day” (4). This use of the third person to jump between each character’s inner

world provides an air of objective certainty to subjective psychological experience, an aspect of the novel which Hill links to the novel's modernist reportage and its "simplicity, directness, omniscience, and objectivist tone" (Introduction xxxv). Indeed, indicative of the novel's nimble naturalism, the roving narrator of *Waste Heritage* enacts a scientific cataloging of the physical and emotional life of the characters, at the same time attuning their gaze to, like Harry, "measure" and "size up" others.

The eugenic gaze is itself an act of sizing up, but what the narrator observes is often less important than what they do not apprehend. In *Disability Rhetoric* (2014), Jay Dolmage explains that normality is often understood as a "negative capacity," in that normalcy isn't explicitly defined or even embodied by an isolated body but becomes known by strategies that "mark out what it is not" (9). In this sense, the "measuring" and "sizing up" that characterizes the narrative point-of-view in *Waste Heritage* suggests an invisible ideal or "negative capacity" against which these measurements are compared. The faulty human body is measured against an idealized universal worker—a ghostly labourer by whom others are sized up through his negative presence. In a novel where all characters are represented as in some way defective, the universal worker ideal appears unattainable, as if to reach it would be to shed character and subjectivity. While "enforced mobility" and worklessness may be the ostensible problems of this novel (Mason, "Sidown, Brother" 150), it is the characters' physical and mental lack of fitness that constitutes the main causal force impacting their lack of success, and this supplies the metric with which the reader is led to comprehend the roots of Depression-era labour inequality.

Eugenic logics presuppose a hierarchy of bodies ranked according to their fitness. Harry, a character whose amputated arm is repeatedly highlighted, provides a foil for Matt, positioning Matt as a more able-bodied and mobile agent in the text. More strikingly, however, the contrast

between Matt and Harry prompts readers to grade and assess bodily fitness, etching the contours of normality that become more defined as the novel progresses. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Synder explain that disabled characters often serve to negatively define the normal, ideal body in a text. They argue that “the deficient body, by virtue of its insufficiency, serves as baseline for the articulation of the normal body” (7). In other words, disabled characters are instrumentalized as tools through which normality is concretized and given expression, and even what might be seen as sympathetic renderings of disabled bodies further reinforce oppressive versions of normativity.

This occurs in the initial depiction of Harry, where his fat body makes his difficulty performing his work as a cook more apparent: “Small bright eyes peered out from the rolling flesh and sweat glistened among his broken features and along the line of his shiny black hair. When Harry fried hamburger, all the grease seemed to rise to his head. He looked around fifty and the build that would feel the heat a lot” (4). While readers might be positioned to feel sympathy for Harry as his fatness appears to cause him more visible effort and strain in performing his work in front of the restaurant grill, how he is depicted also indirectly manifests an ideal worker-body able to perform these tasks with ease. Harry’s amputated arm cuts “off about three inches below the shoulder” and, with his heavy frame, he is depicted as surprisingly agile; he has a “quickness of movement not usually associated with so heavy a man” and used to be “good in the ring” prior to his accident and weight gain (4–5). Harry’s impediments to mobility serve as a foil to Matt’s agility and strength and, in so doing, mark out the contours of an ideal worker’s body—what Harry exemplified prior to several physical changes. At the same time, Baird sets up a parallel between Matt and Harry by signalling their shared predicament as embodiments of fallen masculinity. In this way, while Matt’s physical fitness is depicted as

superior to Harry, they are also lumped together because they fall below an ideal level of physical and mental vigour.

The rhetorical framing of Harry in *Waste Heritage* can be read as an instance of what Dolmage terms “physical deformity as sign of internal flaw” (41). Harry’s bodily abnormality connotes “lack” (41), further reinforcing the ranking and sorting rhetoric so prominent in the book. The narrative frequently draws attention to Harry’s amputated arm and even mocks it for comic effect, with many instances of Harry “scratching his stump” (44; see also 6, 7, 85, 89, 258), or, in one instance, demonstrating his dexterity: “He had a neat trick of doing a half-dozen things at once with his left hand” (6). As mentioned, Harry’s body is described as fat: “Harry’s heavy head swung up and down, his chins concertinaed into one another” (6). These depictions are often followed by comparisons with Matt, including one case where Harry himself appraises Matt: “Harry considered Matt in silence. He studied the drawn, dirt-grained features, the powerful shoulders, the hard mouth, the narrow eyes” (6). As Rifkind notes, “the world of *Waste Heritage* is haunted by the physically and psychically maimed veterans of the First World War” (169), and such appraisals and comparisons signal the war’s enduring impact. In addition to gesturing to the long-term consequences of war, the way in which Harry is portrayed works to foment the book’s eugenic logic. Perceived deviance from a normative body, including its cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions, is a key metric used to explain the successes and failures of the book’s characters.

A similar dynamic is apparent between Matt and Eddy. Eddy is introduced as a “bundle of waste with a head on it” while being attacked by a plain-clothed police officer (10), and is generally represented as a prototypical “feeble-minded” person: a “poor half-wit dope” (255) with “childlike and sinister eyes” (105) who, in Matt’s words, “took a terrible beatin’ an’ it’s left

him kind of rum-dum” (43). Frequently threatened with institutionalization, Eddy attracts the attention of police after multiple violent incidents; Matt is framed as his protector, whom Eddy follows “obediently” (89). But Matt’s position as protector is sporadic, and his own “rage-blindness” is frequently invoked (54; see also 115, 273), coming over him with a pathological or “brain-splitting fury” (54). Indeed, Baird uses rhetoric that emphasizes his and Eddy’s uncontrollable animal violence and signals their shared inferior status, situating their bodies below a normative human given shadowy shape by the text. When Matt appears to save Eddy from a violent outburst against a woman in a protest crowd, both men are figured as snake-like: Eddy’s belt “coil[s] . . . like a thick red snake” while Matt “hisse[s]” at Eddy to run (18). Here, as with the depictions of Matt and Eddy throughout the book, both characters are touched by a hereditary taint of animality, a mark of their shared “heritage.”

In the case of these central characters, their “deviance” appears to be caused by social ills—family neglect, war, and police violence, respectively—but innate traits and tendencies aren’t ruled out, especially in the case of Eddy’s apparent “feeble-mindedness.” As McLaren notes concerning so-called defectives, “If their degeneration was due to environmental causes it could be cured by social programs; if heredity was the cause the state could only limit the problem by restricting their breeding” (19). Read in this light, Eddy’s death appears as a narrative solution to the problem posed by his erratic behaviour and mental incapacities—a eugenic finale that secures an effective restriction of his “breeding” and suggests that social programs might not be adequate to his implicit unfitness. In the case of Matt, the harshest societal reforms for social deviancy are enacted, arrest and imprisonment, penalties suiting his less ingrained but still significant degeneracy. These narrative resolutions indicate the book’s

eugenic thinking, where the success or failure of the movement the book depicts rests on the very bodies of the men involved, and cures or punishments are meted out accordingly.

VII. Eugenic Rhetoric and the Ideal Human Resource in *Waste Heritage*

The novel's much harsher portrayal of racialized characters and sex workers, in comparison to the already harshly depicted unemployed strikers, serves to render the figure of the universal worker as not only able-bodied, but also as a white, Canada-born male. Rifkind notes that, "[t]hrough constructing the central characters as neither immigrant nor colonial, *Waste Heritage* draws a picture of the Canadian working-class male as racially and ethnically unmarked" (191), and the idea of the mark, or the sign of otherness and inferiority linked to eugenic rhetoric, is very much evident in Baird's depictions. Race and sexual deviancy mark the racialized characters and sex workers in the book, in that these one-dimensional caricatures become symbols of lack of moral fitness, abjection, and inhumanity. In one signal example, Eddy and Matt join the other strikers on Vancouver Island in a town called Cutlake (Nanaimo). Eddy disappears and Matt finds him with a woman who hits Eddy, after which Matt brutally beats her. The woman is framed as a grisly abuser: her "animal hardness" suggests a lack of compassion (113), and she is later described as possessing a "tail" and "clawing" and striking Matt brutally (115). This animality, and the suggestion that she has venereal disease (113), mark her as a "deviant" or "degenerate," but the fact that she is not portrayed herself as a victim of circumstances, like Matt and Eddy are, situates her outside the realm of sympathy.

In this same episode, a Chinese man is witness to the attack, but does nothing to intervene, and this depiction is in keeping with other racist references to Chinese people and neighbourhoods in the book, which are uniformly negative (see Hill, xxxix–xl). Baird marks the Chinese man in a similar way to the sex worker via animal metaphors: the Chinese man is said to

have “trotted to the open door” (115), and his “hardness,” or indifference to the attack, mirrors the “animal hardness” in the sex worker’s eyes. Importantly, depictions of inertia, unproductive torpor, and animal metaphors extend to the portrayals of Matt and Eddy here, as before: Eddy is “staring helplessly, his face stupid with horror” while Matt shakes him “savagely” and “hisse[s]” out a warning (115). This rhetorical seepage insinuates that, while Matt and Eddy may be recuperable as white men, the judgment of the novel’s title still obtains: hereditary traits in combination with societal degeneracy have wasted their potential to be productive members of society—the ideal human resources needed for Canada’s extractivist economy.

The racial hierarchy enacted in this novel means that the category of “worker” is reserved for white men only. As Mason points out, the Cutlake episode portrays the Chinese laundry owners, along with many racialized peripheral characters, as members of what she terms, drawing from Michael Denning, the novel’s “petit-bourgeois sublime” (*Writing Unemployment* 118). Only the white characters of the book can truly be portrayed as “workers”; all other racially marked characters are assigned the classification of small-business owner, leaving the category of worker only habitable by someone racially and ethnically unmarked.⁴⁸ Mason writes:

The so-called foreigners in *Waste Heritage*—the “Chinks,” the “kike” junk dealer, the Greek café owner, the “shrivelled old Chinaman” who “looked like death”—constitute the panoply of workers who are, in Denning’s terms, the novel’s “Other.” These figures are not labourers but rather small-business owners, and their avaricious, self-interested financial success stands as a counterpoint to the plight of the unemployed. (118)

⁴⁸ Indigenous people in the book, referred to with the Chinook jargon term “Siwash” or the racial slur “Breeds,” also are never depicted as workers or unemployed, but only as passing figures and in racist terms (see Baird, *Waste Heritage* 149).

In addition to this eviction of racialized characters from the category of worker, as I have shown, even within the ranks of the white unemployed a hierarchy of worker bodies is produced. In this, Matt Striker, Eddy, and the whole “organization” of striking workers are imagined as falling short of the worker ideal, as a waste. But in completely evicting racialized people and sex workers from the category of worker—or, the Canadian human resource required for the state to function—readers are led to reject these groups as potential recipients of benefits should a favourable state intervention occur. In this way, the narrative framing of racialized and marginalized people, and their ideological exclusion from the category of worker, mirrors trends in Canadian labour law and thinking about immigrant, racialized, and sex workers that continued into the twenty-first century.⁴⁹

As representatives of the unemployed strikers, Eddy’s failure to survive the events of the book, Matt’s inability to prevent Eddy’s death, and the larger failure of the striking men to implement political change and attain adequate government aid can be understood as an inevitable outcome of the eugenic thinking that structures the book— a thinking in which collective organizing among “unfit” characters, unable to be the human resources Canada needs, couldn’t possibly remedy what ails society. Close to the end of the novel, after the organizers of the strike make a deal with the government, Matt becomes disillusioned with them. When Matt learns of the compromise made between the strikers and the government (in which they are given a very small weekly sum and free transportation to “go where they came from”), he laments the meagre result of the strike explicitly in a letter to Harry: “All we freight car cowboys know for sure is that we are right back where we started” (259). Shortly after, he finds Eddy in a trance-

⁴⁹ See, for example, Lenard and Straehle or Maynard 44–47.

like state being beaten by a policeman. In a rage, Matt starts to beat the policeman himself and ends up getting arrested. Following this, Eddy wanders aimlessly until he is killed by a passing train. It is unclear to the reader whether this is a suicide or an accident.

Baird ends this novel with the horrific image of Eddy's body being engulfed by the train's extraordinary force:

He ran down onto Pastoral...then headed blindly for the yards. There was the howl of an oncoming train, the glare of a great single eye of light, the low grumbling on the tracks. He plunged on over the ties and shouted at the train. "Stop!" Eddy shouted. He stood there waving his arms and the rain beat on his face and the wind swept his voice away. The light came on, growing on the steel, throwing a blinding glare along the right-of-way. Suddenly he stepped out onto the tracks. His voice broke to an angry sob. "Stop! You gotta stop! I gotta get away from here!" The sound was caught up by the grinding steel, the black, doll-like arms were thrown full in the sweeping glare. Suddenly his voice stopped. His weaving arms were jerked flat like semaphore blades. The crashing of steam came on and on. (275).

By ending this novel where it began, Baird suggests the lack of progress made by the strikers throughout the course of the novel, with the train symbolizing the inexorable and dominant position of the Canadian extractivist nation. Specific details in this passage corroborate this: Eddy, depicted as running "blindly," is in direct contrast with the more powerful (and personified) train, which howls, grumbles and glares light from "a great single eye of light." Eddy, rhetorically accentuating the train's personification, "shouted" at it, begging it to stop and using the same tone as when speaking to Matt, or to the many police who try to arrest him over the course of the book. Baird, in this passage, mimics the evisceration of Eddy's body by having

him absorbed, sense by sense, into the preponderant body of the train. The train's "blinding glare" aimed straight at him, absorbs his "black, doll-like arms" into its "sweeping glare." Eddy's sobs are melded with the shriek of the train, his "sound...caught up by the grinding steel" until his "voice stopped." In the final moment, Eddy's body is fully merged with the infrastructure of the train, becoming a visible part of it: "His weaving arms were jerked flat like semaphore blades. The crashing of steam came on and on" (275). In this final passage, the relentlessness of the larger social forces symbolized by the train and its primary role as mode of circulation in Canada's resource economy, is inversely contrasted with the inevitable death and imprisonment of the main protagonists, whose genetically preordained inferiority, and inability to fully embody the human resource ideal, has resulted in their failure to achieve any of their stated political aims.

Eddy's death might be understood as an instance of what Dolmage terms "kill or cure." He writes, "Just as a loaded gun shown in the opening scenes of a movie will eventually be fired, a disabled character will either have to be 'killed or cured' by the end of any movie or novel in which they appear" (39). In this sense, far from showing sympathy to the strikers, the conclusion to this book reveals Baird's disparaging and fatalistic view of them. As a classic instance of resource rhetoric, this conclusion communicates a pessimism towards the possibility of the strikers pulling themselves up and out of their abject position in society. As I have argued, this pessimism stems from the novel's eugenic thinking about racial betterment: it will not be communist organizers who figure out a solution to unemployment, because the flaws that cause these problems are innate and biological. The evident fatalism present in the book's conclusion, then, can be read as the epitome of the book's entwining of resource and eugenic rhetoric, or the

structures of style and language this novel uses to think through the problem of Depression-era unemployment.

VIII. Conclusion

The title of this chapter includes the phrase “Bloody Sore,” and the word “sore” is used repeatedly by many characters in *Waste Heritage*. This specific reference is to the title of an in-progress manuscript by Kenny Hughes, a writer documenting the strike while travelling with the men, who also functions as a very thinly veiled reference to Irene Baird. The phrase, used frequently by Matt and the strikers throughout the book, indicates the resentment, disappointment, and impatience for change among the strikers, and points to the pain and exhaustion caused by the trauma of their experience as itinerant, jobless outcasts. The men are frequently presented as physically “sore” and continuously tired: their bodies have been impacted by their lack of work, food, and the stress of their lives. In the slang of the era, “sore” also connotes an affect of bitterness—to be “sore” is to be psychologically wounded by unfair treatment. As I have shown, this use of “sore” invokes eugenic rhetoric, eclipsing the metaphorical to locate the cause of these men’s suffering in perceived genetic flaws. A further resonance, as registered in the epigraph to this chapter, is that the men are a “sore” on the body politic. Indeed, this is how Hughes glosses the title of his book: “Hughes pulled off his glasses and rubbed his straining eyes. He said earnestly, “I don’t think you quite get what it is I’m trying to do. This book of mine is to be more than just another book, it’s to be a ... a kind of a social document, a book that will bring before the nation this whole problem of unemployment that is festering on its body like a bloody sore ...” (171). As a figure of speech, then, “bloody sore” is typical of the eugenic rhetoric rife in *Waste Heritage*—the biological determinism that identifies the roots of social unrest in the bodily ailment, the physical defect, and the biological lack.

Many readings of *Waste Heritage* have understood Baird's indictment of Canadian society as implicitly suggesting that only the institution of unemployment insurance or increased aid could help these men, that it is the sole remedy to "heal" the "bloody sore" on the Canadian nation they represent in the book.⁵⁰ The evidence I have provided regarding the book's eugenic rhetoric complicates this reading: while Baird is clearly influenced by the social progressivism of her time, her depiction of Depression-era unemployment does not imply that increased aid would easily remedy what afflicts the body politic as imagined in this novel. Of course, neither would the organization, cooperation, and mutual sympathies developed among the marginalized people Baird depicts as intrinsically flawed and unable to adapt to the requirements of being an "asset" to Canada's extractivist state.⁵¹

In this chapter, I have shown how *Waste Heritage*, like all the novels I study in this dissertation, presents Canada's extractivist state as a narrative given. To work and live in Canada means molding oneself into what is expected by the state, to the degree that this is possible. The capacity to do so—to adapt into the human resources needed by Canada—is in this novel assessed with reference to a eugenic framework. Eugenics in Canada is a product of both settler colonialism and the country's resource-driven economy. Eugenics emerges in Canada with an in-

⁵⁰ And Baird made comments to this effect, as Hill notes (Introduction xxv).

⁵¹ Further attention to Baird's earlier writings and life in England and Vancouver may lead to more definitive answers as to how deeply enmeshed her views were with the eugenic theories popular throughout her career and life. For example, it is worth paying further attention to her education in England, the reasons for her mill-owning family to immigrate in 1919 to Vancouver Island beyond her father's love of fly-fishing (Hill, Introduction xiii), and her teaching work before writing *Waste Heritage*.

built racial hierarchy defined by a “rank and sort” logic. In *Waste Heritage*, we see this “rank and sort” logic used to classify and evaluate Canada’s would-be human resources based on their race, ability, gender and citizenship, to assess divergence from a racial ideal of Canadianness. I show how this logic gives shadowy shape to the ideal “universal worker”—a worker prototype that embodies various features of the ideal Canadian human resource subject. This ideal is never represented in the novel and has shifting characteristics, congruent with the way in which eugenic hierarchies are “made in the targeting” (Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism” 388). Some of these shifting characteristics include whiteness, masculinity, ability, settler-identity, and also the ability to endlessly adapt to both mobile and settled life.

My analysis of *Waste Heritage*, therefore, contributes to our understanding of what it means to be a human resource within the emerging resource discourse of twentieth century Canada. Namely, that to be a human resource means possessing a readiness to change according to the exigencies of Canada’s extractivist state, and mold one’s body and identity to fit its demands. In this way, to be a “human resource” means to some degree shedding embodiment, social entanglements and personal autonomy, and effecting the stance of a dematerialized asset.

Consistent with the tropes of resource rhetoric, the novel’s depiction of labour strife shows that class formation is never possible between these violently disaffected and conflict-ridden masses. Right from the beginning of the novel, the unemployed men are depicted as fundamentally deficient, either unable or unwilling to fulfill their purpose as the human resources needed for Canada’s extractivist economy. My analysis of this novel, then, demonstrates the entanglement of eugenics with extractivist ideologies in Canada broadly speaking. *Waste Heritage* affirms the imperative that workers must shape and adapt themselves to the economic needs of the state, and provides a eugenic grammar for evaluating the fitness of the human

resources who might serve as “assets” for this state. This novel thus serves as an example of a cultural attempt to manage the country’s labour flows. It is part and parcel of the imaginary that made extractivism, and the human resources required for it, appear to be immutable parts of Canadian identity.

This dissertation now shifts from exploring representations of labour disputes among resource workers, to analyzing the portrayal of domestic work in the last days of the Great Depression. Here, I consider how literary works like Gabrielle Roy’s 1945 novel, *Bonheur d’occasion* (*The Tin Flute*) represent social reproductive workers as vital for sustaining Canada’s extractivist state. This chapter will further develop my claim that when human workers are primarily understood as resources supporting Canada’s state, class formation and class struggle, both inside and outside the home, are severely curtailed.

Introduction to Part 2:

New Sites of Struggle: The Social Reproduction Narrative

The reproduction of workers for mines, mills or factories is the product of unwaged female labor everywhere...And we are expected to be grateful that government or industry provides us with housing—*our* factories, for which we even pay rent.

—Selma James, “Wageless of the World”

If women want to change the basic character of domestic labour, they are forced out of the realm of their own family household and into the terrain of politics. The very first stop requires that women cut through the massive layers of mystification that hid the reality of domestic labour by becoming aware, or conscious, of what their real working conditions are.

—Meg Luxton, *More than a Labour of Love*

Introduction

Much of the debate surrounding Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century was fueled by an understanding that the *terrain* of class struggle is of pivotal importance (Katsarova; Varela). As framed by Marxist Feminist critical theorist Tithi Bhattacharya, to ignore social reproductive labour is not just to ignore an aspect of the work that sustains capitalist exploitation, but also to fix and limit the energy of class struggle “to the point of production alone, without considering the myriad social relations extending between workplaces, homes, schools, hospitals—a wider social whole, sustained and coproduced by human labor in contradictory yet constitutive ways” (3). In this dissertation’s second part, I explore portrayals of class struggle that expand its terrain into the domestic realm. Maintaining this dissertation’s focus, I attend specifically to how social reproduction work is framed within the context of the Canadian extractivist state in the first half of the twentieth century.

The most basic meaning of social reproductive labour is that it describes the unpaid work performed by women in the home. This, depending on the time period, might include cooking, cleaning, household maintenance, or child-rearing. These and other actions comprise what social reproduction theorists understand as the creation and maintenance of the worker body via women's unpaid domestic work, which supplies capitalism, broadly speaking, with human labour power. Reflecting on the 1970s emergence of social reproduction theory, Silvia Federici, one of its original exponents, wrote in *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction and Feminist Struggle* (2012) that

to us, it was immediately clear that the circuit of capitalist production, and the “social factory” it produced, began and was centered above all in the kitchen, the bedroom, the home—insofar as these were the centers for the production of labor-power—and from there it moved on to the factory, passing through the school, the office, the lab. (7-8)

While Federici's polemic makes it clear that women's work should not be essentialized but linked directly to the framework of labour exploitation in capitalist societies, later thinkers would explicate this more clearly. For example, feminist theorist Paula Varela writes in her article “Social Reproduction in Dispute: A Debate between Autonomists and Marxists” (2021) that “under capitalism, social reproduction is not the terrain in which we produce and reproduce ‘life’ in an abstract or ahistorical sense, but the sphere where workers are produced and reproduced as bearers of the commodity labor power.” I draw on this most basic assumption of social reproduction theory—that women's work in the home is a vital part of sustaining capitalism. From this assumption, I am led to the primary research question of this part of my dissertation: how does social reproduction labour fit into the overall discourse of human resources that

became prevalent in twentieth century Canada? Do cultural texts portray this kind of labour as part of human resource discourse more broadly? And if they do, how do they do so?

Critic Rada Katsarova has argued (2015) that for social reproduction theorists “the body has become an important focus” and that “the reproductive and reproducible body figures as a kind of resource—a resource for labor but also for producing more bodies and lives, for workers.” I take Katsarova to mean that in capitalist societies, social reproduction workers are discursively understood—or “figured”—as if they are resources for capitalism. In this, they produce and maintain the bodies of workers (who are resources themselves), but they are themselves also resources in that production process.⁵² My argument in Chapter Three rests on a similar assumption—that social reproductive workers were incorporated into human resource discourse in twentieth century Canada, especially by means of *resource rhetoric*.

Novels that foreground social reproductive labour and link it to broader capitalist exploitation of workers are what I define as “social reproduction narratives.” In the chapter that follows, I analyze Gabrielle Roy’s 1945 novel *Bonheur d’occasion* (*The Tin Flute*) as an example of this type of narrative. While not representing strikes or forms of labour unrest or the withdrawal of labour like those analyzed previously in this dissertation, *The Tin Flute* asks readers to confront the problem of social reproductive work and re-imagine the home as a site of labour exploitation. Readers are also asked to consider whether the home should be understood

⁵² Social reproduction occurs in many places outside the home, including the factory itself. As Katsarova writes with reference to Althusser, the latter “saw the factory not just as a place where workers produced commodities and their labor was exploited, but as another site involved in the disciplining of bodies, in the making of working-class subjects, and in the reproduction of the working class itself.” In this sense, the factory functions not only to use labour to produce surplus value, but also as a scene of social reproduction.

only as a factory for the production of labour power, or whether it might also be the location for seizing the power of life-making as a form of resistance.

Varela, here quoting Federici, notes that the purpose of movements like Wages for Housewives was not necessarily for women to have their domestic labour respected and remunerated, but to perform the more radical act of refusing this work and triggering a revolt against the whole framework of capitalist labour relations. Varela writes:

One of the interesting elements of the Wages for Housework Campaign during the 1970s was that, far from being aimed at obtaining the wage itself, the objective of making domestic work visible opened the possibility for women to refuse to do domestic work. In this sense, it would open the possibility to a critique of unpaid social reproductive labor by women. (12)

Social reproduction narratives also “mak[e] domestic work visible” and “open[ed] the possibility for women to refuse to do domestic work.” By using literary and rhetorical forms that compare domestic work to other forms of labour, these narratives exhort readers to apply the same class analytics, and class *struggle* analytics, to domestic work. In this sense, social reproduction narratives use literary thinking to exhort readers to imagine Federici’s “more favourable power relations.”⁵³

To what degree is *The Tin Flute* a social reproduction narrative, and what limitations does the novel place on the possibility of class struggle in the home because of its framing of domestic workers as human resources? Does class formation in the home become more difficult

⁵³ Dougal McNeil (2020) makes this point, too: “although highly uneven, bifurcated between waged and unwaged work, divided by gender, and oftentimes invisible, the patchy terrain of social reproduction was not only a site of struggle but a potential site of class formation” (6).

when social reproductive work is framed as a vital component of the Canadian extractive state, and by placing that work in the physical and metaphorical crossroads of the circulation of resources occurring in 1940s Montreal? These are the central questions of Part Two of this dissertation.

Critical Discussions of Social Reproduction in Canadian Literature

Scholarly attention to domestic labour in nineteenth and twentieth century Canadian literature usually links representations of labour in the home to the development of settler-colonial fantasies of the good life.⁵⁴ In this criticism, scholars investigate how portrayals of gendered work shaped settler-colonial conceptions of what an ideal Canadian (proto)-citizen might be. The most significant early contribution to this was Misao Dean's *Practising Femininity: Domestic Realism and the Performance of Gender in Early Canadian Fiction* (1998). Dean looks at how early Canadian narratives imagined women transgressing traditional gender roles and taking on work outside of conventional domestic labour, and how this act represented a new vision for feminine Canadian citizenship. As literary scholar Linda Morra notes, the performance of masculinity in early Canadian writing was a way of measuring "Canadianness." Good Canadian men, she explains, as imagined in Susana Moodie's *Roughing it in the Bush* (1852), show themselves as such via "their strong work ethic and exceptional character in clearing settlements" and their ability to conform to and accomplish "forms of labour that are sanctioned as appropriate for men" (3). In this way, these scholars show how the foundational ideals of the Canadian settler imaginary emerged from articulations of masculine labour in early Canadian literature.

⁵⁴ See, for example, Henderson (2003) and Morra (2023).

Scholars like Daniel Coleman (2006) and Pauline Wakeman (2012) have shown how Canada's settler ideals were premised on British forms of civility. This "gentlemanly code of Britishness" morphed into a particularly Canadian brand of "white civility," which was a supposedly more evolved version of British sensibilities (Coleman 10). As the phrase "white civility" suggests, burgeoning forms of Canadian identity intersected with white racial hegemony. Critical discussions of domestic labour in earlier Canadian literatures, like Coleman's *White Civility: The Literary Project of English Canada* (2006), show how traditional gender roles provided the scaffold for the promotion of the white Canadian nation in the period stretching from the early nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century. *White Civility* examines fictional depictions of Canadian homesteading, focussing on gendered labour and the construction of race. It highlights how Canadian writers in this time period used allegorical figures of "the Scottish orphan" or "the Muscular Christian" as templates for English Canadian whiteness that would become culturally hegemonic. Novels like *Shenac's Work at Home* (1883) by Margaret Murray Robertson and its depiction of women's work outside the domestic realm of the Scottish homestead is part of a move to amalgamate the ideals of British citizenship with a more vigorous and modern form of femininity, producing a new ideal of "white civility" in Canada.

Roxanne Rimstead's *Remnants of Nation: On Poverty Narratives by Women* (2001) also examines the home and gendered labour in Canadian literature. She considers what she names "poverty narratives," or stories written by or about poor people. She argues that poverty narratives by women were excised from official narratives of the Canadian nation. As she explains,

Poverty narratives in wealthy countries such as Canada often unfold a national imaginary which locates the poor outside the imagined community on the fringes as fragments of nation. Sustained analysis of the discourse of nation in poverty narratives reveals significant tension between the poor and the ‘developed’ nation and a struggle over the notion of national community in the face of growing economic inequality. (7)

Rimstead notes that analysis of class tends to be directed towards men and work outside the home, ignoring the “feminization of poverty” (6). She focusses on how subject formation in these novels is impacted by class, race and gender inequalities, arguing that these texts “should be read as cultural sites of struggle...where identities are constructed and negotiated” (4).

Rimstead’s analysis of the home as a site of class struggle provides a context for my analysis of Roy’s novel, by showing how it fits within a larger tradition of literary texts in which the grammar of the Canadian nation becomes imbricated in depictions of domestic work.

As mentioned earlier, Dean’s *Practicing Femininity* represents the most fulsome attempt to reckon with literary evocations of domestic labour in Canadian fiction with a class lens. Dean’s thesis is that portrayals of women’s domestic activity in these texts naturalize traditional conservative gender norms and inscribe Canadian national ideals while appearing to depict transgressive forms of femininity and class mobility. At the time (1998), this thesis diverged from prominent critical perspectives which tended to see works by Catharine Parr Traill, Susanna Moodie, Nellie McClung, and Sinclair Ross and others as producing “a progressive narrative of liberation from oppressive gender norms” (3). The novelists’ portrayal of women engaged in strenuous physical labour inside and outside the home fostered this interpretation, and their female characters were praised for their autonomy, industriousness and resilience—all traits associated with normative masculinity. But even in depictions of work outside the home or the

heavy physical labour described above, Dean finds attributes of femininity that reinforced both traditional gender roles and prized colonial values.

For Dean, “the particularities of Canadian ideas about class mobility resulted in the redefinition of the feminine ideal” (12). She argues that early Canadian fiction signals a “new feminine ideal” with femininity in colonial Canada being a “contested discursive formation” comingling “a conservative belief in universal and continuous values which is contradicted by the liberal rhetoric of freedom characteristic of the New World” (12). This had a particular effect on the performance of gender in these novels because:

The supposed passivity and physical limitations of the nineteenth-century woman were contradicted by the necessity for active and physical labour on the Canadian bush farm. Femininity was reconstituted as consisting of the virtues which were instrumental to class mobility: primarily, a woman's ability to create domestic comfort and well-being wholly by her own labour and without expending any of the family income. Thus the 'self-made man' who owns his own land and in turn creates capital for further investment, turns out to be woman-made; the cash freed up for mortgage payments, and the unpaid labour which ran the family farm, were produced solely by women. (12)

Without using the term social reproduction, Dean invokes its logic: the ideal male Canadian farm worker is made possible by women's unpaid domestic labour. Dean argues that this is reflected in the generic move from romance to realism in early Canadian fiction, with realism etching out this new self-made woman—a domestic human resource—in the rural colony of Canada. There are traces of this discursive tension arising from the comingling of romance and realism in Roy's novel, which registers a similar tension in its depiction of the domestic working woman.

In more recent analyses, the notion of care has become a core term for understanding how portrayals of women's domestic work both shape and critique Canadian national myths that maintain various forms of inequality. Literary scholar Kait Pinder clarifies the formal and ideological significance of care in the 2015 novel *Birdie* by Cree-Métis author Tracey Lindberg, discussing the ways in which this novel invokes care not simply as an emotional state to represent, but as a kind of "aesthetics" that both registers and counters the image of a caring "compassionate" Canadian nation (224). As Pinder notes, "Lindberg's novel develops an aesthetics of care that breaks the constraining cycle of shame and pride implicit in the colonial image of the 'caring nation' by introducing new (and more complex) taste-feelings that invite readers to attach themselves to and engage with a different world-(not nation)-making project" (232). In her essay, Pinder defines an "the aesthetics of care" as:

A set of feelings that shape our ethical attachments to each other and can, through the development of new tastes, change our orientation toward world-making. An aesthetics of care gives form to these feelings and their diffusion throughout various acts of beneficence and responsibility, thus illuminating the shapes that caring relationships may take and, by drawing attention to their complex affects, suggesting fuller (and perhaps more liberating) models of caring. (232-233)

For Pinder, an aesthetics of care works to provide new models and language to facilitate reconciliation, and a move away from the "colonial nation's models of care... [that] diminish life and conflict with the generative and resistant models of care *Birdie* eventually benefits from" (235). Pinder's account of an aesthetics of care is an illuminating counterpoint to my own analysis. In its depiction of social reproductive labour, *The Tin Flute* shows how care—when mal-appropriated and transformed into never-ending work—can be a destructive force and cause

the unravelling of the social ties of “beneficence and responsibility” that might suture families together.

Critics analyzing depictions of anti-Black racism in the Canadian novel have shown how central the racism occurring in the domestic realm has been in shaping white class identities in Canada. Through her analysis of women writers like Susanna Moodie and Dorothy Livesay, critic Jade Ferguson contends that their texts’ depictions of racial violence against Black people in nineteenth and twentieth century Canadian literature helped solidify “Canadian articulations of white self-mastery and self-possession in a modern capitalist social order” (37). Analyses of novels portraying Black migrant workers, like those written by Austin Clarke, have served as a platform for discussing how of Black women’s labour has scaffolded the development of a white Canadian nation. Much of the scholarship on Clarke’s *Toronto Trilogy*, including articles by Beckford (2012) and Chariandy (2005; 2015), deals with the ways in which the domestic realm operates as a terrain both for exploitation and for struggle.

In discussions of contemporary Canadian poetry, Jeff Derksen’s “Poetry and Globalized Cities: A Material Poetics of Canadian Urban Space,” explores social reproduction as way of mapping the urban landscapes of Cecily Nicholson’s *Triage*. He argues that this poem charts spatial social contradictions by inserting sites of social reproduction into a larger map of capitalist material relations (314). Derksen’s spatial reading is similar to my own analysis of the contrasts and correspondences Roy produces in her novel, which insert the home into a larger map of the infrastructural nodes of extractive capitalism in World War II-era Montreal. In sum, analyses of women’s domestic work in Canadian literature frequently interpret it as an index for Canada’s transformation from a British colony to an (also-colonial) nation, underpinned by regimes of racism, settler-colonialism, and capitalist exploitation. My own approach to analyzing

portrayals of women's domestic work in Canadian literature is to track how authors use *resource rhetoric* to interpolate domestic labour into the fold of the human resource discourse fomenting in twentieth century Canada.

Outside the context of Canadian literary criticism, a notable example of criticism that looks at women's domestic labour is Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (1987). While not employing the term social reproduction or explicitly employing Marxist Feminist methodologies, Armstrong's text provides critical terminologies for thinking about domestic labour in relation to the rise of Western capitalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She argues for the significance of the novel form in Britain for constituting and stratifying several aspects of modern Western culture, including the hegemony of the middle classes. Key to this process, she argues, is the transformation of marriage from a habitual practice that ensured the maintenance of patriarchal social hegemony and acted as a means of survival for women, to the discursive understanding of marriage as a form of codified love. Within instances of this discursive imagining in British novels, domestic work is framed not as labour but as an activity that sustains those that are loved. Armstrong explores how this was articulated by women writers in the so-called "marriage plot," which she contends helped foment and naturalize a new subjectivity, that of the "domestic woman." In British fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and such novels as *Pamela* by Samuel Richardson or *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte, "modern domesticity [is depicted] as the only haven from the trials of the heartless economic world" and domestic work within marriage is portrayed as something that could stem from love, facilitated by the marriage contract (8). These novels conjure the domestic woman as *the* primary subject—the subject who gives value to

“life,” as opposed to work. This subject, Armstrong writes, is the template for the modern individual “which is first and foremost a woman” (8).

Using a Foucauldian reading of norms and sexuality, Armstrong asserts that these novels establish a new “household norm” that has had a significant social impact. Novels depicting this household norm helped justify modern capitalist state institutions in their role as guarantors of the maintenance of the domestic realm. This realm, segregated from the sphere of “work,” and construed as the realm of “life,” was valued as the domain of desire, sexuality, femininity, and the psychological, subjective experience. Armstrong argues that this framing, in turn, became a way of defanging working class movements unhappy with the impacts of industrialization, because to attack the capitalist state would also be to jeopardize the cherished domestic realm. The following chapter explores how Roy’s novel collapses the “household norm” through her social reproductive narrative, where the spatial confines of the home become physically and figuratively porous, vacating the home from its “separate sphere,” and locating it within the larger system of capitalism.

In “Disavowal and Domestic Fiction: The Problem of Social Reproduction,” Armstrong’s 2018 reprise to *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, she discusses how in the neoliberal era the workplace became the realm of affect, romance and actualization once aligned with the domestic sphere of the home. Novels of the post-1970 era speak to this “absence of the household” which has been replaced with “the romance of work.” Written prior to this period, Roy’s novel emerges from a transitional moment when the affective certitude of the marriage plot and the domestic realm was being punctured and disavowed, presaging the more dramatic turn away from the solid ground accorded to the domestic realm that Armstrong (2018) describes. Roy’s novel depicts bare survival, unequal working conditions and abject poverty as the *result* of marriage

and family life conditions as opposed to presenting marriage as a transformation out of economic uncertainty and the apogee of personal fulfillment. Its envisioning of household labour among working-class women calls for a rearrangement of the social beyond simply providing Quebec mothers with more equitable domestic relationships. Indeed, *The Tin Flute* suggests a more radical critique and remedy by locating the drama of class struggle in the domestic realm, suggesting, first and foremost, that domestic work is “more than a labour of love” (Luxton). However, as the next chapter will explore, the novel’s resource rhetoric stifles to a very large degree the resistant energies latent in its own narrative.

Chapter 3:

“Working women of all ages”: Social Reproduction and Resource Rhetoric in *The Tin Flute*

In a flash of illumination she felt her kinship with all the women of distant countries, whether Poles, Norwegians, Czechs or Slovaks. They were women like her. Women of the common people. Working women. Women who for centuries had seen their husbands and children go off to war. One era passed and another came, but it was always thus: women in all ages had waved goodbye and wept to see their men march away. It seemed to her that she was plodding along this sunny afternoon, not alone, but in the ranks of thousands of other women, and that their sighs echoed in her ears, the weary sighs of the needy, of the working women of all ages.

—Gabrielle Roy, *The Tin Flute*

Rose-Anna still belongs to those thousands of women in our city who are looking for a home. If they all came together in closed ranks, we might understand, or we might begin to fear their determination. But they are on their own, each one with her own set of futures to juggle and her anxiety and the question “Why?” that she sometimes asks.

—Gabrielle Roy, “Return to Saint-Henri: Reception Speech to the Royal Society of Canada”

Introduction

In 2017, then Quebec culture minister Guy Fortin designated the publication of *Bonheur d'occasion* an historical event under the Cultural Heritage Act, stating that the novel “initiated a literature of protest that emerged during a period of profound social transformations” (Ministère de la Culture, translation my own).⁵⁵ Fortin’s remarks reflect the novel’s impact on the Quiet

⁵⁵ See Darlene Kelly (2005), Nathalie Cooke and Lorna Hutchison (2003), and Agnes Whitfield (2007) for the contested translation history of *Bonheur d'occasion* in English. I agree with Whitfield’s assessment that Hannah Josephson’s original 1947 translation for McClelland and Stewart has been unjustly maligned. As Whitfield suggests, no translation can be expected to perfectly capture the nuance of the original, but Josephson, a frequent translator of French social

Revolution, which took hold of Quebec in the decades after its 1945 publication. *Bonheur d'occasion* galvanized Quebec and Canada in the period just after World War II, in the decade and a half before major reforms were brought in by the Jean Lesage government to alleviate some of the ethnic and class inequality so prevalent in Quebec, and so starkly captured in the novel. While Fortin dubs the novel a “literature of protest,” *The Tin Flute* (the novel’s English title) does not directly document protest, or disruption of work, production or circulation. But as preeminent critic of the book Ben-Zion Shek has observed, “the economic crisis and its social effects...are presented in such a way as to question many aspects of the capitalist system” (85). These many aspects include the plight of “working women of all ages,” who are framed as uniquely burdened with sustaining the Canadian nation during this crisis-ridden period.

To represent Canada is to represent the flows and rhythms of extractivism, which suture its diverse landscapes together. In the Introduction to this dissertation, I made reference to one of Roy’s most eloquent renderings of this dual, interconnected aspect of Canadian experience in *The Tin Flute*—a description of the home of Jean Lévesque, one of the novel’s main characters. Jean’s bed appears as if it is submerged within the smells, sounds and movements of Canada’s resource flows: “Flatboats passed before his door, tankers reeking of oil or gasoline, lumber barges, coalers, all hailing him with three powerful blasts on their sirens—a salute in passing and a cry for liberty” (17). In Roy’s evocation, Canada’s resource economy is right there with him in his home—a home perched at the crossroads of “freight boats,” “East-West railroads,” “shipping

criticism, realist and modernist work, was more than capable of capturing the important motifs of the novel. As Whitfield notes, Roy was happy with the translation, even with obvious oversights and flaws that might have occurred. In light of potential flaws in the translation, when performing more detailed analysis of language in this book I will include the original French text.

lanes” and a “road to the ocean, the Great Lakes and the prairies” (17). A signal example of how this novel speaks to—and from—the resource discourse of this era, this passage indexes the profound ways the characters of *The Tin Flute* are rhetorically manifested as the human resources required to keep this state afloat. Canada’s resource economy is so definitional to their status as people that it inundates them at home, in bed, as they are trying to sleep.

Roy was well aware of the development of Canada’s resource economy and its paramount importance to the history of Montreal, which is the setting of *The Tin Flute*. Newly arrived in Montreal in 1939, after travels in Europe and a previous life in Manitoba as a teacher and itinerant journalist, Roy published a series of articles in *Le bulletin des agriculteurs* entitled “Tout Montréal.” In these articles, she describes the city’s development from its first incarnation as Fort Ville-Marie, highlighting its ethnic diversity as well as the intertwined histories of French and English colonization. In the article “Après trois cent ans,” (After three hundred years), Roy highlights the “farmers-turned-trappers-adventurer-explorers” who populate the city up until the present day (Clemente and Clemente 146). She describes Montreal as a city of “cosmopolitan at its ports,” “deeply hybrid in its soul,” which Clemente and Clemente argue was partly due to its definitional “French-English duality” (Clemente and Clemente 146-147).⁵⁶ While Roy’s 1945 novel may have been a spark for incipient Quebec sovereigntist movements—before they reached their heyday in the 1968-1995 period—the novel, as well as Roy’s own politics, point towards the primacy of the Canadian nation. Roy’s lifelong dedication to French Canadian culture did not extend to a support for sovereigntist movements. Paul G. Socken, literary scholar

⁵⁶ See Roy, “Après trois cents ans” (1941), pp. 90-91, in *Heureux les nomades et autres reportages, 1940-1945*.

and expert on Roy, notes that by her later years, “it [was] no secret that Gabrielle Roy was a federalist” (200). In *The Tin Flute*, the primacy of the Canadian nation is palpable. And for Roy, that nation is very much already and always a resource nation.⁵⁷

In this dissertation, I argue that the novels I study use resource rhetoric to represent working people as if they are more like assets aiding in Canada’s extractivist economy than members of a working class. Like those novels, *The Tin Flute* endows an overwhelming sense of futility, entrapment and determinism into the lives and perspectives of its working-class characters (Doyle 186). These characters are represented as dejected and atomized, far removed from any type of class formation, let alone labour unrest. And like Durkin and Baird, Roy does not endow her characters with the strength and power to collectively overcome their circumstances, or to even imagine this as possible. The novel’s characters recognize the insufficiency, danger and general bad taste of the only solution to poverty offered to them: government support for the families of those who sign up to fight in World War II. However, the book presents this as the only way some modicum of “second-hand happiness” (or occasional, ephemeral, fleeting happiness (some of the connotations of the novel’s title *Bonheur d'occasion*) might be attained, and the novel does not suggest any kind of redefinition of the basic parameters of the Canadian state or radical challenge to the country other than a more equitable distribution of government support and the repair of systemic imbalances.

Despite its overwhelming propensity to downplay class formation and collective struggle, *The Tin Flute* reveals something crucial about the class dynamic undergirding extractivism in Canada—the vital role of social reproductive work in upholding the country’s resource-led

⁵⁷ See Socken and Clemente and Clemente (144-146) for discussion of Roy’s perspectives on Quebec nationalism, federalism, and later twentieth century debates about sovereignty.

economy. *The Tin Flute*'s resource rhetoric frames social reproductive labour as a fundamental component of Montreal's economy on the precipice of World War II; it portrays this work as essential infrastructure for Canada's resource state, and it imparts the idea that this labour is a necessary "human resource" required for national prosperity. At the same time, and with paradoxical effects, *The Tin Flute*'s central focus on social reproductive labour makes this grueling work visible, and frames it as a form of capitalist exploitation. This apparent contradiction is resolved through the course of the text, as the novel's resource rhetoric interpolates the terrain of social reproductive work into the resource nation, forecloses class formation, and puts a cap on the resistant energies activated in the novel.

The Tin Flute may therefore be understood as a social reproductive narrative, even if the potential for class formation is ultimately curtailed. This is because of the novel's propensity to centralize the exploitative dimension of domestic work, expanding the terrain of labour outside of its traditional location in sites of waged work. Social reproduction narratives hint at opportunities for class struggle in the home, and collapse the supposedly separate spheres of work and home. My analysis of *The Tin Flute* explores its paradoxical portrayal of social reproductive labour as both a site of exploitation and a necessary "human resource" for the state. I argue that the novel's overarching resource rhetoric exhorts its characters to adapt and conform to the exigencies of Canada's extractivist state, ultimately conveying a pessimistic outlook on class formation and struggle among the poverty-stricken inhabitants of Saint-Henri. I attend to the ways in which Roy pushes the boundaries of the social realist novel to do so, experimenting with its form to accommodate her narrative, and its representation of contemporary Montreal. And I show how Roy's experimentation results in an articulation of social reproduction as a foundational infrastructure that can, if well-supported, bolster Canada's resource economy by

facilitating the flows of care and sustenance required for this state to function, In short, while my primary argument is that *The Tin Flute*'s resource rhetoric frames social reproductive labour as a scaffold to Canada's extractivist state, I also explore how this novel's literary thinking inserts a countervailing critique of capitalism, especially when it comes to the exploitation of women's domestic labour.

To the extent that *The Tin Flute* articulates a discourse of class struggle and resistance to exploitative labour relations, it fits within the genre of the social reproductive narrative. Dougal McNeil (2020) and Alden Sajor Marte-Wood (2019) also attend to portrayals of the home as a site of labour in literary and rhetorical texts. Both scholars advance the argument that when literary texts imagine the home as a workplace, they often imply that the home could also be a site of labour agitation. Marte-Wood looks at how what he names "Philippine Reproductive Fiction" represents trans-national domestic workers. He shows how these workers perform a type of work refusal that he terms a "transformative mode of negative agency." While not refusing work per se, the worker characters that Marte-Wood examines make incremental moves towards a full withdrawal of labour in the domestic realms in which they work. Through what Marte-Wood terms a "refusal of care" they enact a form of rebellion against social reproduction work, even when their refusal may appear small. Similarly, McNeil reads Dorothy Hewett's *Bobbin Up* as a "social reproduction text." While this novel takes place at a spinning mill in Sydney during the 1950s, McNeil writes that

Bobbin' Up is at its most materialist and committed in its socialism when it is most thoroughly concerned with documenting the domestic, the intimate and the extra-market social relations that structure family life and reproduction... the novel's attention to the details of domestic structures and relations is part and parcel of its fidelity to a realist

vocation of representing in narrative the complex totality of capitalist social relations in motion. *Bobbin Up* remains a strike and industrial novel according to this reading, but an industrial novel of a special, and especially illuminating, kind. (1)

McNeil's analysis offers an insight I make use of in my analysis of *The Tin Flute*: that when social reproduction narratives provide "the details of domestic structures and relations" as parallels or essential components to "the complex totality of capitalist social relations in motion" they illuminate not only domestic work, but all forms of labour within that totality. In this way, *The Tin Flute* foregrounds the experience of poverty in the home and the injustices and traumas experienced by women due to social reproductive work. But it locates these experiences within the broader context of social inequality in Quebec, and draws parallels between these women's lives and the experiences of men suffering labour precarity, exploitation and inequality.

Critics have attended to the way in which the social space of Montreal in the novel is segmented by class and economic activity. For example, literary scholar Anthony Purdy has noted how Roy contrasts Saint-Henri—the very poor and primarily French-Canadian neighbourhood of Montreal, bordered by the polluted and busy Lachine Canal—with more affluent regions in the city. Purdy writes that "the urban space is itself divided along lines of economic activity and social class; Saint-Henri (the space of work, unemployment, and domestic poverty) is defined in relation to both Westmount (capital and economic power) and rue Sainte-Catherine (the temptations of the consumer society)" (49). Purdy explains how Saint-Henri was originally a *faubourg* (historic suburb) of Montreal and was associated with rural values and traditions of Quebec, even after it was "swallowed up" by the city of Montreal and its "accelerated industrialization" (49). While class is an important element of this novel and class struggle was on the rise during this period in Montreal (as in the rest of Canada), Roy does not

portray class formation, instead emphasizing working-class isolation.⁵⁸ I argue here that although a discourse of class is indeed present in the novel, resource rhetoric ultimately nullifies its explanatory power. While the city's economic disparity is starkly evident, the story only offers a positive outcome—however “fleeting”—to workers when they conform to Canada's resource economy, not when they unite as a class.

And while class certainly segments the city in this novel—within classes and between them—there are also other lines that criss-cross the landscape in this book. Namely, the circulatory veins of infrastructure that weave through Montreal's urban space and suture it to a much vaster resource chain. The networks connecting Montreal to the nation also include the invisible ties of care and communication essential for the social reproduction of the city's working classes. By implying that domestic workers function as a kind of infrastructure, *The Tin Flute*'s resource rhetoric redirects the energies of sustenance and solidarity away from family and class and towards the preservation of the state.

The Tin Flute: Social Reproduction as Infrastructure

Theorist Lauren Berlant defines infrastructure as “the movement or patterning of social form.” (393). She writes that infrastructure is “the living mediation of what organizes life: the lifeworld of structure. Roads, bridges, schools, food chains, finance systems, prisons, families, districts, norms all the systems that link ongoing proximity to being in a world-sustaining relation” (393). Inherent in Berlant's definition are two key aspects of infrastructure that I would like to highlight, which are the fact that infrastructures support larger structures, most commonly

⁵⁸ A demonstrable growth in union density in Quebec and strong labour activism occurred during the period proximate to *The Tin Flute*, rising by around 10% in the period from 1931 to 1941 (Rouillard).

geographic units such as states, provinces, or municipalities. And, that they do so via a coordination and organizing of the “movement” or flow of life, whether that be food, money, workers, resources, energy or any other part of social life needed for society to function.⁵⁹

Berlant’s inclusion of the word “family” in her definition of infrastructure places social reproduction within the scope of infrastructure. Families allow for the continued flow of new people into the labour pool. They shape people in ways that allow for the reproduction of life to continue via the maintenance of patterned behaviours and values. “Infrastructure” connotes something purpose-built. But in Berlant’s definition, the reproductive function of the family is not necessarily denaturalized, but points to how the family has been interpolated as a structure into the larger system of society, where it interlocks with more obviously constructed elements of society like “bridges” and “roads.”

By placing the family within the framework of infrastructure, Berlant’s theory is allied with Marxist approaches to understanding how social infrastructures condition workers to their role within capitalism (as discussed in Chapter One). Marxist geographer David Harvey argues that social infrastructures help to sustain and shape labour power (to allow for continued surplus value production). Harvey writes (1982):

Improvements in the quality of quantity of labour power through health care and education, as well as through a host of intangible means which affect discipline, the work ethic, respect for authority, consciousness, and the like, can have a salutary effect upon

⁵⁹ The Latin pre-fix “infra” means “below, underneath, beneath” and is often understood as component parts which, in tandem, support a complete structure (“Infra-, Prefix, Sense 1.a.”). In common parlance, infrastructure connotes both that which upholds but also that which facilitates movement: large systems that both maintain societies and allow for flows of people, goods, resources, or ideas.

surplus value production...Some of the flows into the social infrastructure can therefore be viewed as investments designed to enhance the social conditions for the production of surplus value.” (401)

The significance of the family to the production and maintenance of capitalist society is nothing new to Marxist critical theory, and was addressed in Engel’s famous work—*The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, (1884). But Berlant’s theory highlights the formal similarities between all types of infrastructure, including the family. Infrastructures are a form of “living mediation,” giving the family a dynamic, circulatory dimension that mirrors structures like transport and communication.

Considering social reproductive work as a form of infrastructure clarifies the historical transformations in how this work has been understood. The historical trajectory of theorizing infrastructure, as Feminist geographer Sarah Marie Hall points out, has meant that even when our conception of this term expands from “physical infrastructures - roads, buildings, operational systems” (86) to contain “social infrastructures,” the latter have been too limited in scope, “refer[ring] narrowly to social spaces and spaces of sociability, such as community centres, parks and libraries, rather than being understood in terms of labour, gender and social reproduction” (82-83). Hall suggests that this is because social reproduction is usually associated with the home, where it has been gendered and naturalized. Because of this, even social reproductive work like elder care and childcare outside of the home have not been imagined as social infrastructures, because they are not “an outcome or function of physical infrastructure” (83).

Social reproduction is an infrastructure because it is system of structured behaviours conditioned to make a society function by supporting its inhabitants (Hall 83). Understanding social reproduction as infrastructure accounts for the way work, such as the work done by early

childhood educators, transitions from the naturalized, unpaid work of the early twentieth-century housewife to the paid work of the daycare centre educator in the 1970s. With the coming of the welfare state, naturalized domestic *work* transformed into “education *infrastructure*.” The common denominator, in both cases, is the labour of childcare. This labour, when conceived of broadly as a patterned system of repeated behaviour, is all infrastructural, whether it is remunerated privately, publicly, or not at all. Of course, this labour does not produce surplus value. But when it is aggregated, social reproduction is a system of patterned behaviour (an infrastructure) which supports a larger structure—capitalist society. Roy’s novel, in fact, represents an inflection point in this discourse—a moment when women’s work in the home began to be discursively conceived as infrastructural support for the state’s continuance.

The aim of theorizing social reproduction as infrastructure is not just to better accommodate, support and remunerate this work within capitalist economies. To do so would be synonymous with “ignoring and marginalizing feminist writings (and authors) on social reproduction, as well as writings on social infrastructure within feminist economics - whilst at the same time appropriating their language” (Hall 86). This is because the Marxist Feminist thinkers who developed the notion of social reproduction (as I discuss in the Introduction to Part Two of this dissertation) aimed to dissolve the need for reproducing the proletariat entirely, by eradicating class society and wage labour exploitation, and the need for social reproduction with it. And while Roy’s novel situates social reproduction as a kind of *infrastructure*, and suggests the gendered politics at play, it does not suggest that any changes be made to the *structure* itself—by which I mean the constitutive elements of the Canadian state, the fact that it is extractivist, settler-colonial, nationalistic, patriarchal. Work could be more equitably managed

and renumerated, men and women treated more equally, but this is nevertheless always within state capitalism as it exists in the country.

Hall notes that we might “consider intimacy as a form of infrastructure,” in the way that intimacy interweaves the “patterns of social relationships” that Berlant describes (90). *The Tin Flute* is revelatory as a cultural work because it articulates a contrary truth about social reproduction and the role of intimacy. While we often perceive intimacy—the deep familiarity, closeness and rapport found within families, romantic relationships, friendships, or comrades—as the glue that maintains social reproductive life, the novel demonstrates that in a capitalist society the reproduction of worker bodies can, and does, in fact, go on without these things, aided directly by the “caring infrastructures” of the federal government, as occurs in this novel.

The Tin Flute narrates a sense that Canada’s social reproductive infrastructure was at risk—that a fissure in the realm of intimacy, in addition to the general economic crisis, was occurring. In her essay, Berlant notes that “at some crisis times...politics is defined by a collectively held sense that a glitch has appeared in the reproduction of life” (393). In *The Tin Flute*, the massive social upheaval of the Great Depression and the impending war are a full-blown crisis for the people of Saint-Henri. However, from the perspective of capital and from the novel’s resource logic, this was just a glitch—a temporary malfunction in the reproduction of the labour power. The word “glitch” suggests a technical error that doesn’t require a change to the whole system. Instead, as we see in this novel, the focus is on repairing the circuitry so that “human resources” can continue to flow as inputs into the system. This is precisely the process I see in the novel’s unfolding of resource rhetoric.

The novel opens in 1940, a year in which a multi-scalar crisis hovered over the people of Saint-Henri. As war flared in Europe, and Canada was only a few months into its involvement,

the lingering effects of the Depression were very much still present. Many of residents of Saint-Henri were either out of work or seeking more permanent employment. Florentine, the eldest child (of eleven) in the Lacasse family, provides the only income to her large family, barely making ends meet. The novel at first appears to be a marriage plot, beginning in one long scene in which Florentine, eager to find an escape from precarity, attempts to attract the attention of the rakish (and fully employed) Jean Lévesque. But the novel soon becomes absorbed in narrating the lives the Lacasse family, comprised of father Azarius, a trained carpenter taking on odd jobs, and Rose-Anna, the impoverished mother of eleven. When Florentine becomes pregnant after being assaulted by Jean (who then disappears from the novel), the focus of the book shifts to Rose-Anna, and her perpetual struggle to make do and provide sustenance and care for her family. This culminates in the tragic death of her young son, Daniel. The final section of the book deals with Florentine's marriage to Emmanuel Létourneau, with the latter leaving for war along with many other local men (including Azarius Lacasse and his son Pitou). The novel ends with the provision of federal allowances to the families of the men, improving the lives of Florentine, Rose-Anna, and their families.

I. Gabrielle Roy: Working Writer, Writer of Work

Gabrielle Roy paid sustained attention to the vicissitudes of work and family life in Canada, drawing to a large degree upon her own experiences in her writing. She began her literary career in 1938 while living near London, England. Her turn to writing came when she was almost thirty and after many years working to support herself as a teacher. She was born in 1909 in Saint-Boniface, Manitoba, into a lower-middle class family, and lived in Manitoba until moving to France and England to study theatre in 1937.

Roy's perspective on work may have been influenced by observing her parents' economic struggles, alluded to in her 1955 autobiographical novel *Street of Riches* (*Rue Deschambault*). Roy was the youngest of eleven children, born to older parents who had both migrated from Quebec to Manitoba in the late 1800s. Léon, Gabrielle's father, was laid off for political reasons from his job as a Federal Settlement Officer in 1913, losing his pension and driving the family into poverty (Clemente and Clemente 195). The family's poverty forced them to take in boarders, and Maman (based on Mélina) to take on extra work. In *Streets of Riches*, Christine (Gabrielle) remembers her mother's struggles: "Then I saw clearly the endless piecing together, the hard role that had been Maman's... mending clothes one evening under an inadequate light, absorbed in trying to save money, sending us to bed early so that the fire not be kept up" (152). These descriptions echo those of Rose-Anna in *The Tin Flute*, suggesting the ongoing influence of Roy's childhood experience on her later writing.

Roy's journalistic writing—the bulk of which occurred between 1939 and 1945—covers a range of "human interest" topics for which she became famous, from colourful vignettes of Gaspé Fishermen to memories of St. Boniface; however, the theme of work and toil inside and outside the home is present to greater or lesser degrees throughout her writing in the first two decades of her career.⁶⁰ Roy's 1950 novel *Where Nests the Water Hen* (*La Petite Poule d'Eau*), which followed *The Tin Flute*, revolves around the building of a school in rural Manitoba and the

⁶⁰ Roy published in many Canadian venues in the late 1930s and 1940s, such as *Le Devoir* and St Boniface's *La liberté et le patriote*. Many of her articles (at least 50) were initially published in *Le bulletin de agriculteurs*, where her short stories and vignettes of characters and locations in Canada and abroad were very popular among readers and established her position as a writer of travel and general interest stories. She wrote these stories after visiting the regions she was covering (Clemente and Clemente, 131-142).

teachers who work in it, most likely drawn from her time teaching north of Winnipeg in 1937. She returns to this topic in her Governor General's award-winning (and final) novel, *Children of My Heart* (*Ces enfants de ma vie*, 1977), whose protagonist is a young female teacher in rural Manitoba, with the novel mostly focussing on the teacher's relationships with students, told in short vignettes. In accord with what her biographer François Ricard calls her "conversion to reality," Roy began to write about Montreal in 1941, with articles that formed the basis of *The Tin Flute* (quoted in Clemente and Clemente 143). Written and re-written over 1943-1944, *The Tin Flute* was initially published in 1945 by Éditions Pascal and received international acclaim and numerous awards, including both the Governor General's Award and the prestigious Prix Femina in France.

The Tin Flute and Roy's later novel *The Cashier* (*Alexandre Chenevert*)—published in 1954 but written as early as 1947—locate the problem of work within a more strident critique of modern society, including the relationship between work and the family. Like *The Tin Flute*, *The Cashier* is a class narrative, but instead of the city's poor, it focusses on the middle classes of Montreal. Chenevert, the novel's protagonist, is a bank-teller whose routinized lifestyle embodies the claustrophobic alienation of the mid-century white-collar experience. With the eating of meals punctuated by periods of work, after work, and thoughts of work, Chenevert responds with exasperation and expressions of tedium, boredom, bitterness, and immense tiredness, culminating in his characterization of "the day ahead like a barren mountain" (28). The novel's critique of Quebec and Canada occurs via a cancer diagnosis—the core crisis of the book—which catalyzes one of the book's main themes: the social safety net in Canada at the time (or lack thereof). Old age pensions, paying for health care, and taxes are part of Chenevert's everyday ruminations and impact the novel's tragi-comic end, where he succumbs to an

exploitative doctor and dies of his disease (see pgs. 33-34; 177; 160 respectively). The book is compelling not because any affordances of the plot, but because of its ability to capture the ennui of twentieth-century North American middle-class life, in which society is perceptibly “advancing” even though such progress has had relatively little impact on the routinized experience of the novel’s *almost*-white collar everyman.

The Cashier is similar to *The Tin Flute* in that both depersonalize and destabilize the family home. In *The Cashier*, Chenevert is just as exhausted at home as at work:

Sometimes, while he probed the night in the white silence of the kitchen, he suffered a feeling of such strangeness that it constricted his heart...Alexandre felt that he was not made for the century in which he lived, this epoch of appalling tedium all too little relieved by gadgets, by nickel, aluminum, plastic, celluloid, Bakelite, nylon, zylon...For some time, now, the refrigerator had been silent; its motor clicked back into action with a dull explosive rumble. The machine purred gently. It put you in mind of an experimental laboratory. Alexandre sensed his utter inferiority as a man, with all his little stomach troubles, his endless colds, his confused problems. The machine’s smooth function threw into bold relief his hopeless yearning. (20-21).

In this passage, the home appears usurped by useless gadgets, flooding the space and divesting the domestic realm of its status as respite from the gloomy monotony of work. Instead, time-saving amenities underscore Chenevert’s sense of his own body’s frailty, and in comparison to their self-sufficiency his neediness appears like “hopeless yearning.” Rather than feeling like a home, the house gleams with the sterility of a laboratory. Time-saving commodities, rather than bringing progress or “life” to Chenevert, disrupt his sense of connection to his home and the era in which he lives.

The Lacasse family's experience in *The Tin Flute* parallels Chenevert's alienation from home and society, even if their class statuses differ. In both of these works, Roy articulates how the ability to find sustenance, care and survival in the home has been jeopardized in mid-century Montreal. While the Lacasse family exists as a social unit within their home, the demands of social reproductive labour under conditions of poverty obliterate the home's potential as a place of rest and respite. And with this, Roy is not only a "writer of work," but a writer whose novels communicate an evaporating sense of the separate spheres of "work and home." This is a problem, she suggests, not just for Montreal's families, but for the entire nation. Because when the home can no longer sustain "life," the social reproduction of Canada's human resources has been put at risk.

II. Remapping Social Realism in *The Tin Flute*

An important element of nineteenth-century urban social realism—a genre that was very influential on Roy—is the bifurcation of the home and workplace into separate spheres. Roy's collapse of these realms in her mid-twentieth-century novels is indicative of an overall remapping of the social realistic form in *The Tin Flute*. This remapping helps to explain the novel's multifaceted portrayal of life in 1940s Montreal. It is a portrayal in which extractivism, a critique of capitalism and emergent feminism all appear as significant influences at different points in the narrative.

The book's generic novelty is hinted at in an early review (1947) by the literary scholar François Charles Archile Jeanneret. He writes that *The Tin Flute* is "a powerful picture drawn from life in a working-class district of the Canadian metropolis, dispassionate, starkly realistic, psychological and photographically accurate...unquestionably the great Canadian novel" (7). The review highlights the way in which this novel is very much within the generic confines of

social realism—a genre simply defined as the fictional portrayal of everyday life. Social realism is also often critical of the society it represents, and frequently betrays “an interest in individuals or groups which challenge the existing social order” (Shek 45).

In addition to social realism, Jeanneret’s review points to Roy’s use of naturalistic and modernist techniques.⁶¹ As he notes, Roy’s novel is “dispassionate, starkly realistic, psychological and photographically accurate”—techniques which move the novel beyond the category of social realism as strictly understood. Émile Zola popularized the term naturalism in the 1860s. This literary movement pushed realism towards extreme determinism and near fatalism, stressing heredity and avoiding even indirect commentary on social forces (Shek 44-45). Like Baird’s reportage, Roy’s novel is characterized by its directness, psychological acuity and commitment to linguistic idiom—perhaps the most famous attribute of *The Tin Flute* is its use of vernacular Canadian French spoken by the working-classes, sometimes referred to as *joual*. Doyle characterizes Roy’s naturalism as emphasizing “the documentation of social decay through the relentless accumulation of detailed evidence,” but notes her “reluctance to draw any but the most negative conclusions from this evidence” (186). Most profoundly, Roy comeslingles an “objectivist stance” derived from naturalism with the “subjective perspectivism” of high modernist form (Hill *Modern Realism*, 16).⁶² Roy uses these techniques most readily when describing social reproduction, using these more contemporary, experimental styles to focus

⁶¹ Doyle notes that Roy’s novel as well as Roger Lemelin’s *Au Pied de la pente douce* (1944), the other novel of the era depicting working class Quebec life, were more influenced by French naturalists than 1930s American proletarian fiction (185-186).

⁶² Georg Lukács, the famous critic of modernism, found its roots in another genre he disliked: naturalism (43).

reader attention on the pivotal importance of the domestic realm to resolving and repairing the problem of poverty in 1940s Canada.

To the extent to which it is a social realist novel, *The Tin Flute* appears belated in comparison to contemporary trends in fiction and the modernist experiment that was prevalent in acclaimed fiction at the time.⁶³ But by using a genre in decline in combination with stylistic and plot choices that indicate an acute sense of the contemporary, Roy produces something more than just a “clumsy” imitation, as is sometimes used as a descriptor for Canadian literary belatedness (Hill, *Modern Realism* 7). Rather, Roy’s generic belatedness in *The Tin Flute* induces a sense of incongruity or temporal disjunction that puts into relief salient facts about Canada, especially the particularity of its resource economy. Nineteenth century urban social realism, as one might find in Dickens, Balzac or Zola, emerges during a time of societal transformation when the urban poor bore the brunt of expanding capitalist exploitation. The main focus of this fiction was the difficulty the urban poor faced in adapting to these transformed societies. The conversion of Quebec society from rural to urban occurred one hundred years after such a change had occurred in France and Britain, and *Tin Flute*, one of the very first social

⁶³ Consider, for example, other well-known works of fiction published in the period between 1945-47: George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1945), Albert Camus’ *The Plague* (1947), and Canadian novelist and poet Elizabeth Smart’s experimental *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* (1945). All use more experimental story-telling tactics, and were nonetheless popular and acclaimed works, like Roy’s.

realist novels of Quebec, was published a full century after this genre became prevalent in France (Shek 9).⁶⁴

Roy's social realistic novel may be belated. However, this coming late allows it to remap and adapt the social realistic genre to effectively convey Canada's distinct socio-economic development.⁶⁵ For example, in *The Tin Flute*, we see the push and pull between city and countryside, and the erosion of traditional ways of life and values, key factors of nineteenth-century social realism, but set in 1940s Montreal. This belatedness points towards Canada's slower movement towards manufacturing and industrialization, as well as Canada's enduring extractivist and resource economy, severely impacted by the ongoing Depression. Roy's *The Tin Flute* and Roger Lemelin's *Au Pied de la pente douce* (1944) were the first major attempts to innovate beyond the tradition of *roman du terroir*—the popular “rural novel” which had dominated Quebec literature up until this point (Doyle 186). These rural novels were marked by a conservatism and anti-urban sentiment that were approved by the church and state, the former of which also appreciated *Bonheur d'occasion* (Whitfield 23). *The Tin Flute* imagines the shift

⁶⁴ For example, the novel contains several characters, like Emmanuel or even Florentine, who appear similar to the *flâneur*, the wanderer figure famously described by Charles Baudelaire as the epitome of modernity in his essay “The Painter of Modern Life” (1863). We see this when Jean Lévesque first enters the streets of Montreal. Roy writes, “he went with quick strides, his shoulders swinging with determination and nervous energy. It was unnecessary for him to elbow his way through the crowd, a path opened at his approach” (11). Based on long walks taken in Saint-Henri after moving to Montreal for the first time in 1939, *The Tin Flute* is as “the product of walkers” as its writer and characters are frequently on the streets of Montreal (Moyes 47-48).

⁶⁵ See Szeman's “Belated or Isochoric? Canadian Writing, Time, and Globalization” (2000) for a general discussion of this phenomenon in Canadian literature more broadly.

from the society of the *roman du terroir*—the transformation of Quebec society from a traditional, religious, rural and patriarchal one to modern, secular, and urban one that was specific to the region. However, the novel also places this change within a larger twentieth-century context shaped by ideas about socialism, radical revisions of family life, and early forms of feminism.

To simply portray the former phenomenon—the shift from rural to urban in Quebec—without also offering a glimpse of twentieth-century modernity, would not be in keeping with Roy’s obvious dedication to realist verisimilitude. Roy’s remapping of social realism, which introduces a sense of disjunction and contradiction, allows her to encompass the social space of Montreal and include conflicting discursive elements. The society she finds in Saint-Henri is to some degree a mere instantiation of the country’s extractivist status quo. But it is also a space, to a limited degree, where class-based exploitation can be seen and felt in ways characteristic of the social realistic novel. And finally, it is also a space of radical revisions to family life, indicative of social realism but also the influence of twentieth-century feminism. All of these influences come together in Roy’s most significant formal innovation in the novel—her reintegration of the separate spheres of work and home.

III. *The Tin Flute*: A Social Reproduction Narrative

1. Glitching Intimacy: Pervasive Atomization in *The Tin Flute*

A key way in which Roy breaks down the separate spheres of work and home in the *Tin Flute* is to first establish the general mood of the society the novel portrays—which is one of pervasive atomization. She can then show how this mood seeps into the home—no longer a refuge, but a place where the same alienation and isolation permeating society also exists. This is

also a central component of the novel's resource rhetoric: while Saint-Henri's denizens are striated by class, they are never presented as united. Very early in the novel, we encounter atomization as a defining characteristic of life in Saint-Henri, a place populated by people whose perspectives are, to a high degree, siloed. The novel begins with a detailed sensory transcription of the "Five and Ten," the snack bar where Florentine works. In this scene, and throughout the novel, we encounter polyvocal narration, a form of storytelling typical of social realist novels of the era written by journalist-writers like Roy, or Irene Baird, in which multiple characters appear to transcribe what they see in their own unique voices.

Roy pushes the perspectivity inherent to polyvocal narration to the extreme, combining naturalism's lucid transcription of sensory phenomena with the closed perspectivism of psychological modernism. With a roving narrative eye similar to Baird's in *Waste Heritage*, *The Tin Flute* shifts its third person narration among the novel's main characters: those within the Lacasse family, mother Rose-Anna and daughter Florentine, son Eugene and the young men associated with Florentine, Jean Lévesque and Emmanuel Létourneau. Through the intense subjectivity afforded by the psychological colouring of each voice, Roy creates an overwhelmingly subjective tone, which contributes to the sense that each character is locked into their own perspective, paradoxically neutralizing a sense of shared experience and conveying separateness. The entire effect of this is to set up each character as a claustrophobic container, combining to produce an affect of isolation. The novel uses this affect to create pathos and push the plot forward. It is also an early indicator of the glitch in the realm of intimacy that becomes the main problem later in the novel.

We see Roy dialing up the novel's highly subjective polyvocal narration by reflexively thematizing narrative point-of-view, thereby bringing the problem of separateness to the

attention of readers. Introspection and seeing through the screen of another, or the trope of “seeing with another’s eyes” occurs in Chapters One and Two and drives the separation of subject, point of view and setting among the characters.⁶⁶ As Florentine watches a platoon walk past the Five-and-Ten, where she is working, she momentarily sees their “tatterdemalion rags through the eyes of her mother” (10). Soon after, when Florentine catches a note of envy about her flirtation with Jean Lévesque from her co-worker, Marguerite, Florentine feels happier about the situation, and notes “never in her life had any object, or friendship, or experience acquired value for her save through the eyes of others” (12). This is followed in quick succession by Jean, recalling the conversation that had just occurred with Florentine, bursting out laughing as he sees himself “as Florentine sees him” (12). This overt emphasis on point-of-view sets up a rhetoric of comparison that focusses reader attention not only on attitudinal differences, but differences of setting, and the work performed in each setting. In this way, while these characters might together categorically constitute members of a working class, they are separated, like the potatoes in Marx’s sack of potatoes—not formed into a community of workers, but each siloed within a workplace in which their values, as human resources, will be extracted.

2. From Marriage Plot to Social Reproduction Narrative: Romance, Workplace and the Infrastructure of Marriage

At the same time as this novel establishes the social space of Saint-Henri as one which is defined by atomization, Roy frames the traditional domains of intimacy—romance, marriage, and family life, as fundamentally transactional and overlapping with the sphere of work. Through this framing, Roy suggests parallels between social reproductive activities and wage-

⁶⁶ See Anthony George Purdy for references to mid-twentieth century critical work on this in Roy’s novel and his own discussion of gaze, sexuality and consumer capitalism (pg. 50, Note 8).

earning labour. One of the primary ways she suggests this is by framing the locations of social reproduction as spaces of labour. I consider this a chronotope of the social reproduction narrative: it treats the locations of domestic and social reproductive work as if they are workplaces, on par with traditional locations of wage-earning employment. This amounts to a blurring of the boundaries of the two “separate spheres” of work and home (Strasser 101). Roy is not unique in this, as scholar of literary domesticity Deborah Clarke notes: modernist authors frequently destabilize the domestic realm and show the home as no refuge from “the vicissitudes of modernity” (Clarke 191). As Clarke explains,

The modernist novel recasts the accepted ideas of domesticity, that it serves as the center of the home, providing sustenance, warmth, and order to family life. Rather, the costs of such assumptions are made vividly clear. The tale of modernist domesticity is not one of liberation from household labors nor of women finding agency in reclaiming the domestic. It is a tale of how domesticity fails to shape female identity, sustain a space of interiority, or serve women’s interests...modernist women writers reimagined domesticity in order to reject its positioning within the binary framework of the ideology of separate spheres. (192-193)

We see the dynamic that Clarke identifies in *The Tin Flute*, which interweaves settings of social reproductive work with other workplaces, creating parallels between these spaces as locations of labour. While much of the novel takes place in the Lacasse home, the initial scene at the Five-and-Ten is the first instance in the novel of a blurring distinction between wage labour and social reproductive work, setting the tone for the book. In this opening sequence, Florentine’s work is registered as both wage labour and social reproduction work. This is because in this setting, Florentine’s wage earning to support her family co-mingles with her search for a husband:

Where was the young man who had given her so many admiring glances yesterday?

Florentine found herself watching out for him eagerly, although the memory of his bantering tone was still fresh in her mind. The noon-hour rush was in full swing. The fever of the store communicated itself to her in a kind of irritation, mingled with a vague feeling that some day all this seething activity would come to a stop, and her purpose in life would become plain. It never occurred to her that she might meet her fate elsewhere than here, enveloped in the pungent aroma of caramel, between the tall mirrors pasted over with strips of paper announcing the day's menu, and to the crackling report of the cash register, a sound like the very expression of her frantic hopes. (1)

A marriage-plot novel is “any narrative that ends, or almost ends, in a marriage or marriages and that is largely concerned throughout with courtship” (O’Connell 5). Much of the power of this initial scene is the placement of a character-type familiar to readers of marriage-plot novels in the dazzlingly unfamiliar location of a working-class Montreal diner.

As in the domestic marriage plots of the post-Enlightenment era, the desire for romance is framed here as a type of commercial transaction. At the same time, the search for a marriage partner comes off as psychologically overwhelming, with the setting and action saturated by the emotional tonality emanating from the characters, a quality that can be seen in such novels as Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847). Florentine possesses the familiar emotional power and fondness for shopping and keeping up a feminine appearance through makeup and clothing of a more naive Emma Bovary, the heroine of Auguste Flaubert’s marriage plot novel *Madame Bovary* (1857). Roy places Florentine in the less familiar culture (for many readers) of the Quebec diner, which crackles with lunch hour intensity. Through this, Roy signals a generic similarity to both the marriage-plot and the social realist novel, a similarity that spans the novel

via its “cast of characters” plotting reminiscent of Balzac’s *Pere Goriot*, in which characters move in and out of focus in a *comédie humaine* type manner.

At the same time, this pivotal passage provides rhetorical tools for interpreting the setting in which Roy has placed her character. The final simile— “the crackling report of the cash register, a sound like the very expression of her frantic hopes”—is an interpretative prompt that invests the marriage plot with the specific transactional aura permeating the social sphere and the economic, inter-personal and sexual life of the Five and Ten. Using the book’s characteristic auditory imagery, Roy finds in the crackle of the cash register a sound symbolic of Florentine’s exasperated expectations, in this case, directly referring to her hope for a continued flirtation (in French: “et au son bref, crépitant, du tiroir-caisse, qui était comme l’expression même de son attente exaspérée”).

To employ a rhetorical comparison is to infuse meaning into something that cannot be easily gleaned by simply describing it. Roy employs a simile to highlight that there is something difficult to grasp about Florentine’s affect and situation. Florentine’s desire and hopes are multiple: she wants the admiring glances and banter of Jean Lévesque, an end to the “fever of the store” or her work there, and her path in life to become clear. Florentine also knows something, or she is prevented from knowing otherwise, by the claustrophobic confines of the store that “envelops” with its overpowering sensorium. Here, we see Roy’s modernist writing style infusing naturalistic details, like the clanging sound of the cash-register, with a psycho-social intensity emanating from characters (“a sound like the very expression of her frantic hopes”), which allows this correspondence to be conveyed. And the implication is that it is only in this store that Florentine will meet her fate—a fate construed as a flirtation that could lead to marriage and a pathway out of the drudgery of work at the store.

What makes the cash register the “very expression” of Florentine’s hopes? The sound of the cash register is a brief and sudden crackling: a short and abrupt stuttering sound, but one which is a continual and ever-present intrusion into the sound-space of the diner. Like an intermittent drone, but not one which is lulling and continuous, it is a shocking clang infused with the destructive connotation of fire crackling or meat crackling on a fire. Florentine’s hopes, then, are not pleasant intrusive thoughts but sudden occasions of fretful worry. If the crackle of the cash register is the very expression of her hopes, then these expectations are not necessarily understood as something which will be “better than here,” but merely an escape (one which Jean also aspires to and eventually achieves) (17).⁶⁷ Florentine’s hopes for an escape from the drudgery of work in the Five and Ten is tied directly to finding a suitor. Through the economic exchange of marriage, she would be in the position of reproducing labourers rather than working as a labourer herself. In this, as we are led to understand, she would be exchanging one drudgery for another. As Purdy remarks, this reflects Roy’s ability to see through

the patriarchal ideology of the “family” (which she dissects with remarkable hardheadedness in *Bonheur d’occasion*) to the economic realities of systemic exploitation which lie beneath. *Bonheur d’occasion* is indeed a novel about money and its principal thematic and semantic structures flow from the economic relationships that shape its fictional world. (48)

⁶⁷ It is important to remember the context of inequality and sexism experienced by women at this moment in Quebec. Women were only provincially enfranchised in 1940, after all other provinces, and 22 years after the 1918 National Act to confer the Electoral Franchise upon Women (Parliament of Canada).

This novel's focus on money comes through in this very early simile, in which Roy strips the romance from the typical beginning to a marriage plot. But even more importantly, it is a way of equating the production of profit occurring in the store with the economic affordances of marriage and reproduction.

The endless transactional churn of the restaurant is similar to the churn of marriage, or so Roy suggests, and together they represent the desire that compels the action of this book: the quest for economic stability, either through employment or marriage.⁶⁸ While the economic dimension is a *sine qua non* of a marriage plot, Roy brings marriage and commerce together into Florentine's workplace, not her family home, suggesting a correspondence between the service work exchanged for wages and social reproductive work performed in the home. We see this in the basic fact that the work Florentine performs in the diner is compensated both by wages and (hopefully) by marriage. While most of the social reproductive labour in this book occurs in the family home, this initial passage and its suggestion that work for wages and work for marriage might be mirrored processes of exchange suggests a correspondence between these two settings and a common denominator—social reproduction. By making Florentine's work at the restaurant simultaneously productive of wages and, potentially, marriage, Roy points to the transactional overlap between these two types of activities, foreshadowing how, in the rest of the book, the separate spheres of work and home will intersect.

3. The Home—A Place of Work, not Life

The initial episode in the Five and Ten is indicative of a storytelling tactic present in the novel overall, which is to highlight how the settings and spaces inhabited by the novel's main

⁶⁸ In *Streets of Riches*, a similar dynamic occurs in the final vignette, where Christine's job as a teacher in rural Manitoba is not only to "earn a living" but to date and find a husband (151-158).

characters have an economic valence that shapes their lives and trajectories. We saw this in this dissertation's Introduction, in the passage in which Jean's bedroom appears as if it is inhabited by the smells, sounds and movements of Canada's resource economy, dictating his bodily rhythms in an all-encompassing way. And we see it again in the novel's early account of the streets of Saint-Henri:

Beyond its serried ranks of low houses stretched out on either side toward the slums, at the upper end toward Workman Street and St. Antoine Street, and at the lower toward the Lachine Canal, where the people of Saint-Henri toil at making mattresses, spinning thread, tending bobbins and driving looms, however the earth may shake and whistles blow, and ships, propellers and rails sing of the open road. (20)

Using the characteristic abundance of auditory imagery that proliferates in this novel, Roy establishes the neighbourhood of Saint-Henri as an urban slum situated amid crisscrossing infrastructural channels of rail and sea, with the toil of workers positioned at the forefront. Canada's resource economy is presented here as a narrative given, with Montreal's manufacturing economy—comprised of tending bobbins and driving looms—fitting neatly within the span of the full nation, with the trains and ships expanding out towards “the open road.” In this, Roy also makes people and their work primary ways of defining Saint-Henri. And, characteristic of resource rhetoric, those people are interpolated into the geography of Saint-Henri as the human resources needed to support and scaffold the larger entity gestured to: Canada.

Within the homes of Saint-Henri, social reproductive workers are part of the same interlocking infrastructure composed of people performing work necessary to sustain the larger structure of Canada's economy. In the Lacasse home, Rose-Anna engages in endless domestic

tasks of laundering, mending, cooking, tending to and worrying about the family's nine children (of eleven, two of whom are working adults).⁶⁹ A realistic portrayal of the labour involved in sustaining a family prior to technologies of automation, Rose-Anna's role as mother is embodied by Roy not through the expression of emotions or "care." Neither of these affects are imbued via figurative language into her performances of endless domestic tasks. Rather, Rose-Anna's performance of motherhood is characterised by the continual work involved in maintaining and sustaining the continuance of family.

Roy presents the toil that occurs in the home as overwhelming, interrupting other forms of social interaction, affection or mutuality that might occur in such a space. In her depiction of domestic work, Roy pushes the "relentless accumulation of evidence" to the stylistic forefront, imbuing naturalistic detail with an extreme psychological intensity (Doyle 186). We see this in the following passage.:

And she returned to her sewing without another word. In all the years that they had lived together there had never been enough time for her to stop her work and become acquainted with her family. The wheel of the sewing machine turned again; it turned between Florentine's boredom and Rose-Anna's fitful reverie; it turned as the earth turned, heedless of what went on from one pole to the other. And the house seemed to be caught up in the inexorable movement of the wheel, seemed to be filled with the sound of toil, too deafening for speech or mutual understanding. (114)

⁶⁹ Only one character, Jean Lévesque, is employed consistently in this novel: he works at the Montreal Metal Works, a job emerging from Canada's entry into the war in 1939 (Shek 70). Mass unemployment still persisted at the time, remedied only by war industries just beginning to spring up.

The work of mending drowns out the social space and sounds of the home, reducing it to little more than a workplace and obliterating other potential forms of life. Auditory imagery aids in this: the sound of the wheel catches the house and its members in an endless churn. The activity of stitching or knitting—typically symbolizing the stitching together of family ties—here represents the force that cancels out these bonds. The sound of the sewing machine buries language and the individual voices of the family unit, but it also obliterates time spent together, and the intimacy produced through that interaction. The social space of the home, rather than being a place of the “living” of “life” is instead a social factory—a domain of work where the family members must cede the relationships that give any purpose to this work.

Agnes Whitfield, a scholar of Quebec literature, writes that some critics may have overlooked Roy’s feminism. This is because of remarks Roy made about motherhood—that it should be the *raison d’être* of a woman’s life—as well as early interpretations of Rose-Anna as a representation of traditional femininity. As Whitfield explains,

Historically, interpretation of Gabrielle Roy's female characters has centred on the mother figure, perceived in the context of conventional values and morality. Early French-Canadian reviews of *The Tin Flute*, mostly by clerics, seem to have set the tone. Rose-Anna Laçasse was extolled as the incarnation of traditional values. Her unmarried daughter Florentine, and her unwanted pregnancy, of more dubious moral exemplariness, were ignored. (23)

While Rose-Anna’s endless attention to domestic tasks may be similar to the dedication and “moral exemplariness” associated with traditional motherhood, motherhood appears here as something “mechanized,” to use a term employed by Susan K. Kevra. It also appears as an activity without a moral or emotional *purpose* (as might be understood in the word “care”),

representing a critique of traditional ways of viewing the family in both the working-class home of Saint-Henri, and also on a larger scale.

In “Wage, Labour and Capital,” Marx notes that for the wage earner, “life” begins outside the context of wage earning:

And the worker, who for twelve hours weaves, spins, drills, turns, builds, shovels, breaks stone, carries loads, etc. – does he consider this twelve hours' weaving, spinning, drilling, turning, building, shovelling, stone breaking as a manifestation of his life, as life? On the contrary, life for him begins where this activity ceases, at the table, in the public house, in bed. (205)

For Rose-Anna in *The Tin Flute*, social reproductive work cancels out “life” or the perception that there exists such a thing as work and life: all aspects of life as they experience it in the home are obliterated by the endless drone of the wheel. Yet portraying the home as a place of work, where work appears to nullify life, suggests that the home could be a domain for class struggle to occur. While the novel does not represent any kind of work refusal or organizing among workers, Roy’s depiction of the ways in which social reproductive labour evacuates communal aspects of family life represents a moment where readers could *imagine* protest and refusal outside the confines of wage labour, and may begin to see women working in the home as a *class* of “working women.” Although the novel’s class critique is squelched to a large degree by the prevalence of resource rhetoric, it is nonetheless present, evincing the novel’s multivalent literary thinking and the presence of a plurality of ideological strands in the novel. In the end, the state resolves the issue of Depression-era poverty with soldier’s allowances and war industry jobs. By framing poverty this way, the novel’s resource rhetoric implies that Canada’s extractivist economy is not fundamentally broken, but in need of a technical fix to get it back on track.

The evacuation of life associated with the home—sociality, sustenance, rest, conviviality—occurs most vividly in *The Tin Flute* via the home's manifestation as a permeable setting. In this space, the noise, detritus and commerce of port, rail and industry barge through the walls, making impossible aspects of communal family existence that requires communication and demolishing what might be enjoyable aspects of the home:

The Transcontinental, the Toronto and Ottawa trains as well as the suburban lines passed their door. There were long freight trains, endless processions of refrigerator and coal cars. Sometimes the freight trains would come to a halt outside the door, then move backward and forward as individual cars were switched to another track, and while this went on the house was beset by the sound of bells ringing, couplings banging, hissing steam and clouds of soot. At other times expresses ran past with a long-drawn-out whistle, shaking the house to its very foundations. The windowpanes vibrated, the pictures swayed on the walls, even the contents of the drawers were tossed about. To be heard above the uproar you had to raise your voice to a quarrelsome pitch, and because of this constant shouting the members of the family tended to transfer their irritation to one another. (247)

While no doubt an attempt to articulate the misery of the family's experience in as detailed a way as possible, Roy's placement of the Lacasse home at the intersection of the circulatory veins of Canada's resource economy—where its sounds, smells, sooty residues and endless shakes literally destabilize the home—can be read as an index for the social reproductive position of the home. Placed here, the home and its labour appear as a core infrastructure, bolstering and sustaining the broader network of capitalist profit accrual driving the extractivist state. Read

symbolically, the home propels the grinding wheels of capital, and the family environment is literally smothered by that which it ostensibly maintains.

Seen in a more positive light, literary scholar D.M.R. Bentley notes that the Saint-Henri of the novel functions as a kind of “haven” from the evanescence of urban life amid capitalist modernity. This is in part due to its status as a “pedestrian pocket” and “urban working-class suburb.” He writes: “With its ‘open’ windows, ‘conversation in the air,’ and ‘talk pass[ing] from one threshold to the next,’ Saint-Henri is a place in which distinctions between inside and outside and private and public space become fuzzy enough to permit members of the community to feel at home *in the street*” (282). Bentley’s conclusion differs from mine, because it suggests a positive aspect of the integration of public and private realms in this novel. Instead, I interpret Roy’s rhetorical emphasis on seepage and threshold permeability, and the way it suggests an obliteration of the distinction between home and work, or private and public space, as a negative phenomenon. Where once the home might have been a respite from capitalist exploitation, it is now understood as another space of grueling labour. But by seemingly absorbing all the detritus of Canada’s resource economy in through the walls of the home, Roy’s resource rhetoric makes an *argument* about how domestic labour fits into the larger economy. Namely, that domestic work is deeply entwined with Canada’s extractivist state, and infrastructurally crucial.

We see this entanglement again in a vivid passage where Florentine wanders the streets, having just realized she is pregnant:

The walls of the big cotton mill on St. Ambroise Street enveloped her in shadow, behind which the machines panted and wailed. Everything conspired to increase her melancholy; the factory that seemed to spring up out of the bowels of the earth, the passersby who

eyed her curiously, the clouds lowering in the sky, and the trees in the depths of the courtyards tossing their branches in a plaintive murmur” (185).

Rather than the effluence of the city’s industry hurling through the home and pervading the senses, the affective space surrounding Florentine when she realizes she is pregnant here enters the rhetoric and metaphors constituting the geography of the city, a pathetic fallacy where the machines of the cotton mill “panted and wailed” with labour pangs similar to what she imagines for her future. In this powerfully claustrophobic scene, social reproduction is enmeshed with commerce and industry in one ghostly personification that springs from the earth, conveying the propensity of resource rhetoric to make extractivist industry appear natural, sublimely powerful, and interminable. At the same time, this passage bears echoes of a class struggle discourse, with the factory and machines taking on a surreal, lifelike quality—akin to the villains of a gothic horror. But the sublime power accorded to industrial production and resource circulation, here and throughout the novel, stifles all hope of a class-struggle solution, despite the novel’s own suggestion that labour exploitation is the root problem.

IV. Adapting to Perpetual Precarity: Becoming Canada’s Human Resources in *The Tin Flute*

I have argued in this dissertation that resource rhetoric dematerializes human workers, shaping them into the malleable human resources required by the Canadian extractivist state. We see this in the way *The Tin Flute* conveys the idea that mobility, flight, and escape are intrinsic elements of working life in Canada. These aspects of worker experience, amounting to a state of perpetual precarity, come across as a given features of life to which the characters are resigned. From Azarius Lacasse’s various schemes that take him inside and outside the city, to the transformation from urban unemployed to soldier that occurs in the novel’s final section, worker

mobility appears as a foundational element of life in Canada. As Mason remarks, this novel “critiques the phenomenon of the transient-cum-soldier and his newly respectable mobility” (115), but it is nonetheless framed as a fundamental feature of worker life which recurs repeatedly. Like the other novels studied in this thesis, *The Tin Flute* largely presents workers’ adaptation to Canada’s economy as a process in which the human resource must be endlessly adaptable, both mobile and settled, and able to embody the inherent contradictions of normative working conditions in the country. We see this extending to the social reproductive worker, and the family itself, conveyed via Rose-Anna’s yearly search for new accommodations through the streets of Montreal. While Roy undoubtedly presents this search as a tragedy, it is nevertheless presented as interminable, inescapable, and something which the Lacasse family must continue to bear until the government, at the last moment of the book, provides federal relief that will help secure more permanent housing.

To adapt to the precarity inherent to being a human resource means giving up on class formation or solidarity, and redirecting feelings like conviviality, filiation and care towards the interests of the state. From the perspective of the novel’s resource rhetoric, unemployment and the men’s failure to find work are naturalized; they are framed as a moral failing and a psychological issue, or the result of prioritizing friendships over employment. Roy conveys the employment precarity of the men gathered in Philbert’s shop and the Two Records with pathos and naturalistic detail (this is where the novel’s use of *joual* is most evident). However, their failed attempts to acquire steady work comes across as a foregone conclusion, with resignation marking the men’s reaction to their inability to find a job. Azarius complains at the Two Records restaurant:

“There's nothing I haven't tried,” he confessed grimly, not addressing anyone in particular, but as if he were searching his own soul. “I've worked at everything except my own trade. They say you have to specialize these days to find work. Well, let me tell you, a trade doesn't mean a thing any more. A man spends half his life learning a trade and the rest of his life forgetting it. No, the good old days in the trades are finished. Today you have to do odd jobs to get by.” (103)

Azarius' complaint rings true among the other unemployed or underemployed workers in the bar, still reeling from Depression-era economic conditions in which only war industries are beginning to increase output (102). This impacts young and old equally, including the eighteen-year-old Pitou, who at Philbert's shop laments “I haven't had a day's work since I quit school I'm too old to sell newspapers and they won't have me in the factories. Nobody wants me, nowhere” (35). The men's complaints reveal their ideal version of work: a permanent, unalienated trade where hard work is respected and both the young and old can find consistent employment. While these men blame social and economic factors for their negative impacts, these factors are treated as inevitabilities that cannot be challenged or overturned, and the men, while depicted in a social environment, never coalesce as comrades.⁷⁰

To be a human resource in Canada is to accede to the whims of the extractivist state. In the domestic realm, this means adapting to the same isolation and precarity in social reproductive

⁷⁰ Like in *Waste Heritage*, the portrayal of Azarius suggests that Montreal's urban poor are to a large degree responsible for their own dire straits. Azarius comes off as inert, lethargic, and “an idler” (108). In *Making Do: Women, Family, and Home in Montreal during the Great Depression* (1999), Quebec social historian Denyse Baillargeon remarks that in the interwar period “unemployment was still regarded as an individual problem caused by some moral failing, like laziness or drunkenness, or, at best, by misfortune” (141).

labour as one would find as a wage earner. Rose-Anna laments that, at home amongst her family members

No two of them desired the same thing, penned together though they were, close enough to touch one another. No two of them were bound in the same direction: each went on his way privately: Rose-Anna figuring out how to make ends meet-how could she think of anything else when she had the problem of feeding them? –Azarius toward his mirage of some big deal, stumbling over every obstacle in the road. (114)

Like workers in the factory, each family member “went on his way privately,” “penned together” physically but with no visible intimacy. Roy famously spoke of how Rose-Anna took over the plot of *The Tin Flute*. She notes that “This little working-class woman...almost forced her way into my story, then turned the plot upside down and, finally, managed to dominate the book through her very un-literary quality of tenderness” (qtd. in Purdy 45). While Rose-Anna, according to Roy, may have brought tenderness to the novel, in my reading what drives the plot is a *dearth* of tenderness—a scarcity of connection, communication and togetherness. This is indicative of the novel’s resource rhetoric, which always presents workers as atomized—pressed closely together, but never in fact touching—as this passage so vividly conveys.

Patrick Coleman uses the term “quest for tenderness” (114) to explain the narrative lack that *The Tin Flute* aims to ameliorate—the novel’s drive to fix the absence of intimacy that Rose-Anna experiences because of her constant toil. Implicit in the idea of a “quest for tenderness” is that “tenderness” is not a natural quality, or intrinsic to the bonds between a mother and her children. Instead, it is like a learned skill—something that can be put to use by a mother, acting in her role as a human resource. Rose-Anna’s “quest for tenderness” suggests that for her, love, intimacy and communication provide energy and purpose to social reproductive work, and also

serve as recompense for its heavy labour.⁷¹ But at the same time, Rose-Anna's "quest for tenderness" reveals that social reproduction work can occur to some degree without the naturalized, gendered quality of tenderness attached to it.

Roy renders Rose-Anna's quest for tenderness into a crisis, but at same time, the novel's resource rhetoric, imbued into its narrative structure, presents it as a mere glitch. With the novel's final invocation of state family allowances, the work of social reproduction chugs on, without the desired familial intimacy, in the end. In this, the novel conveys the idea that tenderness is not an intrinsic part of social reproductive work. This work could feasibly still occur without a grounding in intimacy, kinship—or even, family.⁷² Social reproductive work, then, might be performed by someone else, such as the state, which could fill in the gaps in the social reproductive infrastructure if that system became perilously close to not meeting its intended purpose.

The primary problem articulated in *The Tin Flute* is the economic precarity experienced by the novel's characters, and the narrative tension that drives the plot is the degree to which these characters can establish economic stability in the face of unemployment, lack of housing

⁷¹ In the same way, the production of a use value, engagement in unalienated labour or fulfillment of one's vocation could be understood as the reward for wage labour. These cultural ideals (or fantasies) are what support the maintenance of labour power.

⁷² The fate of Florentine at the end of the book is a case in point: pregnant after being assaulted by Jean, and entering into a loveless marriage with Emmanuel, her trajectory exemplifies the forward propulsion of social reproduction without any claims to intimacy. The "fleeting happiness" (*bonheur d'occasion*) Florentine experiences at the close of the book is the stability provided by the federal family allowance, nothing more.

and access to life's necessities. But within this broader set of problems, Roy centralizes the plight of social reproductive workers, positioning readers to consider the import of social reproductive infrastructure in moments when society faces a crisis. The final "fix" the novel provides, employment in the military (or in war-effort industries like the munitions factory Philippe Lacasse is expected to work in) and a federal allowance to families, helps bolster and maintain the family as a vital infrastructure supporting the state.⁷³ With its requisite marriage plot ending, the novel culminates in the persistence of the Lacasse family, afforded by the federal allowance for soldiers that lets Florentine and Rose-Anna fantasize about renting a home outside of Saint-Henri (274). In making government aid the fix to the glitch in social reproduction the novel narrates, Roy points to a more permanent solution in government support for domestic work. Denaturalizing domestic work has the effect, then, of making space for a welfare state to fill in the gaps of this vital infrastructure, and more firmly fixing the transformation of the worker into the human resource.⁷⁴

⁷³ The novel alerts readers to other gaps in social infrastructure like the inadequate support given to Daniel Lacasse at the Children's Memorial Hospital, where he dies of Leukemia (a theme Roy returns to in *The Cashier*). Or infrastructural gaps pointed to in housing: the yearly evictions, and the crowded, dark and polluted conditions of their "malodourous house" (Shek 77).

⁷⁴ Deborah Cowen's monograph *Military Workfare: The Soldier and Social Citizenship in Canada* (2008) provides a clarifying explanation of how Canadian citizenship coalesced with WWII wartime mobilisations and economic supports for soldiers. Roy's novel is a literary document of this process. Cowen writes, "When the Marsh Report, the blueprint for Canada's post-war welfare state, was released, in 1943, author Leonard Marsh explained that 'social security has become accepted as one of the things for which people of the world are fighting. It is one of the concrete expressions of "a better world."' In his report, Marsh asserted that a precedent for national welfare provision for the post-war era could be found in the military,

V. Conclusion: The Social Reproductive Narrative, Class Formation and the Role of a “Caring Community”

When poverty and unemployment shatter family life to the extent that they do in *The Tin Flute*, what institutions or support systems might be responsible for helping these families?

Rimstead notes that “poverty narratives” in Canadian literature

dramatize how the care and survival of the poor fall back on families and individuals, especially women, in the absence of a larger caring community. Also, in the absence of a more inclusive national imaginary, the poor often see themselves defined in relation to other forms of community, whether a family, a neighbourhood, a small town, a city slum, a street, a region, or even the poor or homeless as a group - groups which many times prove more humanitarian than nation. (8)

Is there any “larger caring community” beyond the federal government gestured to in this novel to ameliorate the disastrous conditions faced by Rose-Anna and her family? The final resolution and source of “second hand” hope is the government’s promise of remuneration to the families of soldiers heading to war in Europe. However, this is framed as problematic in the final pages of the novel, especially since it means the potential sacrifice of many soldiers’ lives. The novel suggests two other potential sources of amelioration or “caring community”: a French-Canadian working-class community and an internationalist feminist working-class solidarity that includes social reproductive workers. Ultimately, neither of these communities are deemed cohesive enough to provide the necessary support.

where ‘soldiers, sailors and airmen and their dependents really have a microcosm of social security already’ (4)

The novel hints at the possibility of French-Canadian working-class solidarity, but in the end depicts this group as too fragmented and lacking real power. Nonetheless, an emerging sense of French-Canadian Quebecers as an oppressed minority who may find solidarity in this shared underclass position emerges, particularly through the harrowing account of Daniel Lacasse's illness, hospitalization, and subsequent death. The novel's most poignant moment is the suggestion that Daniel's care may have been better if his nurse and doctors in the hospital could speak French to him and Rose-Anna. The novel also suggests Saint-Henri's tenement streets could be the location for the foment of class formation, with the class-bifurcations of the city placing Anglo-elites in the position of dominant oppressor. When Jean surveys the landscape, he notes that the "town of Westmount climbs in tiers toward the mountain's ridge in its stiff English luxury... Here poverty and superfluity will stare tirelessly at each other, as long as Westmount lasts, as long as St. Henri lies at its feet" (23). But no class formation appears in these streets, and the French working-class of this novel do not truly coalesce in a way that could possibly characterize it as a "caring community."⁷⁵

The epigraph to this chapter features Rose-Anna's invocation of solidarity with "women of the common people." This intimates that she is advocating for an internationalist, class-based

⁷⁵ While the topic of French Nationalism does come up, it is framed by the younger Emmanuel as backward conservatism, painted with an Ultramontanist (conservative Catholicism associated with the premier of Quebec, Maurice Duplessis) brush—a position held in some regard by Azarius (125). Importantly, the discussion between Emmanuel and Azarius about French Nationalism at The Two Records does not directly refer to oppression experienced by French Canadians, but concerns where allegiance should lie in the face of the war in Europe and divided loyalties.

comradeship imbedded in the shared experience of social reproduction, claiming that these activities are the basis of her bond with these women. Is this a nascent, class-based feminist solidarity? Like most North American metropolises in the first part of the twentieth century, there were incipient feminist movements in Montreal of which Roy most likely would have been aware. As with all organizations of this type in Montreal, there were linguistic, religious and ethnic divisions, with Catholic francophone feminist groups like Fédération nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste as well as suffrage movements like the Anglo Protestant Local Council of Women (Clio Collective 250-252).

In the 1930s and in response to Depression-era poverty, the group Solidarité féminine emerged from a group of militant communist women, who in 1937 organized several large demonstrations in Montreal. Its focus was on “the situation of women who are usually neglected (unmarried mothers, mothers in need) and to convince them that they should get involved directly in struggles” (The Clio Collective 261). While this group only existed until 1939, it represents a well-known instance of a socialist feminist movement in Montreal, organized around class-based concerns including the activation of poor mothers. Whether or not Roy was influenced by groups like this, or other class-based forms of feminism that existed in her milieu prior to this novel, is uncertain. Critics like Whitfield and Shek note that Roy did not voice explicit political perspectives or activism in this period. However, in *The Tin Flute*, Roy clearly advocates for the betterment of women’s lives above all else. Therefore, as Whitfield states, we can understand Roy’s point of view as “essentially feminist in the broad sense of the word” (20).

Roy’s feminism is evident in how she envisions the home to be a terrain of *exploitative* labour, in which the “mother” can be understood as a type of worker and the mothers of Saint-Henri a class of “working women of the world” (161). Roy writes that Rose-Anna, “in a flash of

illumination...felt her kinship with all the women of distant countries.” In this vision of solidarity, Rose-Anna imagines a global collective of working-class women. What unites them is not only their role as wives grieving a separation from their husbands, but also their status as social reproductive workers. “It seemed to her that she was plodding along this sunny afternoon” Rose-Anna thinks, “not alone, but in the ranks of thousands of other women, and that their sighs echoed in her ears, the weary sighs of the needy” (161). The image Rose-Anna creates in her mind—of weary, overburdened women walking together in “ranks”—mirrors the “ranks” of men filing off to war. What these women share is not only their grief, but also their shared class position. They are a class of women engaged in social reproductive work, and it is this labour that makes them sigh, grieve, and, as Rose-Anna imagines, potentially join ranks.

This vision—of women marching together and joining their voices—is returned to by Roy in her 1947 reception speech to the Royal Society of Canada. This speech, published in 1948 in the *Le bulletin de agriculteurs* and entitled ““Retour à Saint-Henri,” is a short story that revisits the characters of the book, imagining what their lives would be like in 1947. In Roy’s speech, both workers and the “financiers and captains of industry” predict a return to pre-war conditions of unemployment. The speech is a fictional polemic against this, but also makes explicit the social critique imbedded in *The Tin Flute*. Roy laments the general assumption that “prosperity and full employment” can only occur as a by-product of war, and not a result of taking the “necessary measures” with “courage needed to confront the problem” (158). The more literary section of the speech has the narrator (here, clearly Roy) meet the main characters of the book in the streets of Saint-Henri and describe their still miserable conditions—the “wasted energy” and “wasted hope” of the neighbourhood in which “the war actually seemed to be a

cruel chance of salvation” (159-159). We find Rose-Anna still house-hunting, never having had a permanent home for more than two years at a time.

In this speech, Roy returns Rose-Anna to the mass of women, still fragmented, but still imagining a unity: “Walk, then keep walking! Rose-Anna still belongs to those thousands of women in our city who are looking for a home. If they all came together and closed ranks, we might understand, or we might begin to fear their determination” (161).⁷⁶ This call back to the “ranks of common women” is revealing, because this time, not only is their class solidarity imagined, but an image of actual class formation is articulated, a *closing* of ranks, which would not only “strike fear”—revealing power—but also allow society to “understand” (161). This passage reveals Roy’s own interpretation of Rose-Anna’s suffering, suggesting that for Roy, Rose-Anna is a synecdoche for a universal class of women doing social reproductive work, whose time, energy and capacity is exploited. And, with some sort of organization—a “coming together”—there might be an opportunity to surmount this. Although Roy does not explicitly depict the formation of a working class that acts as a solid, oppositional force, she strongly hints at the positive results of such a coalescing in this speech.

Roy uses this speech to directly juxtapose a solidarity between housewives with that of striking workers, placing each struggle on the same footing. She does so by following her description of the women “closing ranks” with a direct reference to the striking workers in Saint-Henri in 1947, who “wanted to bring their salaries in line with the cost of living” (161). Roy also

⁷⁶ “Et marche! Marche! Rose-Anna est dans la grande cohue des femmes de notre ville qui cherchent un logement, des milliers de femmes. Si elle venaient ensemble, en rangs pressés, nous comprendrions peut-être, peut-être aurions-nous peur de leur détermination” (*Fragiles lumières* 173).

has Rose-Anna exclaim a much more direct class analysis than exists in the novel, bemoaning the fact that “it’s always the workers who get the blame when prices rise” and exhorting listeners to “put some blame on those invisible people...behind the high walls of the spinning mills and the factories of Saint-Henri, far beyond these ramparts of stone and steam and the rumble of machinery” (162). In a prison camp before his death, Roy has Emmanuel voice the following polemic:

And he conceived a new social order based on the dignity of work and a just division of wealth...For our own country, he hoped for a long-term program devoted to the works of peace...Emmanuel imagined there were no more reasons for strikes or for the squandering of foodstuffs, because an intelligent government would ensure for workers conditions and salaries that were equitable. Moreover, industry was no longer to be uniquely concerned with selling products with no regard for the people’s real needs; and, finally, the exploitation of our resources would be undertaken in the interest of the greatest number. (170)

In Emmanuel’s polemic Roy is quite transparently enunciating her own views as to the direction of government in the moment the speech was given. Roy’s 1947 speech provides a potential gloss for the novel and its depiction of social reproduction labour. It indicates three crucial capacities that are embryonic in the text: that social reproductive workers might be conceived of as a class of workers; that the Canadian government has a vital role in securing, determining and providing the means to make society more equitable; and that this amounts to sustaining what Canada is, not dramatically altering it into something different. The first and second of these are contradictory: while the novel extolls the virtues of class consciousness in women, it suggests that only the government can truly redeem their hopes. Of course, Roy’s speech should not be

interpreted as the final word on this novel, but it chimes with key aspects of my analysis of this novel.

As I have demonstrated, in *The Tin Flute* Roy augments the social realistic form, collapsing the separate spheres of work and home, and positions social reproductive workers among the human resources required for the Canadian state to function. In this, the novel imagines the home as a vital infrastructural element that sustains Canada's extractivist state. While the home may appear at times to be the terrain of class consciousness and formation, the novel does not rise to that occasion. Rather, it centralizes the general atomization and isolation caused by the crisis of the Great Depression and the commencement of WWII, showing how this crisis tears the fabric of tenderness, communication and intimacy. Whether class formation among the women in this novel can be imagined, or whether the working-class men might "join ranks," is immaterial in the final analysis because the precarity and suffering of the home continues unabated, a suffering that must be acquiesced to. It is only state intervention, requiring the sacrifice of Saint-Henri's men to a war they remain unsure about, that might ease some of the suffering conveyed in the novel. Despite all of this, the novel remains a powerful document because of its demystification of domestic work—denaturalizing it as well. But, as I have shown, this denaturalization does not neatly equate with an uplift in women's lives. In the conclusion to this dissertation, I will touch on how the promise of the state alluded to in Roy's novel, was fulfilled in the postwar period. During this time, governments actively intervened with welfare state provisions to create a national "caring community," sustaining the human resources required for the Canadian state to flourish.

Novels like *The Tin Flute* exemplify how the Canadian extractivist state was reified in twentieth century literature. Like *Waste Heritage*, Roy's novel ends with a train, with Emmanuel

pressed against its window to observe a tree whose “twisted branches” rise “bravely up through a network of electric wires and clothes lines towards the sky” (174). In this final image, Canada’s natural resources—the “twisted branches”—intertwine with infrastructures of the state and the home, represented by the “electric wires” and “clothes lines.” Merging together as a synchronized and triumphant symbol of national persistence, this image signals a faith in the persistence of the extractivist state of Canada, despite the novel’s notable critiques of it. Markedly absent in this image is anything symbolic of class solidarity. *The Tin Flute*, as I have shown, presents a world in which neither the domain of work nor of the home can generate the conditions for a working-class politics to emerge, and for the state to be transformed. Instead, politics resides only and above all in the state. Incapable of class combination, atomized, both settled and mobile—a pessimistic picture of an ideal Canadian human resource emerges in this novel, and one which, unfortunately, is sustained well into the post-war era.

Conclusion:

Jobs and Families, or, Canadian Human Resources

2.

house of structure wood all leaky
roof this morning in the rain
sits in the chimney flashing seeps
through to the roof joists and drips
still upright tree wood (branches?)
from the floor sill to cross-beams
what cells left without the bark, root-
less timbers stand in the doorways
and window frames its ok the house
is “appropriate”, our real needs
do not profit us, the hillside trees
also leak the rain down to their roots.

3.

I admit the industry of it, hot
summer work, sweat and mosquitoes
in the headband of the hardhat, chain-oil,
whine of the diesel among the spruce
ehrrrrrehrrr of the saw
to the heart-wood, I admit
the hi-baller works for a new pickup
each year, weekends in town
I admit his skill, I admit that he makes
a life of his own from it, with a grip
on the throttle lever, admit it

—Fred Wah, *Tree*

I. From Postwar Compromise to “Jobs and Families”: Labour’s Rise and Fall in Canada’s Long Twentieth Century

In May 2025, shortly after winning a contentious federal election, Prime Minister Mark Carney selected his first cabinet and appointed Patty Hajdu as Minister of Jobs and Families (Prime Minister of Canada). This position was brand new. Previously, Steve MacKinnon was in the position of Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour. This role

disappeared immediately upon Carney's assumption of office in March of 2025. The change effectively put an end to the federal Ministry of Labour. This ministry had been established in 1900 as the Department of Labour and would endure in various forms until 2025 ("Labour Canada"). For the first time in one hundred and twenty-five years, Canada would now be without a minister of labour.

But that was not all—another notable cut in the Carney cabinet was a dedicated minister of Women—known as the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth, established in 1971 (Seebruch). The new Ministry of Jobs and Families amalgamated several ministries that had been under the purview of Employment and Social Development Canada, including the Ministries of Families, Children and Social Development, Seniors, Citizens' Services, and Diversity, Inclusion and Persons with Disabilities.

The absence of both a Minister of Labour and a Minister of Women was taken as a blow to both labour and feminist movements. Feminist activist Judy Rebick called it a "major setback for women and gender equity in Canada" (Seebruch). From labour, the North America Canadian director of the Laborers' International Union called it a "a slap in the face" (Morrison). In a news release, a spokesperson from the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) lambasted Carney for eradicating the century-long cabinet position for labour, calling it "not just disappointing, but frankly insulting" (Morrison). Labour studies scholar Stephanie Ross pointed out that having a Minister of Labour meant, in part, reckoning with labour movements and that "the absence of a labour minister suggests this government places less emphasis on relationships with the labour movement than the previous government" (Morrison). Ross alludes to a discursive distinction between "jobs" and "labour"—labour typically connotes labour movements. On the other hand, "jobs" is a technocratic word, associated with employment

statistics, and, of course, the discipline of human resource management. It is also simply the plural of one individual job, whereas “labour,” an abstract noun, points to working class unity and class formation. The replacement of “labour” with “jobs” is a spurning of labour movements and a step back from engaging with organized workers.

The change from having a labour minister to a minister of jobs and families also represents an ideological end of an era—the era of the postwar compromise between labour and capital that began during World War II. The postwar compromise was an understanding that capital and the Canadian state would recognize the legal validity of unions, in exchange for labour capitulating to limits on their ability to strike outside the strictures of a collective agreement, as well as other concessions. In addition, this compact is thought to also include the implementation of “Keynesian ‘welfare state’ measures such as unemployment insurance, pensions, welfare, and public health-care programs” (Wells 148). These new infrastructures impacted both “jobs” and “families,” providing a social safety net in the form of family allowances, health care, and social assistance, beginning in the 1950s and coming into full force in the 1960s (McBride 152).

Postwar Keynesian reforms occurred internationally. One particularity of the Canadian manifestation of them was that the welfare state was used to support and maintain extractivism by providing government supports that would allow for “labour flexibility” (Mazer 29). These supports included national unemployment insurance that did not require local residency, as well as nationally coordinated policies aimed at poverty reduction which in practical terms amounted to a reorganization of provincial economies around industrialized resource production and processing and expanded manufacturing, all of which occurred in the decades following World War II (Mazer 26).

The postwar compromise increased union protections for some workers but excluded many others through the standardization of the employment relationship (SER), as I discuss in Chapter Two and its epigraph. The prejudices built into the postwar compact made it so that ongoing employment with a single employer, often unionized, was usually only found among white male workers (Fudge and Vosko 273).⁷⁷ The postwar compact and its formalization of labour relations meant that aspects of class struggle, including tactics like general strikes and sit-down strikes, became rarer or were officially outlawed. As Palmer explains, the reforms of the postwar era inaugurated a time in which “managerial adoption of ‘human relation’ orientations to the perennial ‘labour problem’” would become the status quo and amounted to “the crushing of the communist presence within the trade union movement” (Palmer 252). In this sense, we can trace the technocratic stance implicit in the framing of “jobs and families” not just to twenty-first century neoliberalism, but as part and parcel of the managerialism that was latent in the original compromise.

The decay of the postwar welfare state started in Canada in the period between 1974 and 1995. Neoliberal austerity measures included privatization, deregulation, and a shift in monetary policy that emphasized control of inflation at the expense of employment (McBride 155). Continuing into the present, austerity in Canada has meant a policy in which “deficit reduction”

⁷⁷ Labour sociologist Nandita Sharma’s discussion of twentieth century labour market categories suggests that they hold broader connotations as markers of not only rights, but humanity: As she notes, “State categories ranging from ‘Indian’ to ‘Canadian citizen’ to ‘immigrant’ to ‘temporary foreign worker’ to ‘illegal’ are embodiments of the ‘accumulation of differences’ that Silvia Federici has shown always accompanies the accumulation of capital. These state-constructed categories operate as both labour market categories and ontological categories of being ‘human’ in today’s world. In short, they are representational practices carrying great material force.” (62).

is prioritized over maintaining the social safety net. This policy ran through the Mulroney and Chrétien governments and continued into the twenty-first century in federal and provincial domains (McBride 155-160). From the 1970s until the present there has also been a concomitant weakening of organized labour: a decline in union density, diminishing of labour regulations and flagging public support for unions (Ross and Thomas 333).

The squelching of the Ministry of Labour signals the death knell of the so-called compromise between labour and capital that took place in the postwar era. It is symptomatic of the fundamental problem I point out in the Introduction to this dissertation and explore in these chapters: the mismatch between Canada's human resource discourse—the kind necessary for its extractivist practices—and notions of the worker, labour, and class formation. The novels I study convey this tension: while the state began to acknowledge the needs of labour in the postwar period, a cultural sense conveyed by these writers, that workers would always be subordinate to the extractivist state, persisted in the background.

II. Shaping Canada's Workers: Resource Rhetoric in Three Canadian Novels, 1919-1945

In the Introduction to this dissertation, I explain how the parallel notions of human and natural resources are ideologically necessary components of Canada's extractivist state. As the Canadian colonial enterprise solidified its settler-colonial expansion in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, there was an attendant formalization of colonial state infrastructures, including agencies, departments, educational and legal instruments that promoted the ambitions of Canadian extractivist state. Within those infrastructures a resource discourse—of natural resources and human resource management—was born. This resource discourse amounts to an ideological transformation of land and raw materials into natural resources, and a transformation

of human workers into human resources. The critical theory of extractivism clarifies how resource discourse helps to justify the violence and destruction caused by the removal of vast quantities of raw materials from the earth. Canadian human resource discourse facilitated the suppression of class formation and dissent as it arose in the early twentieth century. It did so by orienting human effort, cooperation and the desire for personal actualization toward the state's advantage, and not the advantage of the working class.

The three writers I study in this dissertation came of age during the consolidation and formalization of Canada's resource regime. They lived in cities close to Canada's resource frontiers, writing their novels after spending their formative years in Winnipeg, St. Boniface and Vancouver. They were themselves the children of recent migrants to those areas, drawn by the promises of Canada's burgeoning extractivist settlements. All three had travelled extensively through remote parts of the country and were witness to both resource hinterlands and Canada's administrative and cultural cores. They were also witness to the country's most well-known period of class-based upheavals, which stretched from 1919 until 1940. Their novels, as I have shown, are testament to both facts. They articulate the deep-seated clash between the imperative that workers act as assets to Canada's resource state, and the imperative that they might improve their lives through class formation and solidarity.

These novels use what I call "resource rhetoric" to convey the necessity for their characters to reconfigure their lives, abilities, bodies, geographies and personal objectives in alignment with Canada's resource-led society. Resource rhetoric is a set of discursive tools artists employ to portray working people as assets within a resource economy. Some of these tropes include the inclination to frame the resource economy as something immutable; to portray

working classes as disparate, violent and internally at odds; and to show elite class cohesion as an incontrovertible force.

My argument develops by first establishing, in Chapter One, that the interwar period was marked by an unease about whether workers could truly become the “human resources” Canada’s economy needed. In Durkin’s *The Magpie*, this uncertainty is manifested in Craig Forrester, and communicated via his critiques of financial speculation, the extractivist practices common at the time, and through his struggle to find meaningful work in this context. Craig’s sense that to be a worker in Canada is to be more like a dematerialized asset than a human being leads to his mental unravelling. The instability attributed to worker subjectivity makes class formation appear unattainable and outside the bounds of representation in the novel, except in the trope of the violent mob. At the same time, a sublime kind of agency is attributed to the extractivist state—the capitalist “machine”—whose infrastructural logic is what Craig perceives as driving society. Overall, Craig’s anxiety, and the chaos he observes around him, are reactions to a broader societal pattern I’ve pinpointed in Canadian society in the 1919-1945 period—the fraught effort to shape workers into the human resources required for Canada’s extractivist state.

In Chapter Two, I demonstrate that in twentieth century Canada, a worker’s success in embodying the ideal Canadian “human resource” identity was measured against a racial hierarchy emerging from eugenic ideology. Eugenics in Canada came about as a byproduct of extractivism and settler-colonialism in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century. In my analysis of Baird’s *Waste Heritage*, I consider how the “rank and sort” logic of eugenics is used to calibrate moral rectitude in the novel’s portrayal of labour strife among the Depression-era unemployed. I use the term “universal worker” to name the worker archetype who embodies qualities of the ideal Canadian human resource subject. Never directly portrayed and with

everchanging qualities, this ideal captures how eugenic hierarchies are “made in the targeting” (Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism” 388).

Right from the beginning of the novel, Baird intimates that the unemployed men are fundamentally deficient, either unable or unwilling to fulfill their purpose as the human resources needed for Canada’s extractivist economy. To be an “ideal worker,” in this imaginary, is to shed class solidarity and prioritize one’s relationship to the state, conforming to the state’s economic needs. Exemplary of resource discourse and a literary articulation of the clash between this discourse and working-class imaginaries, this novel is part and parcel of what made extractivism, and the human resources required for it, appear to be immutable parts of Canadian identity.

In Chapter Three, I show how human resource discourse expanded to include social reproductive labour—the work of “family” invoked in Canada’s new departmental structure in the twenty-first century. While the wage labourers of Saint-Henri who “toil at making mattresses, spinning thread, tending bobbins and driving looms” are categorically different than women doing similar, uncompensated tasks in the home, they are equated in this novel (Roy, *The Tin Flute* 20). Both wage workers and social reproductive workers are resources used to maintain the state and are constituted and formed by it. Roy’s transformation of the social realistic form to unify the separate spheres of work and home has contradictory effects. It makes the home a terrain for potential class struggle and revolt against the exploitation of women’s work, while at the same time positioning this work as vital for the Canadian state to function. Ultimately, resource rhetoric wins out, and a joining of ranks among working-class women, or men, cannot occur because of the widespread alienation that came about as the result of Depression-era precarity and poverty conditions. In *The Tin Flute*, we see how a denaturalizing of women’s work in the home, and an evocation of it as infrastructure, is not in itself indicative of an advance

in the conditions for women. In the imaginary of this novel, only state intervention seems powerful enough to alleviate some degree of the suffering experienced by the novel's characters. Novels like *The Tin Flute* exemplify how the Canadian extractivist state was reified in twentieth-century literature, communicating a faith in the extractivist state of Canada, despite the novel's notable critiques of it.

In my analysis in this dissertation, I offer a name—resource rhetoric—for the cultural logic that made extractivism and the resources required for it to appear to be an interminable and relentless part of Canadian identity. In the twentieth century, the Canadian government and business leaders used many tactics to manage the country's labour flows and silence dissent about the various injustices that occurred in the country at the time. While these novels are for the most part aligned with the resource discourse of the era, they also demonstrate one fundamental failure of extractivist ideologies and resource logic: a person can never truly be a “dematerialized asset,” or a “universal Canadian worker subject.” These novels show that to be a human resource is an unattainable goal.

III. Resources, Labour and Contemporary Canadian Literature

Since 1945, several literary works have captured how Canada's extraction economy intertwines with exploitative labour practices.⁷⁸ In the later twentieth and early twenty-first

⁷⁸ In addition to the works mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, Sam Weselowski's dissertation (2024) *Metropolitan Frontiers: Vancouver Poetry and the Urban Form of Extraction, 1965 – 2018* provides new insights on works that portray extraction in urban environments. Weselowski discusses Vancouver as a “Metropolitan Frontier” in which 20th and 21st century poets articulate “urban spaces where high finance and raw material extraction coincide,” often through representations of the intersecting labour of finance, resource extraction,

century, knowledge of the environmental impact of resource industries in Canada, as well as the history of Indigenous dispossession, became more direct subject matter for these works. Literary studies like Melanie Dennis Unrau's *The Rough Poets: Reading Oil-Worker Poetry* (2024) show how poets animated, materialized and embodied resource work (particularly oil work) in later twentieth and early twentieth century poetry (5), producing the opposite of the dematerializing affect I identify as a component of the resource rhetoric that imbues the novels I study. The poets Unrau engages with convey the enmeshment of dangerous and precarious resource work with broader resource logics embedded in Canada's socio-political and cultural ideologies. In her telling, resource worker poetry implicates readers in the "physically, ecologically, and ethically dirty work" of the oil industry, exhorting them to notice the necessity of this work for "the smooth operation of Canadian culture, from the level of the household to the industry and the nation-state" (Unrau 5).

Kate Beaton's comic *Ducks*, a graphic memoir of the author's job in the Alberta Oil Sands, offers a critique and cultural history of the demands placed on resource workers in twentieth and twenty-first century Canada.⁷⁹ In panels depicting the author's character hanging

circulation and administration (12). In his article "I Admit the Industry of It": Fred Wah's Counterlogistical Poem" (2024), Weselowski suggests that Wah's poem *Tree*, which I cite in this conclusion's epigraph, and its "foregrounding of labor" and "the particularities of timber work and workers" highlights the "whole way of life shaped by the logistics of the frontier and its braiding together of resource industry and commodity culture" (99).

⁷⁹ *Ducks* won the 2023 English edition of *Canada Reads*, a popular CBC radio competition where the judges vote on the best Canadian literature published that year.

off the railing of a ship, staring off at a coastline, and another panel showing an empty kitchen, she writes,

Cape Breton used to export fish, coal and steel; but in 2005, its main export is people. It's not a unique story in Atlantic Canada. Nor is it a new one. Every Cape Breton family has its share of empty chairs around the table, for a hundred years. Fathers, siblings, cousins; gone to the "Boston States," gone to Ontario, gone to Alberta—gone to be cheap labour where booming industries demanded it" (10).

Beaton links the fundamental precarity and abuses she faces as a worker in the oil industry to extractivist practices that devastate land and communities. In this, *Ducks* is akin to other literary works that centralize resource worker experience in Canada and connect them to the country's history as an extractivist state. For example, Fred Wah's *Tree* (1972) evokes the lumber worker experience, while at the same time asking readers to consider the transformation of raw materials like wood into homes and structures, and how this impacts our own sense of place and connection to the environment. In this, he exhorts us to consider the connection between the discursive construction of "natural resources" and the mythos surrounding the resource worker. Or, in more recent works like Rita Wong's *undercurrent* (2015), we see direct links made between extractivist logics and the precarity of resource labour, in lines like "chasing temporary jobs that evaporate / like so much acid rain drifting into Saskatchewan" (17).

Beaton's comic emerges from a moment (the 2010s and 2020s), when there was a general increase in literary works grappling with worker identity in Canada and a "labour turn" in cultural criticism.⁸⁰ Suzette Mayr's *The Sleeping Car Porter* (2022), winner of the 2022 Giller

⁸⁰ An example of this is David Chariandy's *Brother* (2017), which weaves the story of Ruth—the mother of the novel's main characters who works as a cleaner—with allusions to Austin Clarke's

Prize, is an example of this turn, set among Black train porters in 1920s Canada. The book conveys the paradoxical reality of their work, which offered a measure of freedom but was also rife with racist abuse from customers and bosses. While one of the novel's characters, Eugene, is a union organizer, who "likes the words *union*, *brotherhood* and *time and a half*" (73, emphasis in source), the novel's main protagonist, Baxter, is skeptical of how far this movement can truly better his existence. Class formation in this novel is at odds with the mobile and precarious nature of work on the train, the physically draining nature of the work and its debilitating effect on Baxter, and his need to hide his queer identity. While *The Sleeping Car Porter* does not focus on Canada's resource economy or extractivism as directly as *Ducks*, it is grounded in imagery of the country's foundational infrastructure—the railway—which is the backbone of Canada's resource industries. And like others of its ilk, this novel continues to confront the figure of the worker in Canada—a testament to the enduring import of working-class life as a locus of social power.

IV. Conclusion

In 2020s Canada, just as labour is being eclipsed by "jobs and families" in Liberal Government parlance, the figure of the worker is experiencing a renaissance in Conservative Party of Canada rhetoric and branding. In this rhetoric, we see images of worker identity—people working in manufacturing or extractive jobs—and even the phrase "working class" uttered with much more frequency by federal Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre (Lukacs). And we see increased support for the Conservative party from unions, with leaders like Ontario

character Bernice from his novel *The Meeting Point*. Chariandy suggests that Ruth, like Bernice, a migrant domestic worker, never truly "arrives" or is accepted as a Canadian worker.

Conservative Doug Ford reaching out for their support. Right-wing populist rhetoric that enfold working-class imagery into its repertoire is not new for the Conservatives. But its increased frequency tells us that the rhetoric of labour, of the worker, and even of the phrase “working class,” is perceived by Canadian conservatives as persuasive political language. What this rhetoric belies is any pretention of policy that would force rich business owners to “pay a greater share of taxes, rein in their predatory behaviour, or help create publicly owned alternatives in housing, telecoms, or food” (Lukacs). Like all classical populist right-wing rhetoric, this is about aligning with working-class people to secure their support, but it stops short of encouraging them to take the reins of power themselves and create a more equitable system.

The new right-wing discourse of the worker is entangled with the ongoing presence of extractive industries, particularly oil.⁸¹ It calls for a fresh counternarrative of the worker, class formation and collective action. And artists and writers appear to be game, or at least they continue to grapple with the history and present of class and what it means to provide labour power within Canada’s extractivist economy. And even if the rhetoric of labour is fully co-opted by the extractive industry or their governmental cronies, working classes, I believe, will still be “drawn to change.” The latter phrase is a reference to *Drawn to Change: Graphic Histories of Working-Class Struggle* (2016) by the Graphic History Collective, a series of comics depicting labour struggles in the last two hundred years in Canada. As this comic intimates, Canadian workers are still “drawn” to agitate for change, and artists are still impelled to *draw* change—to

⁸¹ See Jacob McLean, “Low Class Oil Trash and the Politico-Aesthetics of the Fossilized Proletariat” (2022) for a discussion of the enmeshment of right-wing populist discourse that utilizes working-class vocabularies to endorse oil industry ambitions. Also, see Gunster et al (2021) for an explication of extractive populism in Canada.

mediate the histories and presents of people who collectively stand against the aims and objectives of extractivist capitalism.

The novels I study in this dissertation bear within them a warning for anyone seeking to reinvigorate class struggle and formation in this country. Namely, they articulate the logical clash between resource rhetoric and the discourse of working-class emancipation. While these novels often appear to condemn their subjects to their fate, they also caution us to the problems that arise when we think class power can coincide with extractivist state infrastructures in Canada. In the present moment, right-wing populist movements are using the discourse of the worker to justify the persistence of the Canada's extractivist economy, risking the future of the planet. At the same time, the word "labour" is being purged from official government discourse. Rather than shunning the rhetoric of labour or integrating it with nationalistic discourse in a politically expedient way, it's time to reanimate it as something more elemental, animated by the potency of working-class power, and allergic to extractivism.

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