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Gothic Realism and Other Genre F(r)ictions in Contemporary Black Canadian Writing

Maureen Moynagh

Abstract: Focusing on works by Wayde Compton and Esi Edugyan, this essay analyzes the mix of realism, the gothic, and other speculative forms in contemporary Black Canadian writing to consider the kind of literary-historical and political work this mix performs. I address current debates about the "genre turn" (Rosen) as well as the (re)turn of/to realism in contemporary literature, and I argue that a supplementary logic governs the introduction of the speculative or gothic within realism in Black Canadian works attentive to the occlusions of the historical archive. The friction between realism and the speculative more than "highlight[s] the gaps . . . in the national imaginary" (16), as Cynthia Sugars has argued of the gothic: it also allows writers to introduce a different epistemology, a different ontology, and a different model of the social. In writing both in the "realist prose" (Chakrabarty 35) of the current political arrangements *and* the languages those arrangements cannot or will not speak, Compton and Edugyan not only make perceptible sites of knowing and being that are outside of the present order but ground collective socio-political imagining anew.

Keywords: realism, gothic, Black Canadian, Esi Edugyan, Wayde Compton

Realism so impossible, we roll
With the fabulous.

Wayde Compton, *Performance Bond* 33

In a conversation with Esi Edugyan and Wayde Compton about fictionalizing Black Canadian histories, Karina Vernon points to "the limits of realist narrative" when it comes to the "uncanny" quality of "life itself when you're black and living in western Canada" (Compton et al.). In contexts like these, Compton concurs, "even the truth about black people often feels mythical." For her part, Edugyan notes that the "main spur" for her first novel, *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne*, was learning about the existence of the historical Black community of Amber Valley, Alberta—a history that "fascinated" her because when she grew up in Alberta in the 1970s and 80s, "there seemed to be very few black people." Her otherwise realist narrative is nonetheless marked, as she concedes, by "gothic" or "magical realist" elements. For these Black Canadian writers and intellectuals, in short, there is something about the tension between the real and the uncanny and their correlates in literary form that captures a "felt sense of the quality of life" (Williams 63)—in this case Black life—in Canada in the early twenty-first century. Postcolonial critical engagement with the gothic in Canada strives to account for the uneasiness with national identity and anxieties about racial purity that haunt white Canadian narratives (Edwards xiv) and to understand the complicated settler-colonial relationship to the "mother land" and Indigenous lands (Sugars 7–9) and the "spectral turn" in the work of "minority writers" (Turcotte and Sugars xvi). I want to propose, however, that these "minority" writers' recourse to the gothic within the real/ist is not only, as Sugars suggests it is, about "highlight[ing] gaps in the . . . national imaginary" (16), though the gothic certainly does that too. The intimate relationship between the real and the uncanny (or between realism and the gothic) registers more than the problem of inclusion in the social/the family/the nation. Realism, Vernon suggests, cannot fully know Black life in Canada; the "truth" of Black being exceeds or overwhelms the conventional boundaries of realism, which, as an "epistemological category framed and staged in aesthetic terms" (Jameson, "Afterword" 279), one might argue should be appropriately tested or challenged in different aesthetic terms. There is a supplementary logic, in the sense of both remedy and addition, to the gothic or other speculative elements that Compton and Edugyan turn to in their

fiction and poetry. The resulting genre f(r)iction[1] gestures toward a different way of knowing, a different ontology, and a different model of the social, and it invites a different scale of analysis.

Having signalled with my title that I am interested in the mix of realism and other genres in contemporary Black Canadian writing, I should address at the outset what some critics are calling the "genre turn"[2] in contemporary literary fiction, especially given that a considerable amount of critical ink has already been spilled on the subject. Indeed, even noting that there is something of a "boom in literary fiction that incorporates various kinds of genre fiction" has become so commonplace, Jeremy Rosen remarks, that it is "a cliché . . . to observe this trend has become a cliché" (1). My aim, however, is not to point to a trend; still less is it to imply that Black Canadian writers who blend genre and literary fiction are themselves just being trendy. Instead, I aim to address what kind of work that blend of genres does in this Black Canadian corpus. How, in the current historical moment, do Compton, Edugyan, and other Black Canadian writers—like David Chariandy and Suzette Mayr—use the friction between realism and the gothic both to interrogate the political history of modern individualism, especially as it plays out in settler colonies like Canada, and to figure the various resistances to that liberal-order project? And how, in so doing, do they offer an imaginative leap toward another order of being and knowing?

Ramón Saldívar has addressed a similar mix of realism and genre fiction on the part of "twenty-first-century US ethnic writers," arguing that "the oxymoronic blending of history and the speculative genres" ("Second Elevation" 5) in works by Junot Díaz, Colson Whitehead, and Salvador Plascencia, among others, exposes the gap between "the ideals of redemptive liberal democratic national histories" and the political and economic inequities "most readily experienced by persons from diasporic, transitory, and migratory communities in the borderlands between the global north and south" ("Historical Fantasy" 594). While I think a broadly similar argument can be made about the genre f(r)iction in the Black Canadian works that I examine here, the particular histories and experiences that Compton, Edugyan, and others engage are not just diasporic but distinctively Canadian.[3] It is surely

significant that the work I am concerned with here was published during a period that was marked, as Rinaldo Walcott and Idil Abdillahi observe, by "the full on assault of neoliberal policies" (15) that adversely affected a wide range of social and cultural policies in Canada. Thus, while it is useful to situate Compton's and Edugyan's work and the work of other racialized and Indigenous writers in Canada in relation to the US corpus Saldívar analyzes, I also argue that the mix of realism and the gothic or magical realism in their work addresses a problem of knowing in relation to "Black non / being in the world" (Sharpe 5) that is particular to Canada's settler-colonial history and its iteration of globalized neoliberal hegemony.

In this context, the gothic or fabulous elements in these works are usefully understood, as Mark Rifkin argues about speculation, as a way of bringing "disparate frames of reference . . . into accountable relation to each other . . . by providing a way of suspending the exclusivity of claims to what is real" (Intro.). Indeed, in the works I analyze here, the gothic is itself a means of producing "reality effects" (Barthes), registering as it does the disappearances of Black bodies, histories, and geographies in modernity.[4] At the same time, I am as interested in realism in these works as in the recourse to the gothic or other speculative forms because it is clear that despite their engagement with realism's limits, contemporary Black Canadian writers have not given up on realism. Realism, as an epistemological category, remains important, if not fully adequate, for the political work of these literary projects, not least because realism's own contradictions afford it an internal reflexiveness that mediates its historical determination.[5] Realism, that is to say, emerges in the context of philosophical debates about idealism and empiricism (Levine 15) and of socio-political tensions between "collective life" and the liberal individual (Stout 1). It is marked as much by formal concerns as by "epistemological claim[s]" to knowledge about the world outside the text (Jameson 5; Levine 15). In some respects, then, the "reality effects" that gothic or fabulous elements produce are ways of extending realism's impulse to knowledge or truth, even if the formal strategies associated with speculative genres register as departures from realism and as compensatory mechanisms for realism's perceived failures. In taking up these

concerns, I will focus on Compton's *Performance Bond* and Edugyan's *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne* not only because of their participation in the conversation about the "limits of realist narrative" with which I began but also because they work in poetry and prose, respectively, and each opts for a different weighting of the speculative and the realist.[6]

I. Realism and the Traces of History

Compton and Edugyan both engage with the historical archive in their writing, and it is in relation to the history of blackness in Canada—in British Columbia and Alberta in particular—that they question the epistemological work of realism. How does one come to know these histories? How does one come to know blackness as the ontological negation of being (Sharpe 14), as a "constitutively modern albeit unstable formation" (Iton 15)? According to Patrick Wolfe, race is "a trace of history," and "colonized populations continue to be racialized in specific ways that mark out and reproduce the unequal relationships into which Europeans have co-opted" them (*Traces* 2). That is to say, blackness is what the structural conditions of racialization under settler colonialism produce; "transatlantic slavery and . . . the Middle Passage were routes" for its "invention" (Walcott, *Long Emancipation* 15). By this logic, understanding the kinds of contemporary experiences that Vernon, Compton, and Edugyan discuss entails thinking about the history of these unequal relationships, including the ways that those relationships have structured historiography and historical archives themselves. How to contend with the archive as a record of the violence of transatlantic slavery, of settler colonialism, the sorts of violence "that produced numbers, ciphers, and fragments of discourse"; how to "redress" that violence (Hartman, "Venus" 3)? And how to contend with the persistence of racialized structures that continue to occlude Black Canadians as subjects and objects of knowledge? The archives in question, that is, are *living* archives that Black artists and thinkers continually revisit and reinvent. The role of the gothic in the context of these colonial relationships is to conjure up those dis/appearances that haunt the archive with what it ought to but does not know. The histories of blackness that Compton and Edugyan engage in their works are informed by trans-American ties

forged by groups of African Americans crossing the US border to settle in Canada, and sometimes crossing back, as well as different periods of racialized immigration from across the diaspora and from the African continent. Knowing Black being in Canada is thus further complicated by the mobility of bodies and archives. The projects of settlement and empire-building in Canada did not produce a single blackness, even as the "racial calculus" Saidiya Hartman has called "the afterlife of slavery" (*Lose* 6) continues to operate in Canada as well as in the US, despite the Canadian settler-state's best efforts to displace slavery, indeed blackness itself, onto its southern neighbour by disavowing Canada's role in that circum-Atlantic history.[7] In Canada, the project of liberal-order nation-building imposes its own stamp on the transnational racial calculus.[8]

As a literary form, realism is characterized by a distinctive tension between the external social world and the internal perception of it. These are realism's "commitments," according to George Levine, evident in realism's constant "reaching beyond words to things as they are" (16), and they are evident, paradoxically, in the dissatisfaction with realist narrative that Vernon articulates. The problem of knowing and inhabiting historic and contemporary Black communities in Canada that Compton, Edugyan, and Vernon address in their exchange arguably makes the uncanny an index of the *reality* of Black experience. Realism, in their exchange, is associated (as it typically is) with the empirically verifiable, with the historical record, with current worldly conditions. Yet the uncanniness that for them is the structure of feeling of ordinary, everyday Black experience in Canada is both a matter of perception and a feature of the external social world. On the one hand, there is the apparent lack of sizeable Black communities in parts of the country, particularly the West—a matter more of perception than demographics. This is the impression registered in Edugyan's observation that when she was growing up in Alberta, "there seemed to be so few black people" (Compton et al.) Compton, similarly, notes that despite there being twenty thousand Black Canadians in Vancouver, the perception is of an absence he aptly characterizes as "a sort of optical illusion" (*After Canaan* 105).

On the other hand, the historical record and in some instances the built environment offer empirical evidence of longstanding Black

communities that have been absented from the dominant cultural imaginary and from dominant historiography. Learning about the existence of longstanding Black Canadian communities in Vernon, Edugyan, and Compton's account is analogous to the *unheimlich*, "the name for everything that ought to have remained secret and hidden, but has come to light," as Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling famously put it (qtd. in Freud 224). While for Black Canadians learning the "secret" of this repressed evidence is on the whole positive—*they* were not the ones who repressed the evidence—the discovery still produces a particular kind of unhomeliness.[9] Not only is it possible to inhabit Canadian spaces where a Black presence has been erased without knowing the "secret," which is uncanny enough, but the dominant cultural imaginary continues to operate without acknowledging the historical record; it represses and displaces both historic and contemporary Black being as a matter of course. As a structural condition of the (neo)liberal settler state, the reality of blackness is itself made uncanny.

Realism has come to be indelibly associated with the political project of the liberal individual—an association that is particularly true of the realist novel, though realism is neither medium- nor genre-specific. It is at least in part realism's affiliation with liberal individualism that Black Canadian writers like Compton and Edugyan confront with alternative grounds for being human and that produces the frictions with realism that mark their work. Nancy Armstrong offers one account of literary realism's role in producing the "class- and culture-specific subject" that came to be known as "the individual," which involved "invalidat[ing] competing notions of the subject . . . as idiosyncratic, less than fully human, fantastic or dangerous" (3). These competing subjects—including, presumably, racialized, colonized, and working-class subjects—peopled the gothic and other forms of writing that were, by the early twentieth century, relegated to the status of subgenres.[10] Unlike those realist works "designed to maintain the autonomy of nation, family, and individual" (Armstrong 139), both the competing genres (the gothic, romance) and the genre fictions (science fiction, horror) that emerged by 1900 explored all that threatened that autonomy from within or without. Following Armstrong's logic, the gothic is one of the forms

inhabited by those subjects thrust out of the liberal political order. It represents the collectives that threaten the coherence of the self-governing individual on which that order theoretically rests and that, in their exclusion from that political order, define and sustain it. Yet, as Dan Stout has recently shown, this contest between the liberal individual—the "modern subject" (Armstrong 3)—and its pre- or un-modern others has not exactly been won. Against the teleological narrative of the triumph of realism and the liberal individual that Armstrong offers, Stout argues that the contest is both internal to and enduring in liberalism and in realism (171–72). The story Stout traces—the story not only of prior but emerging collectivities that are part and parcel of the history of liberalism and modernity—is of interest here for two reasons. The first has to do with the way Canada's settler-colonial history, as a liberal-order project, racializes the collective bodies of the settler-colonial encounter and distinguishes between those eligible for self-governing citizenship as individuals and those on the margins of, but also necessary to, nation-building.[11] The second reason is that thinking about realism and its "antinomies" (Jameson), including the gothic, as resisting settling enables a reading of the genre f(r)ictions in twenty-first-century Black Canadian writing as formal instantiations of the as-yet unsettled state of what has been taken as settled.

II. Compton's "Afro-Fabulations"

If "[r]ealism [is] so impossible" that "[Black Canadians] roll / With the fabulous" (Compton, *Performance Bond* 33) why talk about realism at all?[12] One answer that Compton appears to offer has to do with how, in his poetry, the fabulous itself engages with the "real." Although one of its most common meanings is "mythical" or "imaginary" and "not existing in real life," the fabulous has another set of associations in philosophy and literary theory having to do with events, time, and epistemology.[13] In Compton's usage, the fabulous conjoins the colloquial meaning of the adjectival form—wonderful, marvellous, extraordinary—with the act of writing about Black life in a way that strives to overcome the violence of the archive through narrative, or in other words through fabulation. In proposing this connection between the fabulous and fabulation

as a framework for thinking about Compton's poetry, I am drawing on the recent work of two African-American scholars. Saidiya Hartman characterizes her method for "straining against the limits of the archive [of slavery] to write a cultural history of the captive" while also "enacting the impossibility of representing the lives of the captives" as a "critical fabulation" ("Venus" 11). She is drawing on Mieke Bal's narratological understanding of "fabula" as the "logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors" (Bal 5). Hartman's project to "paint as full a picture of the lives of the captives as possible" is "critical" by virtue of her "re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view" in an effort to "jeopardize the status of the event" and "to make visible the production of disposable lives" (Hartman, "Venus" 11). The archive of slavery reproduces the violence of slavery itself in its failure to afford access to the subjectivity of the slave, especially the female slave. To address what one cannot know from the archive entails the double move of imagining what is occluded and making the occlusions apparent. "Critical fabulation" is Hartman's strategy for hacking the archive.

Tavia Nyong'o is likewise interested in the "a critical and fabulative archiving of a world" of Black life that was "meant to be kept outside or below representation" (3). He argues that fabulation offers a strategy for the "archiving of a world that was 'never meant to survive,' . . . a world that . . . was perhaps also *never meant to appear*" (3; emphasis in original). This notion of a counter-archival practice that both Hartman and Nyong'o advance seems especially apposite in the case of Compton's "Wow and Flutter," from which I quote here and in my epigraph. The poem opens by recalling DJ Scott La Rock's untimely death and summoning him back to life: "Scott La Rock is Lazarus" (Compton, *Performance Bond* 33). Fabulation, that is to say, can raise the dead, make live again in another form. With "[s]o many bodies already buried" (Compton, *Performance Bond* 33), the act of archiving Black lives works against the grain of dis/appearance, as Nyong'o suggests. Compton's work is as archival in impulse in his poetry collection *Performance Bond* as in his anthology *Bluesprint*: *Black British Columbian Literature and Orature*. This archival impulse is particularly

evident in the poem sequence in *Performance Bond* titled "Rune," on which I will focus my analysis.

A letter in an ancient alphabet; a secret; a mystical symbol; a spell; an epic poem—"Rune" marshals all of these possible definitions in its depiction of Hogan's Alley, a historically Black neighbourhood in Vancouver. Not only does Compton present signs in this work that might be understood as runes—the vodoun symbol *vèvè* or a graffiti tag—but the poem sequence may be said to work magic on the historical record, to serve as a spell or "a portal between / worlds" like the *vèvè* itself is said to do (Compton, *Performance Bond* 118). As Compton explains in the acknowledgments, which preface *Performance Bond*, "Rune" is composed partly of the "historical record" and partly of "factitious elements: a newspaper article, four landmarks, and two transcribed interviews" (10) in addition to short poems. The mix is appropriate for a project that is both intent on recovering what was lost when most of Hogan's Alley was demolished in 1970 for the construction of the Georgia and Dunsmuir viaducts and self-conscious about the quixotic nature of the endeavour. Compton's fabulation of a world neither "meant to survive" nor ever "meant to appear" in the first place, to reprise Nyong'o's formulation, explicitly inserts invented content into archival forms and media—newspaper articles, oral histories, photographs.

For example, "Lost-Found Landmarks of Black Vancouver" is a collaborative art-project—or "a poetic device" (Compton, *After* 116)—that takes the form of quasi-archival photographs by Robert Sherrin of what are simultaneously real sites and invented places. Each of the four photographs presents the viewer with a door that is purportedly the entrance to a cultural organization named in a sign designed by Mykol Knighton and temporarily affixed to the building by Compton. While each Black cultural institution in the photographs is based on a historical counterpart, none of these "landmarks" actually exists in exactly these forms either in the present or in the past. In this way, the project showcases the desire for actually existing Black cultural institutions even as the landmarks remain as inaccessible as the door to the "False Creek Muslim Temple," which is missing the staircase needed to reach it. The limits of the archive Compton is working with are such that large parts

of it have to be (re)invented against the loss of Hogan's Alley. At the same time, Compton explicitly acknowledges the act of invention—of fabulation—within the work. The imitation of archival materials in "Rune" affirms the power of historical documentation even as the partly invented content signals the gaps in the archive and affirms the value of fabulation as a response.

Compton insists on a recuperative historicity and an embrace of the fabulous in its colloquial *and* philosophical senses. He approaches both with a trickster sensibility. Not for nothing are we told, in "Vèvè," a poem that takes the form of a dialogue between two personified recording media, Analogue and Digital, that "[*a*] *coyote walks by*" unrecognized (Compton, *Performance Bond* 120; emphasis in original). This sly reference to a coyote, an Indigenous trickster figure that both breaks rules and conveys teachings, and that in this instance goes unrecognized by the recording media, is Compton's way of signalling the possibility of animate presences that historical archives fail to account for. Moreover, in endowing technologies that may be used for documentation with human qualities, Compton suggest both the agency and the fallibility of the documentary or archival act. The final poem in the sequence, "Ghetto Fabulous Ozymandias," may likewise be read as an act of afro-fabulation.

The poem narrates an encounter between "the narrator" and an elusive figure with many names, including the tag "Rev. Oz." The doubling of the narrator is the poem's first deconstructive move: the unnamed speaker who narrates the encounter is not the figure or character who goes by the name "narrator"—the correlate, perhaps, to the "traveller in an antique land" in Shelley's sonnet. The "narrator," the speaker/narrator explains, is taking photographs of the Georgia Viaduct in what was Hogan's Alley when he sees a homeless man through the viewfinder. The man's homelessness is linked to the destruction of Hogan's Alley, which, despite its destruction, is the location the man inhabits in his homelessness. The man's names are fabulous, as the title of the poem declares. He holds forth on the meaning of "Rev." in the graffiti tag for the benefit of the narrator and reader both: he is "Reverend," "Revenant," "Revolutionary," "Revisitor," "Revisionist," "Reinvented," "Revanchist,"

and "Reversed" (155). He thus announces his status as blessed, ghostly, and world-shattering—as intent on transformation, reclaiming territory, and returning in a new form. He performs his status as revenant by appearing and disappearing, depending on whether the "narrator" is looking through the camera lens or not. Only the camera's eye, that tool of documentation and art alike, can conjure him up. He lays claim to other identities, too: the Wizard of Oz and Ozymandias, famous dis/appearing characters. The "narrator" questions Rev. Oz's claim to be Ozymandias, arguing that it is incongruous for the target of injustice—a municipal decision to disappear a community—to assume the name of an arrogant and powerful figure. But Rev. Oz insists that disappearing is itself "arrogant," at which point the "narrator" clicks the shutter and then "lower[s] the camera and look[s]" (156). A pregnant colon is followed by a blank page, eloquent in its blankness, an intimation of the unknown to come but crucially not an image of an Oz/Ozymandias brought down and lying in decay like Percy Bysshe Shelley's monument in the desert.

Compton indicates that in "Rune" he "wanted to approach the problem of remembering Hogan's Alley not through realistic representation, but through more elliptical means" (*After* 112), and he fittingly characterizes the work as a "retro-speculative project" (113). "Rune" is but one of the "Seven Routes to Hogan's Alley" that Compton discusses in *After Canaan*, routes that begin with the empirical work of urban planning and the history of Black migration to Vancouver and gradually move through social history in the direction of the interior worlds of memorialization and desire. "Rune" is the culminating route, and its fabulous or retro-speculative qualities initially seem quite remote from the empirical or "realist" focus of the first route (Compton, *After* 112), but it is no less invested in historical truth than its more evidently factual predecessors. "One of my hopes," Compton writes, "is that readers will experience the sensation of acquiring the knowledge of a particular history and then will subsequently feel that history disappear from them with the realization that it is fiction—a process of reading that imitates the conditions of the history itself" (*After* 117). Once again, Compton suggests that to properly account for the existence of the historic and current Black community of Vancouver, it is necessary to create a different way

of knowing this community and to make that alternative epistemology available to a wide range of readers. Realism alone, Compton proposes, is not enough.

III. Esi Edugyan's Genre F(r)iction

Edugyan's first novel equally lends itself to reading through the lens of "critical fabulation," but the realist register is more evident in this work than in Compton's, despite its gothic and magical realist elements.[14] *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne* opens with "the strange old mansion" that "always had a famished look to it" located "on the outskirts of Aster," a town Samuel, an immigrant from Ghana and the novel's protagonist, nostalgically associates with "the honest era he longed for" (1).[15] Conjuring up a haunted house and time travel of sorts, Edugyan then swiftly moves her readers to the historically defined moment of the spring of 1968, with a map of world events: the anti-Semitic purge in Poland of twelve thousand Jews, the Orangeburg Massacre at South Carolina State University, the Tet Offensive in Vietnam, and the assassinations later that year of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy. In addition to incorporating the gothic and magical realism, then, Edugyan adds the historical novel to the mix. Edugyan's carefully curated survey of racism and political violence locates readers in the real, while the fictive Aster is not only apparently of another era but imbued with a mythical aura. Yet Aster, too, has a historical correlate: Amber Valley, Alberta. In giving the town a fictive name, Edugyan gives herself the latitude to invent—to "add to [the actual] map" (Kortenaar 230)—and thus to draw in more than one history of immigration. Edugyan yokes together Amber Valley's historic founding by Black Americans fleeing Jim Crow in Oklahoma and Texas in the early years of the twentieth century and the story of a post-war "wave of immigration" when "refugees of every skin were seeking new lives in a quieter country" (Edugyan 9). Edugyan imagines a family of immigrants from Ghana relocating from Calgary to Aster. Indeed, the name "Aster" has more to do with the Ghanaian immigrants than with the Black founders of Amber Valley; Ghana's flag bears a black star, a symbol of Pan-African liberation adopted from Marcus Garvey's Black Star Line. In the novel these distinct diasporic histories intersect

in Aster, a fictive place in Canada apparently cut off from the mapped and known world and characterized by an occult temporality. Calgary and Edmonton remain themselves, but Amber Valley is reimagined. Making Amber Valley into a fictive place called Aster allows Edugyan to add this other diasporic history onto the map, but Amber Valley can be fictionalized in the first place because so few know its history as a Black community. Making Amber Valley fictive is not enough: it must also be made over in mythical or magical terms. Realism alone, which would permit a fictive location, is as inadequate to the story that Edugyan is interested in telling as it is to Compton's.

And so, despite its realist register and attention to historical time, the novel marks its setting and characters with the space-time more typical of magical realism, which is to say that readers are invited to consider a place that exists in a different temporal order, a place that, while distinct from the space-time the readers occupy—the world of the "real" Calgary and Edmonton—is represented as equally meaningful, even substantial. This move allows Edugyan to introduce an alternative epistemology within the framework of the (realist) novel, one that offers readers a new way of thinking about some of the conditions of Black being in the diaspora and in Canada. When Samuel's family arrives in Aster, they "see they'd reached some place so private that all roads leading in broke off" (Edugyan 42), and Samuel's wife Maud observes: "We tore through some hole in time right back into the thirties" (43). The house itself "radiated not only another era, but another world" (49). Even as she cleaves closely to the history of Black settlement on the Prairies between 1909 and 1911, Edugyan explicitly evokes the legendary: "*Myth* told of the town's birth as the first black hamlet in Alberta, one not so welcome in those days" (35; emphasis added). As the narrator proceeds to detail the decades of racist reactions of white settlers in Alberta, their recourse to "everything from petitions to newspapers to name-calling," and their fears that the Black immigrants "would soften Alberta's morals" (35), Edugyan moves seamlessly between the historical record and the "myth of Stone Road," which is said to be the result of a decision by white settlers in the area to "pitch up their fear in the form of a wall," each family constructing a layer that "read like a patch in a stone quilt" (36).

Construction halts mysteriously when the road is ten inches high, and with time and erosion, it is reduced to two. The shadow it casts at noon one day, on the other hand, without any observable "object to put [the shadow] there," is reputed to have been five feet high (37). The purpose of this blend of the historical and the mythical is to make explicit the problem of knowing what is historically verifiable—a strategy similar to Compton's.

In the tale of Stone Road, Edugyan first gives physical form to racist discourse in a manner consistent with speculative tendencies to literalize metaphor and invites readers to suspend their disbelief according to the particular protocols of speculative fiction. She then, however, undercuts those protocols by introducing realist doubt about the veracity of the explanation the narrator has just offered: "So the myth goes. Truth is, no one knows how Stone Road came to be" (36). The "truth" the narrator proclaims here is not a referential truth, and so we may read it as sign of the novel's realist register. What is more important, however, is how we read the doubt the narrator introduces about the veracity of the myth of Stone Road and how we think about what that doubt means in the context of the racial divides marked by that myth. What counts as "truth" may well depend on whether one consults Aster's white settlers or the few remaining Black homesteaders. As Leslie Sanders observes, Black writers in Canada regularly negotiate with the presumption that Canada is "white ground," not only in the political but in the epistemological sense—the ground for knowing, against which the Black body is alternately invisible and hypervisible (612). Countering this perception, Sanders argues, might usefully entail looking to "demonic ground," Sylvia Wynter's term for a "site of observation that is . . . outside the present discursive formations and meaning 'fields' of our present order and its related episteme" ("On Disenchanting Discourse" 207n3).[16] As David Scott elaborates in conversation with Wynter, there is "always something else besides the dominant cultural logic," a "something else [that] constitute[s] another—but also transgressive—ground of understanding" (Wynter, "Re-Enchantment" 164). Genre f(r)ictions in Black Canadian writing interrupt this dominant political, cultural, and epistemological ground. This is the case not only in Compton's and Edugyan's

work but also in other writing by Black Canadians that engages with the gothic, such as David Chariandy's *Soucouyant* and Suzette Mayr's *Venous Hum*. Gothic realism, I am proposing, is the formal correlate of this "demonic ground."

To be sure, ground is also at stake in more ordinary senses in *The Second Life*: land as property is key for the liberal-order project of settlement, especially in Western Canada, as well as for the symbolic enterprise of laying claim to Canadian terrain in a bid for citizenship. In his first life as a government bureaucrat, Samuel is both viewed as "indispensable" (5) and subjected to constant acts of microaggression from his coworkers and superiors alike. So while "it seemed at times that the entire Canadian economy depended on the reluctant, soft-wristed scribbling he did in his green ledger" (Edugyan 5), Samuel reaches a breaking point and resigns from this position that he finds stultifying and an affront to his humanity. Samuel wants the autonomy of liberal personhood; he wants to be a self-made man—arguably a category as illusory as it is ideological. Nonetheless, realist novels have portrayed the self-made man as a possibility for middle-class white male protagonists, even when these novels wrestle with the ideological contradictions that wealth and status occasion. In his dogged pursuit of liberal personhood, Samuel misrecognizes the racialized structure of the world he inhabits in Canada: not just the daily encounters with subtle and not-so-subtle racism but the profound ways in which, even in a town founded by Black homesteaders, the larger structural divides, emblematized by Stone Road, hold sway. His talent and ambition are not well-received by the predominantly white community that has, by mid-century, taken over in Aster. He is patronized by Ray Frank, a white farmer and "second to the mayor on Aster's town council" (53), who wants Samuel to sell him the land he inherited from his uncle Jacob; Samuel does not understand until it is too late that the assistance and friendship the Franks extend comes at a price, and that once he has thwarted their aims by refusing to sell, they will withdraw their support and protection to disastrous effect.

There is nothing in this plot, as I have outlined it thus far, that departs from realist convention. Edugyan presents a protagonist, endowed with psychological depth, whose trajectory is defined by his dissatisfaction

with the position he occupies and who accordingly seeks a better one. The novel is also characterized by other realist conventions, including the detailed depiction of a social world and the characters who inhabit it and focalized third-person narration. What need, one may well wonder, has Edugyan for magical realism or the gothic? Surely the realist register suffices to depict the social problems the novel addresses, as it has for other Black Canadian writers.[17] Through this plot centred on Samuel's attempt to assimilate and his failure to move from a marginalized position to full citizenship, Edugyan writes, in essence, a failed *Bildungsroman* and on those terms makes a political claim about the ways settler-colonial states like Canada fail to make a place for diasporic Black inhabitants.

But the speculative elements of the novel add to this realist plot a way of registering how profoundly race is woven into the structure of the liberal-order settler state. Overt instances of racism register at the level of content and feature in the realist conventions of the novel; the deeper structures of racism embedded in governmentality and ways of seeing and knowing, on the other hand, are made perceptible at the level of form. The liberal, settler political project captured in the narrative of Samuel's "second life" as a Black homesteader and entrepreneur is made at once evident and uncanny by Edugyan's gothic tropes and magical realist approach to space-time, beginning with the notion of ground-as-property. The narrator's observation early in the narrative that the "famished" house, with its creaking weathervane, and "the grounds . . . had a magic quality to them" (Edugyan 49) can hardly be read as the sort of "useless detail" that Barthes argues is characteristic of realism (142). Rather, as Rifkin observes of speculative genres, this "magic quality" brings multiple competing histories and perspectives "into accountable relation to each other . . . by providing a way of suspending the exclusivity of claims to what is real" (Intro.). The gothic and magical forms that interrupt the realist conventions organizing the narrative alert readers to other realities only inadequately understood through the dominant codes of realism.

Realism, moreover, is the form most commonly aligned with liberal individualism and the values of the settler-colonial state, including the

terms of citizenship. The novel makes this connection precisely through the friction produced by its interaction with speculative modes: the speculative makes us more conscious of realism as a mode with a particular history and way of knowing the world. It is much harder, as a consequence of the genre f(r)iction, to regard the novel's realism as neutral ground, a default narrative form that need not be questioned. In what follows, I will try to show how this f(r)iction plays out on the levels of content and form. While realism is legible as the hegemonic political form that racialized citizens must contend with, the gothic and magical eruptions of other realities in the narrative show that realism is susceptible to revision, critique, and disruption.

In Edugyan's novel, the "disparate frames of reference" (Rifkin) supplied by the gothic and magical realism are developed through character and family, in addition to place—first and foremost through the Tyne family. The characters are, like Aster, multiply located in time and space. As the novel opens, Samuel is said to be "in the far remove of the civil service," in a world of "private crises" that "held no future" and "no past beyond youth and family life," while the world of his twin daughters "begins and ends with each other" (Edugyan 2). For Samuel, both the public and private realms are dead ends that register as temporally static; the conventional realist plot to bring those realms into harmony is foreclosed in this scripting of Samuel's place in the public realm as a "remove" from the world. His daughters are locked out of the world more profoundly still, even the world of family; neither Maud nor Samuel is able to reach them, to break through the private system of communication the twins devise. These are signs of what, following Pheng Cheah, I characterize as "spectral nationality," which confronts the "teleological time of freedom's actualization" with "figures of finitude that are the very opposite of freedom: death, spectres and ghosts" (381).

If the novel's gothic realism signals how Black life in Canada haunts the idea of the nation as the locus for "freedom's actualization," it also marks how the nation is brought into relation with stratified global divides through immigration from the global South. For both Maud and Samuel, Ghana is suspended in its pre-independence state; they can think of it only as the Gold Coast. Yet they remain connected to

the country of their birth, however uncomfortable those ties sometimes are to them. The clock in Samuel's study is set to Gold Coast time; Maud and Samuel's marriage acquires "added tensions" from the fact that "far across the sea, their tribes had been deeply scornful of each other for centuries" (Edugyan 2); and, when the twins are born, Maud and Samuel "were embarrassed to admit that not even an ocean could distance them from their superstitions" about twins (24). In these ways, Edugyan positions her central characters outside of what Gary Wilder calls "freedom time," the invocation of a revolutionary past as an impetus for a decolonized and emancipated future. She suggests that they are perpetually held in a pre-independence state from which their location on the Canadian prairies is unable to liberate them—for in this place, too, they occupy "another era" (Edugyan 49) in the liberal-order project that needs immigrants but is reluctant to admit racialized settlers to the status of self-governing citizens, which it reserves for white settlers.

The Franks embody the perspectives and histories of white settlement on the prairies in a comically evident way: "Their skin, and indeed their clothes, were so uniformly white they might have climbed from a salt mine" (Edugyan 53). By depicting the Franks' whiteness in grotesque terms—pointing out not only their "pallor" but their "well-fed corpulence," Eudora's "crooked teeth" and excess weight, Ray's "heavily-veined forearms [that] ended in pink, delicate wrists" (53)—Edugyan gives grotesque embodiment to the disturbing views they hold. Eudora is aligned with a particular strand of first-wave feminism on the prairies, signalled by its contradictory motives for seeking women's suffrage, eugenicist impulses, patronizing charity toward immigrants and "the mentally handicapped" (54), and support for "programs to crack down on prenatal alcoholism" (55). Ray espouses stock anti-immigrant sentiment—"newcomers weigh hard on our social system"—while excepting the Tynes, who "are *model*" (151; emphasis in original). Significantly, Eudora points out at their first meeting that "Stone Road divides [the Franks]" from the Tynes (57), reminding readers of the novel's insistence on representing competing truths, generating uncertainty about what can be known, and using genre f(r)iction, including the "unsettling" mix of the historical and the grotesque, to those ends.

A third frame of reference, supplying yet another vantage on what qualifies as the real, is the Porter family, the Tynes' next-door neighbours. Saul Porter, whose age is presented both as indeterminate and very great, is from one of Aster's founding families, which is to say one of the Black families from Oklahoma who settled in Alberta. Samuel learns from Ray Frank that Saul Porter has been nicknamed "Warlock Porter" by white residents of Aster because he saved his crop of wheat from a grasshopper plague with what Samuel recognizes as the method his uncle had used to similar effect in Ghana. This nickname, which aligns Porter with the gothic, makes clear that the gothic functions as a projection of the white settlers' racist anxieties, much like in the myth of Stone Road. Saul's wife, Akosua, is from Ghana, like the Tynes, but unlike them identifies very strongly with Ghanaian traditions and with the nation's independence from colonial rule. Akosua enables Edugyan to introduce an "enchanted" worldview[18] into the novel and to align it explicitly with a critique of the colonial education whose secular codes Maud and Samuel have adopted, despite their lingering "superstitions" about twins.

From the Tynes' perspective, ambivalently positioned as they are between their ideological distance from Ghana and their status as outsiders in Canada, the Porters are unsettling—at once *heimlich* and *unheimlich*. Saul Porter seems to Samuel both familiar and unrecognizable; the Porter house seems both inhabited and neglected, occupied and empty. The Porters are also associated in discomfiting ways with mysterious occurrences: a ladder left leaning against the Tyne house, suddenly mowed grass obscuring property lines between the two families. They are also a threat to Samuel's status as property owner, and in this way to the Tyne project of liberal personhood in the Canadian settler state. Characterized as a "bag of mixed maps" (138), Saul Porter is not only the product of a complex diasporic history but is someone with multiple affiliations but no particular loyalty or sense of belonging. He punctures Samuel's embrace of British colonial education by rhetorically asking "if you don't love another's limits, why love their education" and pointing out that it had not been for lack of literacy that Black people were denied the vote in Oklahoma (183). Saul's family decided to move to

Canada, in response to Jim Crow laws on the one hand and Canadian recruitment posters on the other, only to encounter Canadian racism and an abrupt reversal of governmental policy on Black immigration. Significantly, it is the narrator who recounts the bulk of Saul's story, rather than Saul himself. In this way, Edugyan not only implicitly generalizes the story beyond the experiences of the Porter family but endows the account with the authority typically associated with a third-person narrative voice. The truth-telling impulse associated with realist literary convention here is put to use, as it has been by many Black Canadian writers, to present a counter-narrative to national(ist) narratives that script blackness otherwise, if they write about it at all.

However much Edugyan draws on realism's antinomies to undermine the liberal-order project of the settler state, the Porters, the Franks, and Maud and Samuel Tyne remain legible according to the terms of realist convention. The Tyne twins, on the other hand, are more disconcerting, frequently inscrutable to the other characters, including their parents; they are the clearest instance of a "site of observation" in the novel that is located "outside the . . . meaning 'fields'" of the dominant political order (Wynter, "On Disenchanting Discourse" 207n3). From early in the narrative, when the twins are about twelve years old, they are so fed up with battling racism that one twin announces she is "tired of being black" (30), and certainly, they are interpretable through a psychological lens as suffering from the trauma produced by their experience of the racialized social order and their parents' efforts to assimilate.[19] Their singularities, including their intellectual brilliance, linguistic skill, and mysterious talents—everything that makes them threatening to a social order built on an ideological fantasy that cannot admit of Black equality—set them so far apart from the people around them that they are increasingly driven into a private echo chamber of their own devising, appearing alternately to present a united front against the world and to engage in mutually assured destruction.

Brenda Cooper proposes that their suffering is compounded by their lack of access to the Ghanaian culture of their parents, so that they also lack this means of making sense of their place in the world. Yet somehow the twins intuit "an animist spirituality, turned demonic in

Canada" (Cooper 60), and in this way, while laying the groundwork for plausible, realist explanations of the twins' discomfiting behaviour, Edugyan also draws on gothic conventions to present their strangeness and the extent to which they are perceived as trouble by the community of Aster. Akosua Porter reads the twins through the lens of the traditional Ghanaian beliefs and practices their parents have left behind. She enrages Samuel by proposing that his failure to perform the proper burial rituals for his uncle has caused "madness in [his] children" and that the twins are responsible, by means of magic or a curse, for the fire that burned the Porter house to the ground (Edugyan 259). Samuel succeeds in underscoring the epistemological distance he has travelled in his incredulous response to this charge: "What is this *magic*, what is this *curse*? Are we not in Canada? Did I turn my map upside down and end up right where I began?" (259; emphasis in original). Unlike Saul, who embodies multiple maps, Samuel has but one, with a right and a wrong way up. The twins reveal the limitations of Samuel's map while also transgressing, as gothic figures typically do, the boundaries that the white community in Aster prefers to maintain. Their role in the novel is to make explicit the racialized social anxieties of which they are the target. They also make apprehensible, in all of their contradictions and inadequacies, the established ways of mapping the world of Aster, the province, and the nation beyond.

Importantly, readers are never afforded access to the twins' interiority. Readers can only understand the twins through the observations and interpretations of their parents and the novel's third focalizer, Ama Ouillet. Ama, the young white girl who Samuel decides will be a good influence on his daughters, makes the most concerted effort to understand and befriend the twins, though her efforts are continually rebuffed and ultimately fail.[20] By positioning readers outside the twins' way of knowing while making clear that they are only partly and tendentiously legible from within the dominant liberal order, Edugyan stresses the "demonic ground" the twins represent. Ama, however, is legible in terms of literary realism's conventional concern with reconciling socioeconomic inequality with the dominant moral code that "presumes common humanity between surface differences"—a tension that John Plotz argues made the

realist novel the "novel of liberal guilt" (427). In Edugyan's novel, Ama is the character who wrestles with her conscience and whose reluctantly assumed role in relation to the Tyne family is most explicitly structured by an ethic of moral duty. She is thrust into the Tyne household by her father, who sends her to apologize to the twins for her friends' racist bullying in order to "teach [her] about mercy" (31). Ama's failure to befriend and understand the twins, which leads her eventually to betray them, is thus not only a matter of plot. It is indexed to realist form and thus to the novel's code for structural racism insofar as realism's conventional moral agent cannot but reproduce the structural blindness of the liberal-order project in the face of those who represent "a site of observation" (Wynter, "On Disenchanting Discourse" 207n3) outside of that order. Ama's guilt over her role in the twins' incarceration in the psychiatric hospital helps to account, as Andrea Davis proposes, for her nursing of Samuel at the end of his life in a gesture of atonement and a hopeful sign that different ways of being in relation are possible (46). By working these tropes of the realist novel into her book, Edugyan effectively makes realism's ideological investments explicit, even as she uses realism to address the problem of seeing and knowing Black lives and Black histories in places intent on overlooking and forgetting both, just as Compton's interventions encompass empirical history and produce the "retro-speculative" qualities of "Rune."

IV. Rupturing the Present

"Perceiving the lost subjects of history," Avery Gordon observes, "makes all the difference to any project trying to find the address of the present" (195). And finding that address, Gordon adds, is crucial for imagining an alternative future—a future, in the case at hand, beyond what Walcott and Abdillahi characterize as the apparent "permanency of Black exclusion and subjection" in Canada (15). If the limits of realist narrative which Compton and Edugyan exploit in their work may be understood, at least in part, as indexed to this longstanding exclusion and subjection insofar as realism seems "ontological[ly] comit[ted] to the status quo" (Jameson, *Antinomies* 145), the work of genre f(r)iction is to forge epistemological and ontological ground for charting a way out,

a way beyond, a future freedom apparently foreclosed in the present. The engagement with dis/appearing Black histories that I trace above in "Rune" and *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne* and that finds its expression particularly in gothic/magical/"fabulous" forms as they haunt, penetrate, or break through the "realist prose" or secular codes of modern historical consciousness (Chakrabarty 35–36) should not be understood as a retreat from either the present or the pressing task of stirring the socio-political imagination to future-oriented projects. Rather, this turn to the long history of Black communities in Canada, the exposure of the difficulty of accessing these archives, and the recourse to "critical fabulation" to make those "lost subjects" perceptible stem from a deep dissatisfaction with the present racialized arrangements. The writers' historical or archival turn—and their understanding that it is a *living* archive—is aimed at a future founded on different terms.

Yet why use realism at all? Why *not* simply "roll / with the fabulous"? Why not opt, as so many Afro-futurists and indeed Indigenous futurists have done and currently do in ever greater numbers, for genre fiction without the friction induced by mixing it with realism? Dipesh Chakrabarty offers one rationale for adhering to realism's secular epistemology while also making it "uncanny." He argues that representing subaltern histories in the disenchanted terms of modern historiography is important for the social justice claims of those he strives to represent because "the instruments of governmentality" speak only through those secular codes (48). At the same time, he argues, it is important for the subaltern studies scholar to translate "the time of gods" into the language of modernity in a way that shows that "what is indispensable"—the "realist prose" of governmentality—nonetheless "remains inadequate" (51) because of the basic untranslatability of those subaltern epistemologies. Whether or not Compton and Edugyan share similar aims in their (at least partial) truck with realism—and I cannot speak to their intentions—it is possible to argue that one effect of the genre f(r)iction in the works I have been discussing is to speak both in the language of Canadian history and governmentality and to haunt that language with what it cannot or will not say. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms ostensibly speaks a universal language, despite its privileging

of English and French. It is a language that Black, Indigenous, queer, trans, immigrant, and women's voices can and do speak, asserting citizenship and personhood in acts of translation and dissensus[21] against the all-too-common denial of their rights and freedoms. If these aspirational norms ostensibly open to all voices are one of the languages spoken by the state, indeed by Enlightenment modernity internationally, the state also speaks the language of racial capitalism, another secular code, another instrument of governmentality that has long asserted Black nonbeing. And the language of racial capitalism speaks ever more loudly in the neoliberal present, with ever greater political reach and socioeconomic and cultural impact, and is consequently ever more in need of interruption. As I write, that much needed resistance has been taking place with renewed vigour in the wake of the brutal police murder of George Floyd in the United States and the deaths of Regis Korchinski-Paquet, Rodney Levi, and Chantel Moore (who are all Black and/or Indigenous) at the hands of police in Canada.

As Christina Sharpe puts it, "the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present" (9). This, I am proposing, is how we might understand the revenant, mythical, and otherwise spectral figures that burst through realist narratives and media in Edugyan's and Compton's works. Whether through magical realism's interpenetration of worlds and times or the more explicit boundary-crossing disturbances of the gothic, whether afro-fabulation or retro-speculation, these mobilizations of the "past that is not past" confront the present political arrangements in Canada and the diaspora with the trace of history that is anti-blackness. In doing so in ways that rupture the realist prose of the dominant episteme—through the genre f(r)ictions I have explored—Compton and Edugyan not only make sensible and apprehendable sites of knowing and being that are outside the present order but aim to hold that order to account and ground collective socio-political imagining anew.

Notes

1 There are echoes between my "f(r)ictions" coinage and Brydon's discussion of "global frictions" in "Alberta fictions," including some overlap between the writers we consider. The frictions she takes up are political tensions produced by the

rubbing up of the global and the local. While I will also address transnational scales of analysis, the f(r)ictions I attend to in this essay are those between realism and the forms that tend to be categorized as genre fiction of one sort or another, especially gothic or horror.

2 The term "genre turn" is Rosen's. See both Rosen and Lanzendörfer for analyses of the emergence of a significant body of literary fiction that incorporates elements of genre fiction, a phenomenon occurring at the same time as a boom in genre fiction by racialized writers and writers from the global South.

3 My engagement with the mix of realism and the speculative in these works has been enriched by Saldívar's work on this formal tension in the novels of contemporary US "ethnic writers" (his term). Here, I turn to writing that is comparable to the novels Saldívar addresses, while addressing the distinctively Canadian elements of the writing—even as the corpus also manifests what Moya and Saldívar call a "trans-American imaginary." My aim is not to nationalize the works I take up here but rather to address both the diasporic continuities and the specifically Canadian iterations of those links.

4 See McKittrick's "'Their Blood Is There and They Can't Throw It Out'" and *Demonic Grounds* for a discussion of the complex relationship between Black bodies and geography in the Americas, including "the ways black Canadian geographies are inflected with both absence and presence" and the ways "narratives of erasure" persist ("Their Blood" 27).

5 Literary criticism has been debating the limits of realism for more than a century, but as scholars as different as Levine and Jameson have shown, realism itself engages with its own "paradoxical form" (Levine 15) or "antinomies" (Jameson). More recently Kornbluh has argued that realism might usefully be understood to function as the "not genre" against which various genres—melodrama, the gothic, the historical novel, magical realism, and the popular forms (detective fiction, science fiction, fantasy) that are typically, if confusingly, grouped under the rubric of "genre fiction"—come into relief (102).

6 While Vernon's contributions have been scholarly rather than literary, she has performed pathbreaking research on Black Prairie writing that has recently culminated in her edited anthology *The Black Prairie Archives*.

7 Clarke has addressed the heterogeneity of Black life in Canada: see, for example, the "Introduction" to *Odysseys Home* (14) and the chapter "Contesting a Model Blackness" (28, 47). Walcott likewise addresses the plurality of Black Canadas in *Black Like Who?*

8 For an account of how to understand Canadian national history in terms of a liberal-order project, see McKay. Perry has offered a useful extension of this line of thinking in the direction of a more explicitly feminist and postcolonial framework.

9 There is a recent documentary, *Secret Alberta: The Former Life of Amber Valley* (2017), about the all-Black communities in Alberta that date back to the

early twentieth century. A documentary about a community in Ontario founded by Black people fleeing slavery but believed by its current inhabitants to have been founded by white settlers also has a quasi-gothic title: *Speakers for the Dead* (2000).

10 I do not mean to suggest that Black writers in the Americas have not also made use of the realist novel. Indeed, for many, it was understood as the medium of racial protest. For more on this discussion, see Dubey.

11 Such, for instance, is McKay's understanding of the history of colonial settlement. Addressing the way that liberal-order projects, like the one that came to be called "Canada," build on the "prior ontological and epistemological status accorded to 'the individual'" (623), McKay notes that such projects are inevitably in tension with the groups that negotiate a place for themselves within them, including those that are taken to be either "deficient individuals" (on the basis of race, like the Chinese and Japanese) or "probationary liberals" (like Catholics whose faith was difficult to reconcile with liberalism)(625), to say nothing of the "aliberal" Indigenous populations "external to the liberal settler [project of rule]" (636). McKay does not explicitly address the ontological position of Black people in the wake of slavery, but he does acknowledge the incoherent racial logic of liberal individualism whereby only certain races qualify for the abstract category of "individual" (638–40).

12 Clearly writers like Hopkinson have elected not to engage with realism, though that does not mean that her genre fiction lacks a relationship to the real or fails to undertake politically symbolic work. For a development of this argument, see my article "Speculative Pasts and Afro-Futures in Nalo Hopkinson's Trans-American Imaginary." Compton moves further in the direction of speculative fiction in his short story collection *The Outer Harbour* than he does in "Rune."

13 See, for instance, Bergson and Deleuze, whose philosophical writing on fabulation has been influential.

14 Acknowledging the traces of these forms in her first novel, Edugyan reveals that she was reading Flannery O'Connor and Gabriel García Márquez around the time she began work on her book (Compton et al.). While the gothic and magical realism have distinct genealogies and formal features, they have in common the sort of disruptive and differential relation to the real/ist that characterizes the speculative more generally. Nonetheless, it is not my intention to imply that they are interchangeable; rather, elements of both are evident in different aspects of Edugyan's work, as I will show over the course of my analysis.

15 As Cooper notes, Edugyan's characterization of the house as "famished" may well resonate, for many readers, with Ben Okri's best-known and magical realist novel *The Famished Road* (59).

16 Wynter articulates the notion of "demonic ground" in more than one essay; I am quoting here from "On Disenchanting Discourse," but she also references the concept in the later essay "Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/Silencing the

'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's 'Woman.'" The title of McKittrick's important book *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* makes her debt to Wynter's philosophy explicit; further, the book by McKittrick is Sanders' point of departure for her consideration of the politics and poetics of space in Black Canadian writing, which focuses on Clarke's and Compton's oeuvre, though Sanders also touches briefly on works by Brand, Edugyan, Andre Alexis, Moodie, and M. NourbeSe Philip.

17 A representative sample includes Hill's *Any Known Blood*, Clarke's *George and Rue*, Sarsfield's *No Crystal Stair*, Thomas' *Behind the Face of Winter*, Brand's *What We All Long For*, Moodie's *Riot*, and Chariandy's *Brother*.

18 I am using "enchantment" here in the way Chakrabarty defines it, as a system of thought in "which humans are not the only meaningful agents" (35).

19 Davis offers a persuasive analysis along these lines, in part by reading the depiction of the twins in relation to the recorded experiences of twins in California and the UK that Edugyan was drawing on for her novel (42–45).

20 Ama's evident whiteness is complicated, in the first edition of the novel, by the revelation that she has some Indigenous ancestry: her paternal grandfather was "Native" (183). The traces of the historical encounter between settlers and Indigenous peoples and its associated traumas, which appears in this reference to her grandfather and an Indigenous couple (296) in the waiting room at the psychiatric institution where Maud and Samuel deliver their daughters into state care, do not make it into the second edition and subsequent printings.

21 Rancière argues that dissensus is the "essence of politics" and that it consists of "the demonstration (*manifestation*) of a gap in the sensible" (38), which is to say in what is perceptible according to the terms of a political or aesthetic system.

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