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It is challenging to read *Land/Relations* outside of the context of the TransCanada project. Smaro Kamboureli and Larissa Lai’s edited collection, after all, emerges from the final conference of the almost two-decade-long TransCanada initiative, the Mikinaakominis/TransCanadas conference held in Toronto in 2017. While many of the chapters in the collection stand on their own, the first substantive chapter, called a “microhistory” and written as a dialogue between Kamboureli and Lai, situates the collection within this longer history of critical engagement with the field of Canadian literature and the various manifestations of Kamboureli’s collaborative endeavor. Here, Kamboureli summarizes the TransCanada project, describing it as “not just a one-time conference, but a live, serial event that would pick up and maintain its momentum through other events—small and big, local, national, and international” (p. 40).

For those of us engaged in or adjacent to the field of Canadian literature (a disciplinary designation, which Kamboureli, Lai, and their contemporaries have gone to great lengths to highlight as that which occludes more than it accounts for), the collection is bittersweet. If you trained in Canadian literature any time since the early aughts, you inevitably encountered the TransCanada project in its various forms. The critical and creative works of Kamboureli and Lai, Roy Miki, Rita Wong, Terry Goldie, Erin Moure, Len Findlay, and Rinaldo Walcott, among so many others, have comprised keynote lectures, edited collections, novels, and poetic and critical interventions into a field of study necessarily disjointed, self-obsessed, and indeterminate in its engagement with identity, belonging, nationalism, indigeneity, citizenship, and so much more of the stuff that makes the field of Canadian literature hardly a field at all. The TransCanada project has always understood this: that what happens when you try to read literature produced on these lands, within these borders, is not, thankfully, the solidification of a cohesive national identity or project, but rather, a perpetual unmasking and exploration—a “trans” hermeneutics—that is, an approach to the study of a literature in transition, of transference, in transit, transporting, always in motion. This commitment to the moving target that is Canadian literature and its discursive engagement is what makes the broader TransCanada project, and works that emerge from it such as this collection, both so necessary and so frustrating.

You will not find a perfectly coherent collection of writing in *Land/Relations*. The title makes clear the broad categories that hold the collection together: land and relations. These two categories intersect in useful ways—land as relation, rela-
tions on land, relations to one another, however challenging, and likewise complex and complicated relations between the scholars and writers who make up or write within and against the amorphous field of Canadian literature. In Kamboureli’s words, “Land/Relations embraces the affects, politics, and—yes—poetics of difficulty, for it invites us to immerse ourselves in the web of difficult relations within which we are already embedded” (p. 57).

In many respects, Land/Relations is best suited for readers who already know the history of this engagement and its rehearsals. The writing here, specifically from those authors who have been part of or in proximity to the TransCanada project for several decades, is deeply self-reflexive. In this way, and for these authors, it is a kind of stock-taking. While the microhistory provided by Lai and Kamboureli is an obvious example, in his aptly titled contribution, “Back to the Future: Black Canada’s Past and Present or the Changing Same,” Rinaldo Walcott revisits his call for “a grammar for Black in Canada,” first articulated twenty years ago in his pivotal work, Black Like Who: Writing Black Canada. While his chapter offers an important reading of Black recovery in David Sutherland and Jennifer Holness’s 2000 documentary, Speakers for the Dead, his piece is also a lament for the continued absence of a grammar for Black, “for narrating our relationship to the Canadian state in a manner that provides a collective response to the state’s continued subjugation of Black possibilities” (p. 104).

In other ways, the collection offers works that are forward-oriented, presenting new and reconfigured concerns for writers and scholars in the orbit of the fields taken in under the banner of Canadian literature. The inclusion of the reflective and insightful writing from Oneida Elder Eileen Antone, who opened the conference, marks an effort to bring in the integral voices of those we so often suggest we are honoring in our engagement with the concepts, ideas, and materiality of terms such as land and relations. While Antone is not exactly adjacent to academia as a professor emerita herself, giving integral space in collections to the Elders who grace us with opening remarks, prayers, and teachings marks a decisive shift to what I think should become standard protocol. As is often the aim of Elders’ in opening an event or conference, Antone situates the collection in a good way, tracing her own engagements with Indigenous literatures and the ongoing tensions that persist between Indigenous writing, the Canadian state, and the disciplinary limits of Canadian literature. Antone helps contextualize the collection within the conference’s tensions, limits, and potentials, emphasizing the relational that needs to be acknowledged in moving from the conference hall to the written word.

Likewise, in her chapter, “Re-storying and Restoring the Buffalo to the Indigenous Plains,” Tasha Hubbard challenges the bounds of how we conceptualize relations—animal, environment and historical—and emphasizes restoration, both in the literal return of buffalo to the prairies, and of the stories that need to be told and retold to understand the import of the multifaceted relations she is concerned with.

Jennifer Henderson’s chapter, “Neoliberal Gothic, Settler Social Imaginaries, and the Case for Decolonization on Two Fronts,” offers a highly nuanced analysis of the image of the residential school and its relation to ongoing Canadian neoliberal governmentality and settler social relations, brilliantly marrying genre criticism, affect theory, and the integral decolonial writing of Leanne Simpson and Glen Coulthard, among others. Henderson’s piece is illustrative of how the discursive engagement of literary studies and its concerns for something like genre can serve as a sharp tool for reading imagery, for critique of state processes, and for undertaking more grounded decolonial engagement.

Sonnet L’Abbé’s two poetic contributions, “CLI” and “CLII,” perhaps mostly aptly fuse this
past and future-oriented engagement characterized by the different writing in the collection, while also drawing out the ongoing tensions that continue to plague the field of Canadian literature, and academia more broadly, particularly from the vantage point of a Black woman, scholar, and poet. While “CLI” dissects the decades-old problems within Canadian literature, it also cautions against turning away from this history—that in burning it all down, so to speak, we also risk losing the plight and work of those voices that have been toiling in and eking out space in the field despite the active violence against them. “CLII” reflects on more recent ripples—of diversity and inclusion, of Indigenization and reckoning with colonial pasts, at least symbolically—within a field and institution that has never quite reckoned with its own whiteness, and indeed its own anti-Blackness. Collectively, L’Abbé’s two contributions problematize more than they resolve, which serves as an apt portrait of the collection as a whole.

I have only touched on a small handful of excellent writing contained in this somewhat disparate collection. What looms in the background of Land/Relations is several decades of critical engagement with a field fraught with tensions and limitations. The collection does not aim to resolve these, but instead reveals how many of them are alive and well. While Land/Relations does not take up either of the concepts captured in its title in a cohesive way, it does draw out a critical counter-memory to ensure past injustices and the scholarly and artistic work undertaken to critically engage them are not forgotten, while looking to new modes of engagement and critique, along with new tensions and implications that ensure the field of Canadian literature remains forever, necessarily, transitory.

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