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swell

by

Amilcar Nogueira

A Creative Writing Project
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Department of English Language, Literature and Creative Writing
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at the
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

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swell

by

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Author's Declaration of Originality

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this Master's thesis and that no part of this creative writing project has been published or submitted for publication.

I certify that, to the best of my knowledge, my creative writing project does not infringe upon anyone's copyright nor violate any proprietary rights and that any ideas, techniques, quotations, or any other material from the work of other people included in my creative writing project, published or otherwise, are fully acknowledged in accordance with the standard referencing practices. Furthermore, to the extent that I have included copyrighted material that surpasses the bounds of fair dealing within the meaning of the Canadian Copyright Act, I certify that I have obtained a written permission from the copyright owner(s) to include such material(s) in my creative writing project and have included copies of such copyright clearances to my appendix.

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Abstract

“swell” is a poetry manuscript accompanied by a critical essay that examines the functions of grief in contemporary culture through the lens of the long poem. This long poem seeks definition within the space of the closing parenthesis, responding to its function in previous contemporary texts, while at the same time delving into narrative to focus on the disjunction death, grief, and mourning can have on a persona. This long poem employs the use of a column to show the inescapable fracture that these living processes can have on a persona, while forcing the reader to examine the same lines both across and down the page for meaning. This long poem also employs techniques such as puns and mathematical language, to highlight a linguistic search for meaning that crosses language and the word. The text ends, revealing that language and image together end the persona's search in/from grief.

Dedication
for my family

Acknowledgements

For the hours of suffering through each draft and only providing improvements, I would like to thank my advisor, Nicole Markotić.

I would like to thank the Josephine Conspiracy for keeping me grounded.

I would like to thank my peers who inspired and helped me, not only in writing, but also in surviving the semester, especially through constant and consistent consumption of pizza (now and forever). This poem would not be possible without them.

To Chris Cameron, for eating lasagna with me.

I would like to specifically thank Matthew Caron, Caroline Lether-Caron, and Emily Wunder for their continued support in reading my work, being excellent friends, and for eating soy nuggets with me.

Thanks to Andre Narbonné for providing me humourous readings in my lengthy despair.

I would like to thank Thomas Bray and Jasmine Elliot for allowing me to sleep on their couch, eat their food, and talk until 6am.

Lastly, I would like to thank Candace McCort who is stronger, smarter, and braver than I.

Table of Contents

Author's Declaration of Originality	iii
Abstract	iv
Dedication	v
Acknowledgements	vi
swell	1
Critical Statement	62
Works Cited	85
Vita Auctoris	87

swell

let me tell you of home

my Papa starts
in the garden

lit cigarette in hand
gestures like fireflies
mating
pushes his glasses
sips homemade port

pond water splashes
Spike sniffs the deck, the grass
a dead bird
Pele bawks from inside the house

by the bookshelves
the grandfather clock
chimes the quarter

weights in the basement
thirty years older than
us grandkids
love *lingua* lost

inside the hallway closet
the hotel bell's inscription:
 “Sweet Heart of Mary,
 be the salvation of Russia, Spain,
 Portugal, Europe
 and the whole world”

gounin, montreal
back further

boats / stars
the planes / the plans
back to lisboa
back pain as pallbearer at *tio's* funeral
tiny man, large head, larger hotel

bury his casket after *oração*
para a noite
awake at the wake
the guitar vibrates the pine

out of air-force
done cutting aces
twenty-five

porto on port
starboard stares
nighttime arrival
gounin, montreal

people flooding the streets
press shoes / new walk
depress feet
start down gounin
wading in
the canadian tide

sauna off
 the culligan bottles
 ferment grapes
 impress friends
 fill the cellar

in the extra bedroom
avó's babels paint the walls

flesh peels back
 sagging open
 muscle tissue
 pulsing--

cut to the story:
 chase down street names
 from gounin to st catherines
 rue port de montréal

first km,
 blisters grind the ground
 fifteenth,
 foot touches gravel
 fiftieth,
 muscle greet mud
 stopping
 with the setting sun.

poise menino menino poise menino canta oração [in-side sterile walls
 [you look so much like your *tio*
 [muddy eyes, small head,
 pining voice]]

noventa e sete

noventa e oito

noventa e nove

['The Blow was Great, The Shock Severe']]

EXT. EVENING. A FUNERAL HOME.
 (snowing)
 ALL: ...

melted pond, koi nibble
 for firefly hands, listening
 for absent mouth:

all your uncle could say was hello

*the foreman gives him the contract, tells him to read
 and signs*

my left hand to his
 a mirror

veins pulsate / roots run
 his body

the road
 horns

my body
 under books

his plywood shelves cover
 the walls

hand cups
 ear for words
 hand cups
 my chest
 sings
oração

EXT. MORNING. A FUNERAL HOME.
 (not snowing)

taps head, thinker cap
 from alloys and arc welding
 never wet his lips on the dry dock
and sign

greetings on the dock

hands speak

in sparks

ola

hello

bonjour

a small house in collingwood
 blue mountain smiles

*I take his hand and
 make his signature*

worn, wear, water
 two languages

memorial cards
 held to the jackets
 of old novellas

basement carpet imprint
stretch out by the bar
tapping on the bottles

the song changes
the house quiets

pen curled
hand
in hand

*no problem
if it's his hand,*

buried side by side (by side by side)
four suits in the sun
tapping phones

aye menino

reach the marble
boot on fresh dirt

[Do Not Stand at my Grave]

right?

her note: key
 between ink and letter
 smears out of tune
 me

can bad writing kill ya
I dont wanna live and find out

she spoke and smoke
 carburetor heaves
 through essex county

word on
 air
 word on out the window
 air
 out the window

chains link
 a fence away from the fields
 harrow in

dirt and grass
 a bruising
 pumpkin

her note:
 my last
 writes

just tell another

re: writing

car as old as
 the money tree
 in the backyard
 hammock up
 reading *from this day*
 dipping ash
 in the tray
 napping and downing
 marinol with water
 a bandana

no

car, carburetor
 chugging gravel
 lugging hockey bags and hockey
 bodies whose parts
 resemble wholes
 car breaks down
 in a ditch,
 engine failure, the doctor tells you
 in the hospice

no

story
 the last page
 the last ink/ten-
 sion, I on and on
 keys in the ignition

can she hear
 here, the farm/ the far

hello

curls to her hair
 half a funeral at the wedding

words
 on air
 smash an engine
 bruise a fence

flattened wheat, words
 force
 a crop circle

her note: *I*

forgetting turn signals
 fly into the ditch,
 dirt in the scratches of the boots,
 six pallbearers
 smoking in the winter sun
 coats off/ sleeves up
 dressed in overalls,
 mismatched socks
oração]
 [canta exterior shot, day,
 an anglican church,
 no.

to find out

	this photo	these two
	the desk	
		(this photo, the smile)
two minutes on the phone	the	the nose
	smile	is the photo
	the	(who took the shot?)
	line	
	smiling	faces, two
		crayon moustaches drawn on
		(who took
		the photo?)
Aunt Christine died last night.	her memorial	
love you and off the phone.	an olive sangria,	
	from exhaling to	
each pore of skin.	here, me, her, more the real time.	
fingers. nails.	suit suited (suits you in the shot, but who took it)	
back rubbing against cotton.	back rubbing against wool.	
	in-vent words: restand, unclaim,	
	destroy pictures	
toritate	lights shake,	
sudden-cant	kiss a corpse and	
sit still	shadows sit	
	smile in the photo	
head detaches and floats to the sky		(but who shot the photo?
inhale precipitation cough hail.		who was there?))

solve:

Nami has a family recipe for *Pastéis de nata*.

Eight people RSVP the wake.

Half a carton of eggs makes forty pastries.

Nami's hands bulge purple/

Nami sets up two stand-mixers.

How much flour will Nami use in her *Pastéis de nata*
recipe?

For bonus marks: how many will mourners eat?

=

If friends equal family and if family equal handfuls of eggs,
friends equal eggshells in the dough. If egg minus shells
equals eggs and eggs equal smooth and smooth
equals dough then eggs equal dough, which equals
seventeen waffles for breakfast.

Friends equal dough and waffle about the room
smothering eggs.

Friends bake family in the heat.

)

a photo:

a basement bedroom,
 inside a photo album
 the resting. the *familia*.
 Amy,
 found. orange light
 in the photo. blankets
 and two peeking eyes.
 three months. paper marker.
 cursive on the back and
 this is why you hide
 in a basement scrapbook
 cribbed curled and tucked
 between page and red-light exposure

picture:

in the car, mum turns into a roundabout and begins
 the story:

my friend, she starts, because this story
 can only have friendship.

family drowns
 in a postcard of the ambassador bridge

mon ami
 she begins the story in
 her mother's tongue,
 we are all little *grenouilles*,
 in a big *marais*.

she begins,
 this time
 just the question,
 and it storms the car doors/
 croaks the radio.

but who took the photo,
 i ask, as we continue round
 and the rain drenches us through
 windows and clothes,
 windshield wipers

?

a photo:

the only bedroom,
 inside a crib photo of the smile
 cursive and the story
 where Amy. found
 plastic crib bars
 in the photo sat
 forecast and too many eyes.
 three months span
 on the back and
 this is why you hide
 inside a breath, you open
 your lungs, close your eyes,
 and never exhale

picture mum:

in the roundabout, mum turns into the conversation and continues
 the story:

your father can't build the crib
 for your nephew.

and the speed limit increases
 so that we
 drive through the night.

she exhales
 as her storm takes the wheel,
 he hasn't built a crib since then,
 he can't now.

his breathing,
 she states,
 is a flawed circle.

the back of the car has been empty
 for years, she remarks

but behind us no one talks
 and in front

a photo:

a box too small,
giant
divider in between
for two bodies
for where Amy.
flame reduces skin, bones.
in the box sat family
and too many
times written and rewritten
this is why you hide
inside garage lumber,
so hands can pull pine
and un(ite)

this picture:

in our roundabout, mum finds words:

when we die,
she says.

- and I say stop
just stop-

when we die
the storm sings,
puts us in the box
breaks the law.

and the roundabout empties
we. alone.
except our voices
warming the car.

instantly the sky
separates. rain slows
as she turns off the roundabout

in front
windshield wipers weather
a tide. subside

a photo:

our bodies, two, swell,
wooden box in a palm

the same photo.
with Amy.
our handful of dust?
in fingers, *familia*
and shovels break
hard ground, dates the picture
this is why you hide
in ink, re-inked, re-ink-inked
so lines gnarl about an empty room
and

picture this:

i never learn to drive.
oil sputters, engine light fades,

when we, we, die
i wrote

-

-)))

i erase storm songs
as thunder strikes
oak trees

if a car drives itself,
when does the roundabout end?

tide, i,
tight-eyed, water fills the seats,
washes the glove compartment,
windows
windsor, under water

drown / dry

a photo:

swell,
alm

Amy. ?

our
in in

round, in
you hide

in in in in
lines about

and

picture me:

the photo: gone.
who took the photo?

i check the album
but basements flood.

i show mum
she says it's the same photo.

but no wheels
on the crib,

i
dig up the concrete floors

dad says,
we have a copy,
but we can't re-produce it.

so you took the photo?

dad says,
dad can't say.
they replace the floor
with unweathered wood

and a shine
that hides indents.

)

hearing
 (the crowd)
 Karrie's in the back of the first car

How
 ?

(bookend the magnetic/
 FUNERAL flags police)

scene:

but the janitors cleared
 the rocks off the roof
 and only one smokes

the same
 end:

i speak to rock-less rain

or

The school will impose recess on its surroundings as the classes re turn to their studying. Grief counsellors arrive and prepare
 the guidance room. All welcome. The roof remains off limits to students but this does not stop me from returning and smoking or
 skipping. A line to the guidance to speak about seat belt failure al l welcome. Word spreads: accidental, promising, cough, accelerate,
 locker, overdue library book. The last stone from the roof left on a bookshelf next to a yearbook.)

their
 march on
 seat/ belt

one year
 she sat
 these years
 she lies

,

I guess you win

bare
 which
 tough smile
 smell fire
 and on
 the end
 flag, flag,

a card:

Thirteen and you trump all numbers
 when I see your flag, your skull,
 you signal me, come and see,
 came, saw, horse drops the king
 I didn't know black armour could shine
 me down

let me sleep in the horse's eye
 announce your name in bold
 with sleep, come and see
 I know no tarot and now know
 shuffling names you

a card game:

mum splits the deck,
 I ask for war.
 with a bridge,
 she builds crazy eights

the cards pile, split.
 lines divide the table,
 a table story--

grandma used to read

the table begins()

grandma used to read the cards

I change suit

mum extends the into spades
 queen draw 5

I spit diamonds
 she spades Amy
 she clubs me
 she fills my hand with every suit
 and calls last card

I play it out but know that she has the ace she needs

a card:

dad places you upside down
 you hold the flag like a tether.
 the world, a crib.
 dad listens, reads your pennant
 (he hasn't built that crib. the roundabout)
 tear or tear, mum never tries

would you flip if she did
 you would let go without
 the crib: put away or lost or
 plastic,
 he wouldn't go and see
 if he left you in the basement

a card game:

mum divides the cards by faces
 twos to tower kings, and everything else

let's play crazy eights
 mum sets up speed

fine speed
 mum sets up
 slap jack.

cards. any cards.
 mum says euchre,
 but the table's empty.

there's a way to play euchre alone
 she solitaires sideways.

what about a board game?

mum splays the deck and swipes it to the ground,
 fifty-two flying squares
 flutter

a card:

tell me the hand	or send me a suit
paper speaks	rocks marble
bridged from crib	to cribbage
smash cigarettes	pick scabs
songs shift do-re-	st, do, write
tell me comfort	do you come in pairs?
tell me come forth	did you count cards?
cheaters tap-tap-	er, to late if caught.
cheaters break	words fast, glass
sharp as pebbles	trick and tick,
when a bridge collapses,	partner split.
tell me, did they pass,	or double down?

a card game:

mum.
me:
what's
the
stake?
mum:
this
photo,

something bigger than

you
 a large dog
 a hockey bag
 choirs
 needle-point pen
 handstands
 high schools
 curtains stuck half-closed
 Portugal
 two peas
 bar tabs
 a two-by-four
 a forty-year-old elephant
 the penny
 the pen chant
where'd it go, eh? where'd it go?
 dipping hammocks
 stage directions for a number
 a photo negative
 ink splattered around the lips

And I imagine the room the day after: nurses flipping blankets,
 no visitors the (day) after, and everyone's dying these
 days, don't you know? but placation sounds like play, and I
 grab her jacket forgotten on the chair, her new slippers,
 her last cigarette half-smoked next to a loonie for the pop
 machine. maybe she could've called home, phoned a friend,
 or at least anted up

hey, i'll flip, you call.

and I said no, that's okay, that's all right. church pews
 creak mom dragging me in to see the (body) but hell is
 other people, I stumble through standing, block the doors
 forget my lines, better to look inward to the church room:
 lice thrive in these shag carpets, in these speeches that
 break into verse versus the speeches cut in half by tears
 versus the speeches that start slurred and end sober.

and I said no, let me go, I'm not going in. clench the paper.
 mom kissing lips, kneeling, crying into the flower vase,
 straightening each photo. pins 'em up on the poster boards,
 fixing the desync'd audio and video, and passes out
 cold coffee.

and I went into the "remembrance" room. fifty odd chairs.
 thirty people, all cramped together, remembering:
 how many chairs are in the room, how many people it takes
 before fire code applies. dad whispers, god needs us, you
need someone, and I say, jingling my pockets

the page
 nail clippings
 truck stops
 thimble, shoe, cannon (no longer in print)
 flag poles
 another large dog
 foucault with hair
 a referee
 these rooms

)

the bathroom cupboard still pops off the wall aiming for my face
chocolate bars come in two-packs
the 401 has regular pileups
christmas starts on november first
papa still smokes
mum tries not to smoke
noah isn't old enough to smoke
bruce springsteen breaks the bass in the pickup
aunt christine's daughters come to saturday game nights
dad works fifty-five-hour weeks
the basement floods
fleas glue themselves to the layla, spike
the basement drains
noah eats chocolate for easter
I discard dvds for blueray
the penny disappears
toronto remains four hours from windsor
my titan arum survives
global housing discussions run on
the money tree survives the winter
divorces postpone
the toilet breaks
we keep trading turns pall-bearing
nails never stop growing

)

on my last:

I didn't exaggerate enough

my dog bit my bones early

my doctor said I laughed too much

my comedian said I didn't laugh at all

what does dad say to the mortician?

please don't muck up the carpet

not at the border

rent camoes club and prepare streamers

death and dirt

too much pizza

can intestines explode?

spontaneous tapdancing

if methodical/method acting then
consult nearest comedian

not enough pizza

barnyard

bars

me|

Layla|
pooooool
concrete grr grr graass grass

When you remember the backyard,
you watch a pool swallow a swing-set, a shed
the garden. Down came the concrete. Layla, gallops up
the steps after digging up only potatoes. Get to the root of
the problem, but potatoes grow stems and Layla
lies underneath concrete. When you lie on the concrete you
can hear the tail wag. thump thump. Dirt dug and moving.
Entropy: the act of you noting how much concrete it takes
to fill a flower bed, how many weekends it takes to flatten
tomato vines, and how many blisters must grow before two
backyards mingle and merge, until Layla unburrows,
drinks the pool, and barks at potato seeds.

maybe rent caboto?

invest in vest for burial

Windsor-Essex County Cancer Report, 2010

minor tuning, followed by minor chords

light source| subject| object | wall|

don't store near sub-pump

miniature ontarian flag

hide in vent?

sun| tree| I saw the tree| wall|

will travel without driver's license

if I'm scared of heights and I jump is that irony?

3d model of the cn tower

maybe ativan

smoking: too much a slow burn

re-find Amy

buy new sneakers, wide foot

THE ABOVE CHARGES ARE
APPLICABLE ONLY ON PAGES.
THERE ARE NO
HALL CHARGES HELD
BELOW GROUND.

de
re spite

When you enter the hospice, you find dead hair and dangling bonds. This chemical reaction leads to silicon shoes stuck to the floor. Example: weddings. Another example: television shows lasting more than four seasons. Final example: these notes. When I replace the wood in the hallway with these words, the chemical reaction diffuses. Instead of the clank of schedules and perfect sleeping hours, water rots the paper-thin flooring and you fall into the basement. You can't jump if you're falling. Although your body expands into the body of water, you can't swim when you tire. Even if gills do not deploy, droplets of water breathe by joining clouds in the sky or pores on the face.

read between lines

can pizza explode?

rewrite suicide haiku

Elegy Written in the Country Churchyard

pregunta – with the heroic stanza?

Am, Dm, Em, repeat times four

learn adobe in-design

hide body in the clock

maybe pills and ambassador?

Elegy Written In A Basement Bedroom

hire a new comedian (schumer?)

maybe muddy, slip on mud

As light first struck, bending the world in two

netflix and terse discussion

disposable camera, three pictures left

essential waters

ding

an

tin by ton,

tincture

her full satan

mum dad

below nails

by dad

tear tacs

mend lash

tin by ton,

tincture

her note

dad

dial tones

forget mmmm-

mum

guest hall

A painted picture for you: re: goodbyes (not another). This still life paints me. Apple, Grapefruit, Banana. I am not afraid. I name dirt mushroom, but a bowl of fruit? Not today. Nor a painting or a goodbye. Once, I asked dad if a car crash equates a heart attack. But you can only find the notes and tie them on a leash and bring them to the park.

Maybe fly.

A painted picture for you: re: painted pictures for you (re: not another). I do not know how to paint.

A gift canvas, covered with no colour, at each birthday, titled: Birthday One. A note on the gift: please paint. The still life hangs above twenty-six blank portraits of yourself.

Later, you gather and remove them from their frames by cutting at the edges of your body and retitling them

be: 1.

dove moisturizer for the (body)

you| me| the pizzas| wall|

A family gathers split on sides of pine

show the clock on the stomach

arctic monkey “505”

ex-hale

wednesday, 830am, bank

Throwing rope across the papers for you

trapped in brain pit traps

snows of kill > drown minus Entropy

stress management

Knowing they must take from these words, a line

four-oh-one or macdonald-cartier

re learn one tu trees

frostbite on absinthe

snow dampens tapdancing

ripe

pier

Some times:

When the clock replaces mum's ribs and the hands replaces dad's feet.

When the sun rose for the second first time.

When the stones shifted from circle to oblong, to square, to dodecahedron.
1988.

When dad sits around the pond, observing gravitational waves.

When art went out for a pack of cigarettes and comes back three days later
singing about tequila and palm readings.

When your words broke and her voice writes.

clock gears
on the face

Can broken words tend?

the car the car the car the car the car the car the car

wikihow: driving

show stomach in the bathroom portrait

tense portense

Will your plants without you grow or end?

game over screen

“hello world” in the mud

pizza with too many toppings it breaks

re. stressed. syl. la. bles.

passkey to the school roof

Until the word breaks free and bodies send

ROI on therapist notes

resposta – stabbed with the quatrain

cheat sheet (person – first: textual language)

Windsor-Essex County Cancer Report, 2040

to me
not bs

flies

fruit

dirt

me

Me: No last goodbye for family left by the boats with holes in their hulls and farms made up only of pig iron and black sheep. You can have a book or a bookshelf, but none of the letters. Gift my student loans to the government to pay for my debt to the Centre for First Nations Governance, for the use of their air and water. Please rip off the covers and burn them. Eat a page, I know I won't. But my worms will: they need to survive in my stomach. If there's an agency I've forgotten, please leave a video response.

(pause)

Me: I can't seem to figure out how to shut it-

End video.

new old vest for old vest contest

shoe| foot| sole| concrete|

the car's hood typeface

Amilcar Nogueira (elder)

a meal on the dark road

The trumpets playing and un-end.

scratch that.

wide foot no longer issue, just close bottom half

top half intact if pills

first crown I ever get

maybe the world can explode? in one go?

putting the pen down

the poem| the author| words| wall|

my doctor said my irony levels will rot my kidneys

my comedian issued no comment from the grave

no exaggeration in shoes.

stairs

stear

stamp
lingo
emote
return address

my will:

My brothers take vacations to the backyard.

My mom wears the twelve holiday sweaters.

My dad borrows the hockey stick.

My godparents take god.

My sisters kijiji my bicycle and split the change.

My aunties double down the poker game (without me).

My papa already has his name, so he doubles up.

My nami kneads her counters and solves her recipes.

My uncles say auntie.

My friends drink this last parting party.

My acquaintances have a drink.

My comedians keep their mouths shut.

)

The parting of the wills:

Cathy:

ac/dc back in black sign in the interior by the band,
cover cracked and vinyl scratched by a bad needle.

fourteen pairs of bellbottoms
florescent green to worn-out black, tagged by and

for Cathy, who cut the fifteenth pair up for fabric
forging a hundred denim patches of famous cat
felix, twelve sold, the rest resting underneath the lamp
fixture still broken from the indoor frisbee party
where her frisbee decapitated and also punctured the
window screen and landed outside

by the hammock.

*and i would lie down and yeah yeah yeah the wind
carries you without a push.
that was the best time to smoke and sleep, then wake
and smoke and throw up and eat*

her black cavalier, covered in mud and
weathered by the corn detassled in the back seat,
blankets shaming the dog-scratched interior, distracting
eyes from the orgy of macdonalds and burger king

“happy meals,” next to the 2002 tax returns, and
a broken lava lamp.

sold on ebay to crispyvenom for twenty dollars, which she stored
in her memorabilia room after playing it once on arrival

from goodwill to goodwill, seven for ten dollars
tags torn out

taken to the dump
donated to the felix the cat museum in barrie
taken by refurbisher who replaced the wiring, ordered a new
lampshade, and sold it to the pawn shop
melted down that night during the bonfire, sent to landfill
repaired screen seven months later

unmoving, except by the wind during the summer months, or when
uncle tim moved it to the backyard shed after summer, where he
repaired each damaged and frayed rope, inspects daily during the
summer and one after the winter ends, boxing it tightly to avoid rat
feasts,
now unused.

first given to Christine, cleaned for sale, then removed from sale
due to a will dispute, then driven illegally for three months while
the estate made no attempt at sale: replacing the leather and
constant vacuuming to remove the smell of “loving it,”

uncle tim stores in a cabinet then shreds when tax season ends
on top of the cabinet, he wonders who owns the damn broken
thing

ashes in a blue urn

an empty plastic journal, a gift from mum Cathy used as a level for the computer desk

her wedding ring

the library, with nora roberts's *from this day to midnight in death* and four john grisham novels with ripped fronts, the sides she wrote on, and the back she scribbled over.

a collection of baby scrapbooks from 1989-1990 and 1993

two bank accounts, one maxed-out credit card, and a 1000\$ bill in the safety deposit box

one mug with felix the cat sleeping, another one plastered with sand and shells

the *pysanky*

oregano, basil, hibiscus, african violet, peace lily, seeds and the empty pots.

a single of "tin soldier," scratched to the point where the record loops the second half of the chorus

going to quit now. oh dont cry
later, sleep now? just buy me a pack, money's in my purse. hey, if i'm dying i'm not
tim- tim grab me a smoke? and roberts to read? when's dinner? gonna sleep ok? talk

moved from the crematorium to the mantle by the *pysanky*

plastic cover damaged by rain, the rest of the journal holds up the new broken computer desk

left for her son, he used it two years later, returned it two years after, it rests on the mantle on the other side of the *pysanky*

given to goodwill, sold for pennies

boxed by uncle tim for posterity

moves from a box underneath the desk to a new plastic box in the attic, opened by mum during Christine's death

slowly paid off by estate
left alone

tim cleans and breaks the first one at 4am, rebuilding attempted but deemed a waste. throws the second one into the sky and sledgehammer smashed, into dust

from ukraine from dido from ann from cathy to the mantle to the children

planted by mum, each pot colour-coordinated to each seed, lived until the cats got to them, who puked up seeds for weeks.

go ahead, go ahead, go ahead,
ride ride ride away

Richard:
 thirteen wrenches same size and make
 chess set, missing a pawn
 a pile of notebooks marking licence plates:
 fleas
 a bucket of toy cars, including an almost
 complete collection of the 1996 hot wheels
 releases, missing only the dodge viper
 three large brown eggs, half a stick of butter
 the apartment
 jack nicklaus greatest **hits** three
 res-med sleep apnea machine
 willow tree figurine angel collection
 six burnt-out light bulbs
 straight razor circa 1955, handle replaced
 circa 2000
 a box of chocolate easter bunnies in the freezer next
 to a compress

twisted together forming an art piece called “twelve wrenches”

I replace the pawn with a shot glass

lost

I vacuumed, drugged, poisoned, and coerced them into the
 landlord's shoes: left for future landlord/tenant tribune

*where do ya want em, where do they go, plastic little wheels
 bent at the choking hazard. and this one you'll drive and
 this one you'll race, and this one*

baked into a quiche, when I read the expiration date, fed to the
 neighbours.

empty for two weeks until landlord loopholes new geriatric friend
 in

hit with nine iron, putt into garbage with driver, albatross

sold on craigslist, I returned to res-med for new machine, slept
 loudly

the figurine angels plant their feet on the floor, wrapped with
 nicklaus face, sold at yard sale, watched, sold at yard sale smashed

causing bleeding

gnawed and scraped until full *you get sharp.*

<i>grab a board, we'll play</i>	<i>what's next, putt putt, driving practice, drive to wasaga, lie down, listen to sand</i>	leg	bandages	<i>welp, nope, i wont, i won, dont need to play again, i got this one down, no next game</i>	a squirrel nicknamed Daly shreds them
		teabags			we fill them with mulled apple herbal tea, dislike it, fill them with lemon thriller
		foam		mattress	we flatten it with a book shelf and two televisions only removing one of the edges. slept for three months inside his outline.
auto		show	tickets		dated the same day as his showing: sell on tickethub
baby		photo	(wrong	one)	return to right baby, frame until frame breaks, scrap-book
four		dollars	in	pennies	gather from coin collections and dustpans, roll and disperse among great-grandchildren's bonds
fall		1989	golf	magazine	gather with the newspaper, turn into a paper maché mask by a grandchild's face into the grandchild's face
peach		suit	jacket		for final burial, a brighter tone than his skin, eaten away by mushrooms
the			gideon's		not good enough to keep, I shredded and re-purposed as kindling
		coffee	grounds		grandchildren created ancient maps by dabbing the grounds and baking the paper, taping the maps to walls so he could find home
double		bubble	joke	wrappers	reread and don't laugh, reread and don't laugh, reread and laugh
			mail	chess	black resigns, white player attempts initiation of new game until sent a memorial prayer card, on which he responds with e4
		home	video		record onto blueray, digitize and store on the family youtube channel
hilton		mini	soaps		dissolve after one shower, small chunks of yellow survive the trip to the sewer, soap croutons eaten by ducks
		glasses	case		given to local play company for production of <i>blasted</i>
hydro		bill			paid

Me:
 cranium
 mandible

cervical
 thoracic
 lumbar
 sacrum
 coccyx

clavical
 sternum
 scapula
 manubrium

humerus
 ulna
 radius

carpals
 metacarpals
 phalanges

femur
 patella
 tibia
 fibula

tarsals
 metatarsals
 phalanges

separate into boardgames and bird beaks, sell to stratford for future stage production about a yale fraternity

query chiropractor for purchase as an example of improper cell separation, donate to uottawa so students can file tightening nerve tracts while articulating the sum of the sorts: see one, saw one, saw another, remove, clean, organize, and wrap in a sheet

glue to the front of a hope chest, so nieces and nephews can crack it open searching for lego, or, reassemble the pieces above the oven so the last juices drip into the meals, or, joke about losing one in the garden, lose one in the garden, unsmile, and paw at the dirt

stash in a hope chest.
 during just for laughs gags
 measure the distance from elbow to *lisboa*

fish in the conclave until a fisher-friend gets a bit hand-sy, push him into the conclave then write about him grinding these bones into sharp pens, flipping angels to anglers

patter along wyandotte leaving chocolate pellets behind, attract carpenter ants who can extend pathways and, in case of safety pin failure, place sharp metal shivs inside their veal

leave these heals
 leave these metres
 with rows of figurine anglers

skull
 charles jeff
 spinal column
 rib
 laurent
 ant
 hands
 jean-baptiste
 legs
 feet
 felix

roads
 cobble
 will
 will
 tongue
 sneakers

compost:

i	you	i
	mum	
they	i i	they
swell		mould
break	flee	flip
crumple		dry
whittle	wheel	
picture	stick	backseat
	tongue	you
	frisbee	
	maggots	i

germination:

i swell backseat
 you mould dry
 they whittle frisbee
 they turn tongue
 mum flee you

i backseat crumple
 they picture turn
 they stick swell
 you maggots flip
 i i flee

whittle i backseat
 turn you tongue
 mould mum maggots
 dry they picture
 break i you

turn backseat i
 you flip you
 crumple maggot they
 break tongue mum

backseat break i
 you crumple mum

backseat i swell

“

-:

?

()

”

...!).

”

windswept i, maybe swell. you
 “they twice mould oblong maggots”
 docile i thunderously crumple backseat:
 mum! yet dry “zealous tongue?”
 brown they still flee picture
 ... i latterly whittle high-school stick-
 cute i so flip frisbee;
 sweet you quite break i()

)

tea	hole
back	bag
no	words
assimil	table
tit	ate
a	an
con	rum
clothes	tent
rec	line
break	commend
un	in
under	bruised
re	stand
uni	spites
deep	deal
with	end
cont	hold
de	end
pro	stable
me	cure
life	pact
pro	line
un	claim
fire	able
pro	works
inter	position
bow	burst
know	tie
any	ledge
out	one

something
now
he
form
ra
upp
fri
ma
kit
steps
tabl
ra
wa
for
rec
dam
sees
don
comfor
fri
reapp
def
tact
pile
c
ret
winds
tiles
mag
wint

ing
ing
here
rein
er
inbow
ercase
day
inland
kat
on
etop
inwater
shouts
ego
line
aged
aw
ate
table
endless
ear
end
bond
areless
old
or
et
got

vee|er
wa|ring
fi|lking
torren|nite
spo|t
ca|ken
rew|ble
baseme|rite
c|nt
h|ave
do|peful
m|ad
dr|um
bl|ip
r|ink
st|oar
sm|eer
st|ash
pr|ick
d|aise
fog|rop
dri|gy
win|ve
che|ter
toena|wed
fi|ls
ga|lea
wr|rrote
wr|ing
i|st
y

)

solve:

ferris wheel - wheel
 fairs – fairness
 (fair²)^{-ness} x centennial - cents
 + three-second delay between tracks
 - trains
 - storm + or
 + in vent
 - strawberry pasta sauce
 + gin - cranberry juice
 + european union
 - non
 + halloween hayrides
 - hellos - bonjour
 - (hi³)
 x (suicide hill + cioccolata + perogies)
 - monarch mountain
 no lunches + 8 exhales
 ÷ family trust - minors
 + (debt settlement x stanley cup)
 - lisbon letters lisbon
 x giggle at your own puns
 x strawberry festival
 + radioisotopes
 + intravenous^{hospital outfit}
 half - life
 x (county ditch ~ wallaceburg tournament)
 ÷ wheels on your cavalier

=

i collapse festivals within falsetto
 at the top of the wheel. I gamble my half-life
 while these mixtapes approach non-zero

i golden spiral to a critical maximum
 within the identity scrapbook
 i theorum recipes
 derive onion and garlic bases
 converge the arc length
 of a climber's rope

i mask parameters
 inside my língua
 i limit the crown

)

asleep:

smushed against the wall flower i glow for her when i taste iron
and tin from chewing lips tongue little flesh bits stuck in the throat

fin
cough

tonight

ii

re
wrist
te

)

stones

down the family path
i pitch stones
mums hangs wreaths
a marble lamb melts from years of acid rain
not the first, maybe the second, never the last one

blanket

silt

stones

charcoal

grass

to
no
me
to
no

stones

dirt
mounds

cists
circle

her in
divide number
some no the a an
all my articles
i sign estate

stones

tie

eat

pre
sem

com
dad

dawn
means

uni
a

stones

launch

sigh

in volumes or can i find my monsoon
can i fleet and lose the letters
chasing word junk this lingo this noun this foot
grown like a tree can i reach the root of this
will i take pine or oak or flame or none

)

awake:

eyes clench a retire while fingers seize
the stomach's knot. while small pills still
ills still end in a coffin: close brain's curtain

earlobe

toenails

)

autolysis of an empty house:

wet tiles
wettle
we I

kitchen sink

toothpaste

pancake mix

bent blinds

brown carpet

record player

luggage

amp

unopened carton of cigarettes

lightbulbs

broom
room

doors

)

solve:

httperson - 404

Ahhhhhhhhhh. This person you search for got zapped.

We broke someone or you can't type.

You just 404'D.

Could you please go back to 404?

Sorry but the person you requested cannot be.

Broken.

In case of person, do not use elevator.

The person you seek has moved, deleted, or doesn't

break

even.

=

the template you
white screen
black text

i scan for malware
so i can cache coats

refreshing guests
cheese plates

common sorries
dictate
webmaster

but host memory
reaches fatal error

mod_rewrite disabled:
flower checker
overload

if i google
i see you

but the page request
never stops loading

)

ending:

I will wake up. I will pour a glass of grape juice and will drink. I
will eat wheat germ and half a grapefruit. I will compost myself.

note

)

Rotten banana under the thumbs. I will take a shower. Suave hair
and beard. Sud armpits to ass-crack. Wash away. I will finish in

stone

)

under three minutes. I will dry. I will try. I will dress myself. I will
floss the back teeth. I will floss. I will remove cerumen from the

)

ear canal. I will cleanse the toilet once a month. A deep cleaning. I
will use a toothbrush for the shine and the always yellow rim spot.

puke

)

I will snapchat friends. Photo of me 140 characters and a palate of
emojis. Umbrella. Volcano. Ghost. Train. I will snap on a tie. I will

exit

)

sit on the porch. Gravel cotton polyester blend. I will sort the

)

recycling. Cans, glass, cardboard, pizza box bottoms. I will care

)

about the environment. I will get in my parent's SUV. I will sit in

)

the back. I will fix my jacket. I will say hello. I will talk games.

)

Hockey. League. Firewatch. I will be a good companion. Humour	begin)
in pop culture. Sport reference. Play on word play. I will snap back	stay)
)		
of the SUV. I will entwine my arm with Nami. I, cane. Family. I)
))		
nothing. I will hug aunts, uncles, cousins, one poodle. I will not)
rise or kneel. I will attempt Ukranian. I will kneel. I will listen to)
my mum's quake. I will chew my cheek. I will pass down kleenex.)
I will condolence my uncle. I will kiss the body. I will offer my)
)		
Facebook the suit, no emoji. Upload. I will get in mum's yaris.)
)		
rock. I will change the station. I will change the station. I will talk)
small: mhm, yes, ya. The flag falls off mum's car. Last car in line.)
I will roll down the window. I will change the station. I will roll up	still)
the window. The car enters the cemetery. I will enter the cemetery.	<i>fm</i>)

))		
))		
)		
her hand. I will condolence whisper. I will hug mum. I will stop)	mollify)
))		
my arms. Bright green. I will hover around the wake. I will shake)	pocket)))
hands. I will shake hands times three. I will eat. Cheese. Crackers.)	wind)
Taco dip. <i>Pastéis de nata</i> . I will dip. I will sip. I will crack. I will))
swallow. I will balloon. The large object floats. I will stop))
))		
Go home. I will text back to friends. Tweet grass stains and)	reset)
))		
bathroom. I will wretch. I will call. Busy. I will crawl the))
stairs. Wood bends and snaps. Cuts the knee. I will bleed and))
))		
))		



bite the skin. Blood and itch. Bite to the knuckle. I will find my
 loss my skins. I will turn on the light. I will clean my nails. I will
 and hair. My mind paces streetlights. I will lie. I will merge
 pillow. I will crack fingers. I will type. I will masturbate. I will
 on times to be safe. I will check the time. I will let the sun set. I
 sigh and climb. I will enter my room. I will turn on the computer.
 cry. I will catch up to mum. I will stand next. I will hold
 Kick mcdonalds bags. Stale fries mix with sneaker. I will put on
 Sidelnyk. Nogueira. Gomes. I will touch my sister's name. I will
 Hums to life. I will write a letter. I will print it. Nice font. Gothica
 too much? Will I slim down? How do I lose my body? How do I
 my face. Red nunning. Snort-nosed punk. I will leave
 grass stains)

Closing the Damn (ed Parenthesis)

Amilcar John Nogueira

In the last chapter of Margaret Atwood's book, *Negotiating with the Dead*, Atwood hypothesizes that “perhaps all writing is motivated, deep down, by a fear and a fascination with mortality – by a desire to make the risky trip to the Underworld, and to bring something or someone back from the dead” (156). Atwood, believing in an intrinsic connection between the writer's fear of death and the act of the writer writing, makes two statements. The first is that a writer chooses to write because her reaction to death is strong enough that the writer needs to record something that has some permanence. The second is that the “something or someone” that the writer attempts to bring back from the dead can only be brought back to the land of the living as writing. My poetry manuscript, “swell,” attempts to create a record of the dead my persona encounters and the effect dealing with mortality has on him. My manuscript does so by engaging with the events that happen after a loved one dies, such as wakes, services, and wills. In this essay, I explore how Canadian poets, such as Robert Kroetsch and bpNichol, have employed the specific technique of the open parenthesis and how this seemingly tiny punctuation marker functions within a narrative about death.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the parenthesis as “[a] word, clause, or sentence inserted as an explanation, aside, or afterthought into a passage with which it has not necessarily any grammatical connection, in writing usually marked off by brackets” (web). The use of parentheses change depending on the textual form. In scripts

for plays, parentheses can indicate emotion in a line of dialogue or an action for an actor to take. For example, in *Doc*, by Sharon Pollock, stage directions guide the actors “(CATHERINE and EV look at each other. CATHERINE looks away)” (347). In prose, the parenthesis often relies on an aside within a text, such as in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. Traditionally in poetry, a parenthesis predominantly suggests an aside by a persona attempting to provide detail on a situation or to note a specific contrast between what is written and what is in the parenthesis. For example, A.M. Klein's *The Rocking Chair* uses the parenthesis to extend the image of the rocking chair's. The rocking chair “is a character (like that old drunk Lacoste / exhaling amber, and toppling on his pins)” (467). In more recent poetry, post-modern poets have employed the technique of the open parenthesis to denote the fluidity of time to confuse the line between aside and main thought. In the Canadian journal *Open Letter*, bpNichol and Frank Davey's article, entitled “The Prosody of Open Verse,” focuses on detailing notations often used in contemporary open form poetry (5-13). Nichol and Davey define the open parenthesis as “commonly used to indicate an interpolated comment that becomes the main text”(12). This interpolation changes the original context of a line in a poem. By breaking the boundary between the line's original comment and the aside, the text removes a hierarchy between the aside and original statement creating a sentence where the beginning and the ending of thought are impossible to discern by traditional markers. Many poets engage in this practice: Robert Kroetsch, Daphne Marlatt, Barry McKinnon, George Stanley, and Phyllis Webb, to name a just few.

For my project I aim to provide a concrete exploration of the difference between beginning and ending, especially in the case of mortality, by closing the parenthesis. I aim to explore the difficult space of dealing and working through loss, rather than wallowing in the writerly underworld in perpetual remembrance. The closed parenthesis becomes a symbol that encapsulates the complexity of dealing with mourning.

In the preface to Kroetsch's *Completed Field Notes*, a collection of all his poetry books published prior to 2000, Canadian poet and scholar Fred Wah examines the poetic styling Kroetsch uses and to which he constantly returns. Wah remarks that as the collection is “seek[ing] awareness of its own making, [readers] find only the impossibility of either beginnings or endings” (ix). Wah writes about how Kroetsch utilizes a pluralistic idea that life continues past the poem or the object. Instead of existing with the life and death of the writer, the poem takes on a life through self-awareness of the poetic process. Through constant self-assessment, the poem seeks to survive in a landscape where it lives in a state of flux. The first poem in Kroetsch's collection, “Stone Hammer Poem,” revolves around a persona who attempts to discern the history of a stone found by his father in a field. The poem constantly raises questions about the history of the stone: Who made it? What is it now used for? The stone holds a history longer than Kroetsch's or the reader's: it spans thousands of years. In Atwood's terms, the object becomes representative of the memories connected to the stone, allowing the memories to live on with the stone in the poem. The poem begins with the persona describing the stone shape and history:

The rawhide loops
 are gone, the
 hand is gone, the
 buffalo's skull
 is gone; (3)

The persona defines the stone by what additions of it are gone, parts that previous owners shaped or added to change the stone into a hammer. But revealing that the stone had once been a part of a stone hammer, the persona finds no rawhide loop. The hand of the original owner is lost to memory and time. The buffalo skull, which the hammer could have been used on, has decayed and disappeared. All that remains to convey these memories is the stone itself.

In the second section of the poem, the persona re-examines the artifact:

Cut to a function,
 this stone was
 (the hand is gone— (3)

Kroetsch opens this parenthesis by rewriting the same line from his first section—changing the spacing, punctuation, and word placement—and does not close the parenthesis for the rest of the poem. By leaving the parenthesis open, Kroetsch ties the history of the stone to the object of the stone hammer and vice versa. The history becomes harder to uncover as the persona delves deeper into its history. The distance between “the hand is” and “gone” grows because the history imbued in the object is no

longer remembered. Thus, the stone finds its “function” in the poem. Aside from representing the tool, it becomes a representative of memory. By recording the stone in the poem, the stone and its history live on. Kroetsch encompasses history known and unknown by leaving the parenthesis open to the possibilities of future knowledge. While the persona cannot entirely know the past of the object, he can present the object as still existing and continuing to create a history as it changes hands.

This idea of extracting time and history from objects happens again in the fifth section of the poem, this time using three open and unclosed parenthesis:

(the saskatoons bloom
 white (infrequently
 the chokecherries the
 highbush cranberries the
 pincherries bloom
 white along the barbed
 wire fence (the
 pemmican winter (5)

Here, the persona overlaps the flora with a proposed indigenous history of the land. First, the persona focuses on the specific details of flowers and berries. The first flower leads to a memory of berries on a fence, which leads to pemmican. Pemmican is an indigenous food often made from meat and the berries the narrator mentions. Here, too, an extra space divides two words. This division between “pemmican” and “winter” suggests a

similar loss of historical detail. The gap holds an untold narrative of the people who would take these flowers and fruits and make the pemmican. The persona can only guess what the narrative may be and he leaves these narratives up to the audience to fill in the possible details that would involve a pemmican winter. The persona's goal is to reveal how, just like the stone hammer, the land and its peoples holds its own lengthy narrative. These stories are not complete. Instead, the readers receive fragments of these possible stories and creates their own narratives from the fragments. The story in the “Stone Hammer Poem” is not about the people who once held the stone hammer—except to note how that history is beyond the persona's knowledge—but the details of the stone's various pasts, the gaps between words, and the persona's efforts to connect the part to/through the present artifact. The unconventional punctuation gestures toward a whole history, still largely unknown.

By excessively closing parentheses in my long poem, “swell,” I aim to show that even a short life may include untold narratives, yet that life still has an endpoint. The constant forced closure of death frames the relationship of my persona to his loved ones. Where the “Stone Hammer Poem” becomes a stand-in for the stone hammer itself, the story of the stone hammer is only partially offered by the persona as the persona suggests that an object (or even a person's) entire history cannot be known. In “swell,” I emulate Atwood's suggestion that the writer must return from the Underworld instead of staying or becoming immobile: “all must descend to where the stories are kept; all must take care not to be captured and held immobile by the past” (178). My poem is a poem of endings.

I close the parenthesis in different ways. A closing parenthesis ends each section of “swell,” signifying a shift in form. The first section of “swell” concludes after shifting away from a narrative focused on specific family stories (such as a phone call to the persona noting that another person in the family has died). The persona responds by thinking about a photo he has:

(but who shot the photo?
who was there?). (7)

The persona is stuck on the question about who took the photo, seeking a way to record all possible details revolving around an enjoyable memory with the now deceased. The persona keeps asking himself, but finds no answer. Instead he comes to the conclusion that focusing on the details around the picture, rather than on what the picture signifies, detracts from his connection to the person. The “extra” closing parenthesis closes not only the aside, but also suggests that the photo is enough because it is something to remember the loved one by: the punctuation gives reminder to the persona and the reader that closure can be a deliberate decision. Similar importance can be seen in the line from the “compost” and “germination” section of the poem: “()” (39). This double closed parenthesis reveals the consistent ending processes within my manuscript. The persona constantly seeks to answer his own proposed questions about grief and death. The extra closed parenthesis allows the persona to stop his search for the answers to “who took the photo” or on how to deal with mortality. Instead, the persona comes to terms with the questions and with the ideas of existing within grief by moving past the current moment,

until another moment arises to create a new but similar challenge. The closed parenthesis then, both closes the moment of grief that may feel endless, and at the same time signals a progress, a movement forward- both textually and in grieving.

My long poem concludes with a prose section slowly consumed by closed parentheses. The persona becomes overwhelmed by the act of dealing with mortality, of the author and of the author's loved ones:

)

her hand. I will condole whisper. I will hug mum. I will stop

))

my arms. Bright green. I will hover around the wake. I will shake (57)

The parentheses interrupts the act of mourning while showing the silence created from the grief of the author for the loved one. The persona continues through the day, in the future tense, seeking a way to ground himself in the actions he will take, only for those actions to be shaped by the closed parentheses. With their inclusion, the sentence breaks and the persona presents himself as lacking not only control over how to function within the spaces of ritual, but also control over himself. The last page combines these silenced sections with the image of closed parentheses obscuring his words, making it hard to read. This page gives the reader the idea that death simultaneously creates and destroys the persona's attempts at understanding mortality:

“(my)face))Red))running))Sno))mused))pink))I will leave))Grass stains)” (60).

The closed parenthesis acts as both image and signifier. The image of the repeating

parenthesis on top of the persona's somewhat erased dialogue suggests that death and the act of dealing with death infuses meaning into life. This section merges the persona's experiences with the marker of death and endings, forcing readers to engage his representation of grief either by trying to find the words through the image, or to ignore them altogether. The persona cannot escape that the end has come, causing his statements within the last section to lose coherence, nor can he escape the effect the end has on him, which is in a state between having no ability to communicate while at the same time only communicating in a confused state.

Closing the Parenthesis on Canadian Identity

The search for identity is not a new topic to the Canadian Long Poem. The Early Canadian long poem often functions within the parameters critic C.D. Mazoff presents in his book, *Anxious Allegiances: Legitimizing Identity in the Early Canadian Long Poem*. Mazoff begins his discussion by examining what he sees as the main focus of the nineteenth century Canadian long poem: “Early Canadian long poems, in particular those that are topographical, have often had the telling, or, perhaps more accurately, the retelling of history as one of their ancillary functions” (3). Mazoff focuses on the cultural divide between the Imperial British subject and the developing Canadian consciousness. His idea on the topographical and its relation to the retelling of history is not far off from what Kroetsch or even bpNichol attempt to do in their long poems during the second half of the twentieth century. Kroetsch's poetry often focuses on the topographical, infusing

the space of his poetics with local colour; his most well-known example, “Seed Catalogue,” a book-length poem written against the backdrop of a seed catalogue, or “Stone Hammer Poem, about a rural Albertan family field where a farmer finds a stone tool. Kroetsch defines being Canadian by retelling local history. “The Stone Hammer Poem,” for example, connects the persona, his father, and his grandfather to the stone found in a farmer's field.

In my long poem, the story splits history on the page between the present and the past. My long poem begins by invoking history: “let me tell you of home” (1). I am able to explore death through the different cultural lenses of my persona and his family. Atwood remarks in *Negotiating with the Dead* that “[the dead] want to be recounted. They don't want to be voiceless; they don't want to be pushed aside, obliterated. They want us to know” (163). Stories, inherently, are a retelling. Stories function as a way to return to the space where the dead still live, if only for a brief moment. The persona in my long poem retells the stories his family has recounted to him, explore his own experiences with grief, and writes both down so he can reveal the impact that these stories have on him. I move away from the specifics of telling an individual's history and instead focus on situating an individual within a plethora of different stories. In my research, I searched for a possible way to intersect Canadian identity with poetic technique. I looked to the Toronto Research Group (TRG), a poetic organization created by authors bpNichol and Steve McCaffery to explore the theory and practice of contemporary poetry during the 1970s, as a place to begin my exploration of

contemporary poetry. They state that they “maintained a common subscription to Gertrude Stein's credo that the writer's responsibility is to be contemporary.

Contemporary for TRG was non-canonic and international” (18).

McCaffery, an immigrant from the United Kingdom, argues that the Canadian scene, especially during the 1970s, was “a milieu obsessed with establishing a Canadian identity largely predicated upon nationalist narratives and values” (18). This definition of Canadian identity largely emerges in the ideas Margaret Atwood collected in her book *Survival* which aims to discern a national Canadian identity that distinguishes it from the United States and Britain. Atwood explores texts written in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, building a list of texts that support a nationalist Canadian identity. My long poem deals with the tension between a nationalist Canadian identity and an international and contemporary Canadian identity by moving into a space that fuses Canadian narrative into a poetic swelling. By shifting focus from the specific death of one person, to another, and another, I place the elements of narrative within the poem in contrast with the different types of poetic wordplay, specifically puns. In my long poem, I replace the humour found in the resolution of a pun with sadness through the words with which I play. For example, in the section entitled “on my last,” I break the word “ending” on the right column side of the page, putting focus on the words within that section: “ding/an” (25). When the persona deciphers the pun, the play on the word comes back to the constant endings the persona faces. His identity and the moments and words that define him come through the puns. The pun reveals attempts at distance from the intense

emotions created by grief. The focus in my long poem is on closing the identity narrative that Atwood insists on with the role of katabasis in the writer's journey. In Canadian critic Smaro Kamboureli's text *On The Edge of Genre: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem*, Kamboureli traces the lineage of the Canadian Long Poem in a chapter entitled "An Archaeology of the Canadian Long Poem." Kamboureli begins the chapter by discerning the difference between nineteenth century poets and contemporary poets¹:

“[T]he nineteenth-century poet wanted to define an identity, whereas the contemporary poet often and resolutely resists the proposition that there is such a thing as identity; the older poet wrote out of a belief in the truthfulness of history, while the poet of today sets out to unwrite and rewrite history by deliberately suspending its purported objectivity and inclusiveness” (3).

For Kamboureli, both identity and history are foci of the long poem. These early Canadian long poems aim to define Canadian as something within the British Empire but at the same time unique. Contemporary long poems still work within similar ideas: those of history and identity and the ways a poet attempts to define them. For example, both Kroetsch's poems and Webb's *Naked Poems* seek self-definition. As well, even when these poets subvert or attack the idea of the definition of an identity, they still engage history (like Webb's connections to Sappho in *Naked Poems*) and identity (Kroetsch's persona's connection to the stone).

In *The Long Poem Anthology* (edited by Michael Ondaatje), Kroetsch provides a

1 Contemporary in her definition, is poetry from the sixties to the publication of the book in the early nineties: Michael Ondaatje, Daphne Marlatt, Robert Kroetsch, Eli Mandel, to name a few she explores in her book.

statement about his long poem “Seed Catalogue.” Kroetsch discusses the idea of “the dream of origins”(311) and the merging of myth into beginnings. “Seed Catalogue” examines origins through its persona's search for self-definition within the prairie landscape. The persona combines memory, familial origins, and text from a seed catalogue, that, when presented on the page, fragment the persona and the persona's understanding of self. In the line, “How do you grow a poet?” (33), the persona seeks an answer to growing a poet, as if there is a concrete way similar to the growing of the fruits and vegetables within the seed catalogue. The line “How do you grow” changes through the poem, from “How do you grow a poet?”(33), to “How do you grow a lover?” (26), to “How do you grow a prairie town?” (28). These questions take place throughout the persona's personal history, familial history, and town's history. These permutations on what is growing within each section of the poem allow the persona to create an identity from each answer he seeks. He is a poet, but he's also a lover and a part of the prairie town. Each separate permutation reveals a new part of his self-definition. Each new space of identity comes from a separate and distinct beginning space, as if the persona is in a constant state of flux. Kroetsch strongly engages the idea of constant change of identity. In the “Statements by the Poets” at the back of *The Long Poem Anthology*, Kroetsch engages the idea of identity through metaphor stating: “Do not feed the apocalypse. Metamorphoses please” (312). Kroetsch finds the possibility of constant evolution and change through ideas of redefinition preferable to that of a stagnant state of “apocalypse.” Kroetsch's remarks decipher the constant searching within “Seed Catalogue” as one of

growth and development. Kroetsch defines his writings as a “continuing poem: not the having written but the *writing*. The poem as long as a life” (311). Kroetsch focuses on not the product but the process. The life-long poem² aims to constantly evolve and change. It renegotiates the parameters of the audience and the poem. This metamorphosis becomes a renewal. The apocalypse comes with the closing of the parenthesis. I search for a space of understanding within the search of how endings function, rather than focusing on the metamorphosis.

bpNichol engages metamorphosis at the level of the word. In Books 1-4 of *The Martyrology*, Nichol focuses on constructing “Saints” by breaking words that begin with the letters “st.” For example, “St Orm” from the word storm, St Reat from the obsolete word for street, streat. Nichol changes the current meaning of a word and finds new ways to employ it poetically. In Book 5, sections of the poem function as an exploration of streets, with footnotes connecting the sections at different points within the poem. Street names even become a part of the poem: Daven's port, St. George, St. Clair. Nichol contrasts St Reat with names of Toronto streets such as St. George. Nichol wants the reader to experience the streets linguistically as well as markers of routes and continuous pathways that the reader treads. The physical space is interspersed with the language.

2 The “life-long poem” is one way to access bpNichol's *The Martyrology*, or American poet Ron Silliman's *Universe*. In *Wave Composition*, Silliman describes the design of his project for *Universe* as having 360 different sections: “should I live long enough to do enough of this to make sense, and let's hope I do—that the rest of the project, the 200 sections I might not write, that they will seem at least implicitly clear to the reader in that sense.” Silliman notes that the goal of such a project is to reveal a certain thought process to the reader in the case of in-completion: the poem, then, despite being a project that reaches decades forward – beyond the probable life of a poet now 76 years – can only function as a life-long poem. I aim for an opposite idea. Rather than a long poem that seeks to remain open and incomplete, my manuscript should stay closed through it's self-reflexive nature. The poem reads as an end to itself rather than a continuation. There are no after words.

Nichol shifts words and makes puns, revealing the connection between contemporary and archaic words. For Nichol, language holds its own history of development within itself. Language develops and changes over time by breaking apart words and creating meanings from words that can be found within the word. Nichol reveals the intrinsic connection between ancient and modern words, or rather a sense of a history, as part of the word:

here

ere i begin²

[...]

arch a is m

a connection seen

bridges tween. (n. pag.)

Nichol follows a tangent through the new beginning he creates using a footnote. This footnote leads to the start of section 2 which begins “arch a is m.” Nichol finds the obsolete “ere” within “here,” leading to the line which breaks apart the word “archaism.” Nichol plays with connections as a reminder to the reader of the importance of the way history and language intertwine: connecting the reader to language's past through each break of a new word. “Ere”, an archaic word meaning “Early, at an early hour” (OED Online), comes from “here”, meaning the persona is situated within a specific time and moment. That moment is a blend between the immediate and the archaic. Because “ere” leads to “arch is a m” Nichol reveals that archaic language still reveals connections

between modern thoughts on language.

In Section 11 of Book 5, Nichol presents an erasure poem. He makes this poem by taking a section entitled “Clouds” from Book 2 of *The Martyrology*, and erasing each stanza, save for the first word and the repetition of the last letter of the first word. In Book 2, he presents this lyric:

surely when they fell
 it was into grace

left the white streets of that higher town
 to tumble down the long blue highway to the trees'
 tops saint reat &
 saint and travelling thru those lands of colour
 they'd followed the rainbow down to find
 the land at the end of the rainbow
 the ancient saints had taught about
 this day they'd set their feet upon the earth
 as if it were the lost home
 the lost planet of their birth (n. pag.)

In Book 5, he removes most of the content, leaving behind only remnants of the past books, forcing the reader to find the connections between the original clouds and the repetition:

surely y

y

y

y y (n. pag.)

Book 5 replicates the original text space for space. Each “y” sits in the same line and spot as it did in the original passage from Book 2. This replication allows *The Martyrology* to retread its past. In doing so, Nichol once again examines the poem's history and how the poem uses history to expand itself. Reusing a passage from “Clouds,” Nichol uses the same words and comes to a new conclusion: in this case, “surely” becomes a cloud, almost floating off the page, untethered from the original specific meanings of the “Clouds” text while still tied to these meanings due to its relation to the source text. The focus on the specific word “surely” becomes a space of new importance on its own. “surely” floats on the page leaving behind “y” after “y.” Meaning becomes about how “surely” works within the next context of the blank page and what it holds on its own. Nichol often reworks the created mythology of *The Martyrology*. The entirety of Book 5 could be, in a way, construed as an exploration of a phrase from a passage near the start of Book 3:

-suddenly the sky opened-

it is all blue
 (bluer than blue)
 it was all blue

bluer

BLUE (n. pag.)

The poem opens with the sky stretching above the word “blue” on the page four times, and twice as “bluer.” Book 5 opens with a similar phrase “blue/bluer/bloor” and closes with the words “blue/bluer/blur.” Nichol's search is one of constant opening and merging.

By repeating the word in different permutations, Nichol offers the reader choice in meaning. Each “blue” may lead the reader on different poetic “streets.” “blue/bluer” could express the shifting of the persona's feelings until it's all a “blur.” Perhaps the relation between the last words of each “bloor” and “blur” offers the experience of the Toronto street: a blur of constant action. Nichol wants the reader to have multiple interpretations from such a seemingly simple phrase.

I explore the possibility of opening words to multiplicative meaning, while directing that meaning through the lens of a grieving persona. In “swell,” I attempt to break words in half through the use of a column on the page as a fracture representing the emotional resonance of the persona. I also explore the multiple meanings that words hold. By taking prefixes, suffixes, and compound words, and separating them from their original roots, I create new words such as “re|stand and “under|bruised” (43). By the end of the section, I abandon using such a break and instead move to break the word to explore possible words that make no logical sense such as “baseme|rite” (45). This change allows me to explore the multiple possibilities these words have, especially when these words overlap in meaning with words repeated throughout the long poem ,such as “m|ad dr|um”(45). The word and person “mum” becomes part of the words mad and drum, shifting the possible role that the mother figure takes within the text. I take from Nichol the idea that severing and reconstituting individual words creates multiple meaning for readers to explore. Since each created word follows another created word, readers are able to find relation in their meanings. “c|nt / h|ave / d|opeful / m|ad / dr|um”

(45) become a miniature statement about what the persona can and cannot have emotionally. The reader can seek to reconnect the words to their original phrase and can connect those meanings to the created words possible meanings. Each relationship with a new word provides a new chance of expansion. Ideas about death and mourning force an emotional connection that can provide the reader a specific lens of meaning around ideas of grieving. Since I create new words through the use of the column on the page, I am able to imbue grief into the creation of the words. The column functions as a poetic tool to express the loss of a loved one through literary markers. Sometimes the blank space provides the experience of loss, as in the section “autolysis of an empty home,” where one side of the page is blank, indicating something missing. Then, on a facing page, I overlap words, once again obfuscating the original word. The sections of the phrase that blur suggest new words and meanings within the original phrase:

wet tiles
 we tile kitchen sink (53)

“wet tiles” become inherently connected to “we tile” and “we i.” The words contain more than their original intent. The tiles become representative of a possible event between the persona and the loved one as well as the now distance “we” becoming “i.” The poem represents autolysis, the first process of corpse decay, through both the visual decay of the word and the emotional bond between the persona and the unknown loved one.

My work focuses on exploring culturally taboo topic of dying, death, and grief through wordplay. Historian Philippe Ariès outlines the shift in Western society's attitudes

towards death in his (aptly named) book *Western Attitudes Toward Death*, remarking that in the twentieth century “[death] would become shameful and forbidden” (85). In texts, the topic of death often ends up relegated to the technical or the overtly sentimental. One such example of technical writing is Ariès's book *The Hour of Our Death*, which provides an important understanding into how Western culture processes and deals with grief. Readers may turn to Aries's book for comfort and to glean more information about how contemporary North Americans deal with death. What such a book does not provide, however, is an emotional or artistic response. Sentimental writings, such as formulaic gift cards or literary poems placed on the back of a memorial card, move into the cliché through transference into popular culture. Often times the poems on these cards are reused over and over again for each funeral: thus, the poem moves into the area of the cliché due to its constant use.

I engage both sentimental writings and scientific terminology to reveal emotional resonance within the process of grief. Early on in my long poem, memorial cards interject themselves into the narrative, often between a line of dialogue that attempts to cross the page:

no problem |
if it's his hand, | [Do Not Stand at my Grave]

right? (5)

The dialogue on the left division of the line competes for the reader's attention with the interjection of the cliché sentiment from the poem listed on the memorial card. The card's

interjection reveals that sentimental language cannot represent the complex feelings of grief. Rather, the card placates complex emotions by repeating the same phrase that is commonplace in a funeral home, instead of becoming an important marker of the death. The line becomes a nuisance, interrupting the sentence from the persona's grandfather. The grandfather attempts to relay a memory to the persona but the message breaks because of the layers of communication: the column and the card. Thus a powerful moment is undercut by cliché, distancing the persona from his grandfather. This theme of language as distance repeats in the sections entitled “solve:” which rely on mathematical writing to simultaneously create this distance through detail while revealing the grief the persona holds:

+ intravenous^{hospital outfit}

half - life

x (county ditch ~ wallaceburg tournament) (46).

The persona attempts to break death down into specific mathematical understandings. In doing so, the specific moment of “+ intravenous^{hospital outfit}” forces the reader to add the intravenous to the other images in the poem while also seeing the relationship between the intravenous and the hospital outfit. The hospital outfit sits in the exponential position in algebra, where a number is usually multiplied by itself a certain amount of times. By applying this algebraic notation, I create an image that merges IVs and hospital outfits. “intravenous” becomes the main descriptor while “hospital outfit” attempts to fulfil the notation of how many times the persona has seen an IV. The mathematics fail, but the

image attempts explanation for the persona. The “x” becomes a marker of both “multiplies” and “time.” Time becomes both a unit of measurement of grief (the times shared between the persona and the loved one) as well as a search for meaning: if the persona can solve the memories and emotions that rise from grief, perhaps he can find an answer to his specific response to their deaths. The attempt to mathematically extract meaning from grief provides a disconnect between the persona and his loved-ones. The representation of times as both multiplication of events in one's life as well as a mathematical purview allows the persona a chance to disassociate from grief through the notations that come through ritual. Mathematics merges into a grieving ritual: if the persona can solve the problem, he no longer needs to mourn. This tension between mathematics and poetics reveals to the reader the persona's attempts and failures to quantify grief. Since his equations are faulty, so too are his solutions.

Conclusion

My long poem attempts to close the parentheses within the contemporary Canadian long poem, specifically noting the ways that poets have used the open parenthesis to provide an idea of plurality that focuses on expansion within the text, breaking from form. As Atwood suggests about the metaphorical land of the dead: “you can cross over into theirs. You can go on a journey from this world to that. You can go down into the land of the dead and then you can get out again, back to the land of the living” (167). My long poem attempts to take this journey and explore the possible ways

that grief inhabits and inhabits my persona, who constantly attempts to dissect the effects of mortality and mourning.

At the end of Kamboureli's book, she remarks that “the long poem never lets itself be entirely seduced by either silence or words, death or life. Nor does it cradle the reader in a cosy world of familiarity” (203). I have attempted to represent the moment of fusion between death and life within my long poem. My persona goes on a journey wherein he enacts mourning, the mechanical processes of grief, and the understanding of the totality of death. And then he comes back again. And his words are marked by the silence and the dead. My long poem approaches death through life, ending in both silence and words. Examining the traces left behind by the dead; whether through wills or through wet tiles: endings come. The apocalypse is now.

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