Studies in Canadian Literature
Études en littérature canadienne

Written on the Body: Personal Monumentalization in the Work of David Chariandy and Tessa McWatt

Camille Isaacs

Volume 47, Number 2, 2022

Special Section: Black Lives Matter
Dossier spécial : Black Lives Matter

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1108321ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/1108321ar

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

University of New Brunswick, Dept. of English

ISSN

0380-6995 (print)
1718-7850 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this document

Isaacs, C. (2022). Written on the Body: Personal Monumentalization in the Work of David Chariandy and Tessa McWatt. *Studies in Canadian Literature / Études en littérature canadienne*, *47*(2), 53–71. https://doi.org/10.7202/1108321ar

Written on the Body: Personal Monumentalization in the Work of David Chariandy and Tessa McWatt

Camille Isaacs

Many communities have grappled with what to do with outdated and/or controversial monuments and eponymous buildings in light of Black Lives Matter (BLM) movements around the world, recalling responses to other instances of inappropriate monumentalization in history. For example, in the aftermath of the Second World War, many European cities had to contend with relics of a past that some would rather have forgotten or remembered in distinctly different ways. Various counter-monument movements arose with the intention to leach power from the edifice in the town square and disseminate it in a way that better reflected the often neglected communities behind iconic decision makers. The theorists emerging out of this time argued for the redistribution of memorialization from the ossified monument to the living, breathing, moving body, which would then disseminate memory beyond the static statue or building and keep it alive.

Canada is not immune to these discussions. Although there have been several notable removals of statues and renamings of institutions in recent years, we must also be mindful of the reverse: of how the neglect, erasure, and demolition of particular communities have led to the denial of blackness in the Canadian space (examples include Africville in Nova Scotia and Hogan's Alley in Vancouver, among many others). What, then, is the best way to commemorate a community, a person, or an event? How does one acknowledge what is at times a traumatic history while not being mired in debilitating stasis? So many of the authors and artists discussed below have found innovative ways to commemorate Canadian and diasporic blackness. What they share is an approach to history and memorialization that is current, flexible, and embodied and encompasses the ordinary human being.

In "Between Memory and History: *Les lieux de mémoire*,"[1] Pierre Nora introduces the concept of "peoples of memory" (8), which refers

specifically to the Jewish diaspora with its long history of displacement, particularly during the Second World War. In part because of their concomitant exclusion from various historical and archival documentation, Jews were forced to carry their histories and memories with them. As Nora argues, "the atomisation of a general memory into a private one has given the obligation to remember a power of internal coercion. It gives everyone the necessity to remember and to protect the trappings of identity" (16). Nora also suggests that it falls on individuals and communities to memorialize their histories, rather than letting them disappear from more traditional sources of memorialization, such as the archive or monument. I contend that modern diasporic populations, particularly those emanating from the Caribbean, much like the Jewish populations that Nora describes, should be considered as embodied migrating memorials of their particular and often neglected histories. Since the trauma of race and race relations is an ongoing, sometimes daily occurrence, it has not yet moved into the past; it has not yet been made history. Personal monumentalization is a fitting way to commemorate the after-effects of slavery, given that the reverberations of this institution continue to affect communities across Canada, the United States, and beyond.

Christina Sharpe reckons with this challenge in her influential book *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. In particular, she queries the absence of a National Slavery Museum in the United States: "How do we memorialize an event that is still ongoing? . . . How does one memorialize the everyday? How does one . . . 'come to terms with' (which usually means move past) ongoing and quotidian atrocity?" (20). However, rather than conceiving of memory as embedded in the museum or monument or archive, I argue that migrating, monumental black bodies themselves can function as sites of memory. *Lieux de mémoire* can be lodged in bodies if we consider people to be monuments — or memorials — of their various histories, cultural signifiers, and traumas.

Both David Chariandy's *Soucouyant: A Novel of Forgetting* (2007) and Tessa McWatt's *This Body* (2004) provide prominent examples of characters who embody memory and then travel with that personal history, whether they want to or not, whether they remember it or not. *Soucouyant* follows an unnamed narrator who has returned home to Scarborough, Ontario, to care for his ailing, Trinidadian-born mother, Adele, two years after abandoning her. In a series of flashbacks, he

recalls the diasporic journey of the family, including the racism that they experienced in Canada. The Canadian-born narrator eventually teases out his mother's traumatic story: Adele and her mother endured financial instability in a small town in Trinidad during the Second World War, where her mother took on sex work to support them. One day as a child, Adele runs away and encounters a *soucouyant*,[2] a vampire-like figure; eventually, she ends up at an American military base, where she accidentally sets her mother on fire and burns her own scalp. The majority of the story takes place in Scarborough after Adele has immigrated to Canada and started a family there. Chariandy's novel details her struggle with dementia in the later part of her life. By the time the son has returned to care for his mother, she has forgotten much of her past, but her body remembers.

This Body, in contrast, portrays the protagonist, Victoria Layne, as someone who cannot seem to forget. The novel follows her from Toronto to London, England, with flashbacks and quick trips to her native Guyana. Victoria goes to London in search of her old lover, Kola, who has died, as she later finds out. At the outset of the novel, the almost-retired Victoria struggles with both old loves and new ones, with an inability to let go of the past. Partway through the novel, she becomes the guardian of her eleven-year-old nephew, Derek, after her sister dies in a car accident in Guyana. Coping with the loss of her sister as well as her unsuccessful love life, Victoria must come to terms with the past in order to parent her nephew. The novel is interspersed with various recipes, for Victoria is a fabulous cook and baker, and often mediates relationships through food. Both Adele and Victoria personify alternative forms of monumentalization as they carry their various histories with them in the diaspora.

This concept of an alternative, personalized monumentalization, I argue, is akin to postcolonial notions of privileging the margins and taking power out of traditional structures. I also engage with aspects of monument theory as a means to consider current decolonizing methodologies in literature. For those who are part of a diasporic population, often two journeys are taken, especially as migrants age: a journey from one country to another and a journey from one life stage to another. One need not be deceased to be memorialized; in migration, though, certain parts of one's life are often left behind in a past that might be thought of as dead. Various life stages — childhood, youth, adulthood — can function as sites of memory from which one migrates. As one

travels in the diaspora, one can memorialize the various life stages from which one has migrated. These types of journeys are often conflated because the migration into one's senior years is often accompanied by a physical journey as well. Both *Soucouyant* and *This Body* have central female figures in their early senescence who suffer from various physical and mental infirmities. In telling their stories, Chariandy and McWatt give voice to women older than themselves, and they also present these women as subjects of value, their histories worthy of commemoration.

In addition to questioning the hegemony of traditional structures, protagonists, and stories through alternative monumentalization, both novels use food and cooking to convey memory written on and through the body. Although cookbooks and recipes have long been considered a kind of culinary archive, McWatt especially posits her narrator, Victoria, as an embodiment of food memory. It is not just that she has been a professional cook for most of her working life but also that her body — not her many recipes — holds the key to food preparation. Another form of alternative monumentalization can be seen through McWatt's positioning of various natural wonders, such as Kaiteur Falls in Guyana (the tallest freefalling waterfall in the world), as natural monuments to counter the traditional, human-made markers often erected in countries with greater financial means. These various forms of alternative monumentalization, whether through bodies, the food that they create and eat, or the lands on which they live, all speak to the notion of a distributed memory keeping, no longer held solely in statues or names of buildings, so that marginalized peoples, places, and events can take their rightful positions as markers and containers of excluded or unheard stories.

Embodied Memory

In David Chariandy's *Soucouyant*, the characters move beyond Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* to memories housed in the body. Nora writes that, "the less memory is experienced from the inside, the more it exists only through its exterior scaffolding and outward signs" ("Between" 13). In placing memory in an archive or other institutional site (museum, statue in a park, plaque), people are relieved of active memory work; they are free to forget. Migration aids this forgetfulness. Memorable events are often lodged in places; if one emigrates

far enough away, then memories might fade more easily. If memorable events are tinged with trauma, then there might be all the more desire to leave them behind. In Chariandy's novel, Adele hopes to be "free from [her] past" (8) by leaving Trinidad and migrating to Toronto. Migration allows her to "forget" her impoverished childhood, the sex work that her mother took on to support the family, and the fire that Adele caused, which disfigured her mother and ultimately separated them. Chariandy writes of a Toronto full of immigrants fleeing their memories: "The city was for me a place of forgetting. . . . I met others who were fleeing their pasts, the discontents of nations and cultures, tribes and families" (30). Adele's migration into forgetfulness, therefore, is twofold: Adele migrates literally from one country to another, but there is a concomitant journey, from youth to old age and into early onset dementia. Her youth thus functions as a *lieu de mémoire*, a site or life stage, from which she moves (or migrates). Nora's *lieux de mémoire* become not just physical markers of the past, typically housed in an archive, monument, or museum, but also life stages from which one migrates with age, so that the body can function as a living monument or receptacle of memory.

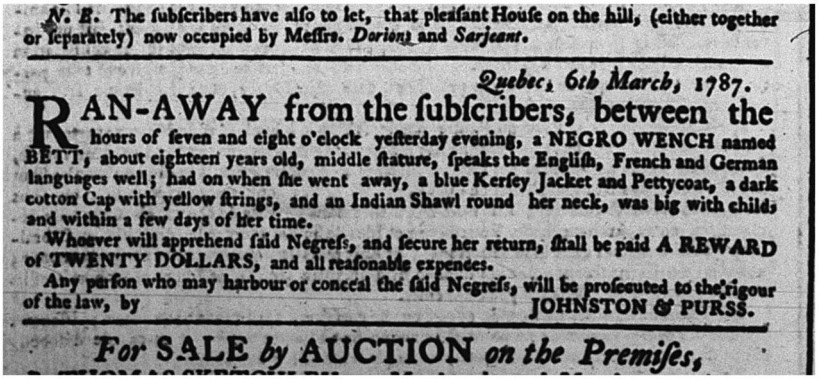
Adele's narrative is complicated by her illness, which results in selective amnesia. The earlier traumatic memories, which Adele thinks she has forgotten, reappear at inopportune times, out of chronological order and in the wrong locations, causing chaos. In revisiting her past, both Trinidad and her youth, she inadvertently brings those Trinidadian, youthful spaces to Canada. This selective amnesia means that, at times, she cannot control the memories that choose to visit her. Adele can remember forty-nine different types of mangoes, but she has difficulty remembering her youngest son's name. As her son describes it, "Mother can string together a litany of names and places from the distant past. She can remember the countless varieties of a fruit that doesn't even grow in this land, but she can't accomplish the most everyday of tasks" (47). Memory is sealed off in certain locations or *lieux* — in this case Trinidad and her youth, the archive of her childhood. In leaving the country behind, Adele hopes to house that memory there, making it history. The only memories that she actively works to maintain are the pleasant ones: the local fruits, herbal remedies, calypsos. Trauma she relegates to history, and that particular archive is opened unwittingly through her dementia when she no longer holds the key to that memory box.

Both sites and life stages, her youth and Trinidad, come back to torment Adele, much like the *soucouyant* of the title. The *soucouyant* "forgets" her age and wrinkled skin by placing the latter in a jar in order to walk around mortals undetected, suggesting that memory and trauma can be housed in an old woman's skin. At one point in her childhood, Adele believes that she is chased by a *soucouyant*. But now, in her senility, it is as if she has become the *soucouyant*, donning the skin of another and scaring those around her.[3] Adele regularly haunts her Scarborough neighbourhood, so much so that she is given the nickname of "wandering lady" (165): "A mother wandering the streets and calling in that same shameful language, calling for her boys to return home. Her voice pitching wildly as if some final calamity had beset the whole neighbourhood. Her bare feet in winter. Her parka in the middle of July, her face streaming with sweat" (155). Adele's commingling of her Trinidadian childhood and her Canadian adulthood is a salient example of what Astrid Erll calls "transcultural memory," "the incessant wandering of carriers, media, contents, forms, and practices of memory, their continual 'travels' and ongoing transformations through time and space, across social, linguistic and political borders" (11). In this instance, Adele's body is the keeper of memory, operating as the archive or trace because Adele no longer actively remembers given her dementia. And in her own trauma in Canada, the lost spaces of her dementia, she returns to the notion of donning the skin of another as a response to trauma.

This re-emergence of Adele's memory, however, asks us to reconceptualize how *lieux de mémoire* function. Hershini Bhana Young considers "the body as a form of memory . . . nonlinear, heterogeneous, resistant, and above all, lived" (5). Memory can be said to be lodged within people — not places — if the body can be conceived as another site of memory. The body as a monument is a concept that American artist Nona Faustine has examined in her performance art. In her *White Shoes* series, Faustine revisits historical New York landmarks that not only have been touched by slavery but also where that history has been forgotten, neglected, or denied.[4] Through photographing her body inserted into those spaces, often in the nude or with minimal clothing, such as the "white shoes" of the title, Faustine asks viewers to consider her body as a monument to those often forgotten slaves. Her body, then, is a physical marker of a forgotten past or a monument to history. Although the New York landmarks, of course, function as traditional

lieux de mémoire, African Americans' exclusion or excision from these sites, through neglect, denial, or amnesia, means that these sites do not function as *lieux de mémoire* for them. As a result of the historical excision of black bodies from these spaces, Faustine's body becomes a site of memory to right the wrongs of African American erasure. Faustine is the archive laid bare, literally and figuratively.

Canadians Camal Pirbhai and Camille Turner similarly investigate Canada's forgotten history of slavery by reconfiguring historical fugitive slave notices and bringing them into the present. Their exhibition, *WANTED*, takes such notices and turns them into contemporary fashion photography (see Image 2).


N. B. The ſubſcribers have alſo to let, that pleaſant Houſe on the hill, (either together or ſeparately) now occupied by Meſſrs. *Dorion* and *Sarjeant*.

Quebec, 6th March, 1787.

RAN-AWAY from the ſubſcribers, between the hours of ſeven and eight o'clock yeſterday evening, a NEGRO WENCH named BETTY, about eighteen years old, middle ſtature, ſpeaks the Engliſh, French and German languages well; had on when ſhe went away, a blue Kerſey Jacket and Pettycoat, a dark cotton Cap with yellow ſtrings, and an Indian Shawl round her neck, was big with child and within a few days of her time.

Whoever will apprehend ſaid Negreſs, and ſecure her return, ſhall be paid A REWARD of TWENTY DOLLARS, and all reaſonable expences.

Any perſon who may harbour or conceal the ſaid Negreſs, will be proſecuted to the rigour of the law, by

JOHNSTON & PURSS.

For SALE *by* AUCTION *on the Premiſes,*

Image 1: Fugitive slave notice, *Quebec Gazette*, 8 March 1787.

As Pirbhai and Turner have written, "WANTED presents an embodied archive of slavery" (Turner). The 1787 fugitive slave notice from Quebec is made contemporary through fashion photography. The body of the fashion model literally carries Canada's forgotten or denied history of slavery through the clothing that she wears and the black body that she inhabits. What Pirbhai and Turner's — and Faustine's — works ask us to consider is the body as a receptacle and voice of memory. This is precisely what Adele in Chariandy's *Soucouyant* does, at times unwittingly, through her embodied memories. Her body functions as an archive and retains, and eventually retells, forgotten memories.

Adele has tried to forget traumatic histories housed in her body, but physicality often causes her to remember, as her son recounts: "Touch has remained important to Mother. It steadies her to an increasingly alien world and jars her to recollection when sight and sound fail to do so. Mother may not always be able to remember me. Not always.

Image 2: Camal Pirbhai and Camille Turner, "Bett," *WANTED* series 2016-17, edition of three colour photographs on vinyl, lightbox.

But she instantly remembers physical quirks like my trick knee" (41). Her son literally carries memory on and through his body, which Adele cannot forget. He has not migrated out of this particular body quirk or physical characteristic, and he has not left it behind in a different country. This idea of sense memory is reinforced by Julia Creet and Andreas Kitzmann, who have studied the connection between memory and migration. Creet argues that "bodies carry with them from place to place memory as sensation, sometimes articulated, but often not, expressed rather as *aporia*, gaps and intensities in physical presence, broadly understood as 'sense memory'" (17). Not surprisingly, the triggers for Adele are often sensory: touch, smell, and sound, particularly old calypsos.

Sometimes her sense memories have no referents because of her dementia. Adele carries her own physical marker of memory. The fire that caused her mother's disfigurement also burned Adele's scalp and caused her to lose her hair. She "forgets" this incident by wearing a wig continuously and leaving her mother behind in Trinidad. The wig conveniently hides the scars that would cause Adele to remember the incident. In her senescence and with her dementia, she no longer recalls the memory that her body is trying to provide. But one day after a walk her wig slips off; however, instead of the embodied memory coming back to her, the sign has no referent, and she blames her son instead: "What you done to me. . . ? What you do to me. . . ?" (122; ellipses in original), she asks him. The body can also carry memories that the mind has forgotten.

But Not Ossified

This embodied memory, then, also suggests that diasporic figures themselves can function as migrating monuments, carrying their histories or memories with them to other places. The work of Tessa McWatt makes this connection between body and memory explicit, as shown through the title of her novel, *This Body*. Unlike Chariandy's characters, McWatt's protagonist, the Guyanese Victoria Layne, is fully aware of the memory of her lover as she travels from Toronto to England. She recalls longingly the physical touch of Kola, which she remembers bodily: "Sometimes she refers to him as though he's just touched her. This surprises even her, . . . and she's been trying to catch herself before she says anything. But nothing could beat how Kola would touch her back"

(24). Whereas Adele attempts unsuccessfully to house certain memories in a type of Trinidadian archive, Victoria does the active memory work to keep Kola alive. Rather than ascribing memory to place, the Toronto where she last saw Kola, Victoria follows him to London in an attempt to unite the embodied memory with the man himself, not attaching it to a physical *lieu* or specific site.

This body memory can also be problematic. In the same way that a monument can be said to ossify history through its stasis, the body as monument can be a tremendous burden for the bearer. Traditionally, monuments were created, for example, to memorialize important events, represent the nation-state, denote sovereignty, and create a sense of community. Thomas Stubblefield describes them as "self-aggrandizing, heroic monuments that utilise their physical remove from daily life to reinforce the static and eternal history they articulate" (2). This is certainly what Victoria in *This Body* wants to do in keeping Kola's memory alive once she realizes that her former lover has been killed. Her new lover, Alexander, accuses her of making Kola statuesque through her holding "a torch for a dead person" (268). In memorializing Kola as Victoria does, Alexander believes that she has made him "untouchable, infallible" (268). In essence, she has carved him in stone, and none of her other lovers can ever compare. In so doing, Victoria begins to recognize her similarity to her namesake, Queen Victoria. The book opens with Victoria visiting the Albert Memorial, which she calls "a statue to love," "a singular, consuming love for one man" (4). Unfortunately, memorializing Kola causes Victoria to become stuck in time, ossified as it were, and her relationships with Alexander and another lover, Lenny, fail. She comes to the conclusion eventually that this memorializing does her more harm than good. She says goodbye to Kola, and McWatt writes that the "monument to him that grew inside her all those years toppled" (242).

The toppling of the Kola memorial is in keeping with current thinking about the role of monuments as keepers of memory in our society. In 1938, Lewis Mumford declared the monument dead (J. Young, "Counter-Monument" 270). Likewise, many contemporary theorists recognize that monuments rarely do what their creators intended them to do, questioning "whether an abstract, self-referential monument can ever commemorate events outside itself. Or must it motion endlessly to its own gesture to the past, a commemoration of its essence as a dislocated sign, forever trying to remember events it never actually knew?" (273). James Young is describing here the "counter-monument" movement,

which proffers a new conception of monuments and memory making in our public spaces. Instead of conceiving of monuments as the keepers of history or the markers of events, he argues for the memorial "to disperse — not gather — memory" (293). Similarly, Michael North puts forward the idea of the public as sculpture, suggesting that the bodies of communities offer a living memory of events: "As the aesthetic focus shifts from the object to the experience it provokes, the relationship of the two goes beyond mere implication: the public *becomes* the sculpture" (861). Alan Rice coined the term "guerrilla memorial" to "describe the way memorialising sometimes takes on an overtly political character in order to challenge dominating historical narratives" (30), which, perhaps, is the best way to define the artists' works described above. Especially as cities question the best way to memorialize the past, I want to put forward the idea of the ordinary human as an antidote to static, traditional monuments. What better way to memorialize the past, which itself has fluid and continual interpretations, than with the human body, alive, forever changing, and unresolved — just like history?

These contemporary interpretations of monuments, however, also can be seen as liberating not just for the preservationists but also for the diasporic figures. In *This Body*, Victoria's love for Kola has been transposed onto the Albert Memorial, which she will never look at the same way again: "Had the mad accident of birth placed her otherwise, it might have been Victoria Layne who erected a statue to her love. The Kola Memorial. Royal Kola Hall" (5). This "desecration" or "defilement" of the Albert Memorial and Royal Albert Hall takes Albert's monument out of history and gives it second life, much as many postcolonial texts rewrite the canon. As North has argued, "The sculpture is no longer an object installed in the center of a public space; public space has instead become the subject, and thus the centerpiece, of the sculpture" (869). The pigeons that defecate on it, the graffiti sprayed on it, a local mentally ill woman who regularly circles it, and other visitors all have the potential to move the Albert monument out of stasis and into the constantly shifting public realm.

However, if memorialization is dispersed to different sites and meanings, and if we continue to accept the notion of an embodied memory, then what of those body memories that have no referent, such as Adele's singed scalp in Chariandy's novel? Although Adele's memory loss is caused by illness, McWatt also wants to account for those unremembered events, as seen through Victoria's nephew, Derek, whom Victoria

adopts after the death of her sister in Guyana. Derek has been conceived through a sperm bank, and no one knows his father's ancestry. However, Derek has a strawberry birthmark on his face and hazel eyes, attributed to this unknown father. In *This Body*, in a note on the text, McWatt writes that "the body remembers the path it took to getting where it ends up" (7). Derek carries within him a monument to a person of whom he has no knowledge. He carries an unremembered memory.

There are connections between this unremembered memory and Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, which "characterises the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated" (22). Although Hirsch is discussing the children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors, she suggests that the term might have other applications. Subsequent generations carry within them the repercussions of the trauma (or history) that their ancestors experienced. It is a kind of second-generation memory that she characterizes as a "particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation" (22).

Although Derek's embodied memory in *This Body* is ostensibly less traumatic, he still engages in imaginative work to make up for the absence. Throughout the novel, we see him "manufacturing" a memory of a father out of the scraps of stories that his mother told him and letters to his aunt from Kola, whom he presumes to be his father. However, when finally confronted with a photo of Kola, who bears no physical resemblance, Derek is forced to "forget" this particular manufactured memory. He subsequently turns to sperm banks in an attempt to create a different memory, a different narrative. The novel ends with no real resolution for Derek, who has yet to find the presence that the absence of his father indicates.

Derek cannot, however, seem to wrap his head around losing a memory that he never fully possessed to begin with, especially since he embodies it. At one point in his article on counter-monuments, James Young asks, "How does one remember an absence?" (290). Similarly, in *This Body*, McWatt asks "How does it feel to be an echo?" (78). To what does the echo refer? In Derek's case, a child implies a father or at least a sperm donor. For Derek, once he has manufactured a memory, it is hard to disassemble it: "He wishes his mother had told him the secret,

but without knowing it he's growing resigned to the fact that loss is the father of his imagination" (303). His father functions in two ways: as the absent progenitor, the source of the echo, and as the creative force of his imagination conditioned as a result of this loss. With Derek, unlike Adele, loss is more than forgetting, for he never remembered to begin with. Instead, he carries within him a kind of repressed truth or memory that will never surface adequately, except as imagination. In the end, he comes to the same conclusion that his aunt does. There might be no easy answer. He might be unable to generate the memory: "Ancient things arrive in the body through the trajectory of others who came before it. Things we must absorb and interpret, in order to move ahead. But move ahead to where?" (320). Derek's example suggests that there might be many monuments for which no one can recognize what is being commemorated. Derek is a monument to a history that no one knows.

This absent presence in his life is akin to a type of negative-form monument. James Young references an anti-fascism monument in Harburg, Germany, buried after several years ("Memorialising" 273-279). It began as an obelisk several metres tall. As spectators wrote on it and defiled it, it was buried, a few metres at a time. In the end, all that remained was a plaque at the top of the buried obelisk. The plaque and Derek's strawberry-coloured birthmark can be read as functioning in the same way — each a marker of an absence, a memorial to the erasure of a memory. Each time we see the plaque and the birthmark, we are reminded of their absent referents — memories hidden. Similarly, in Chariandy's *Soucouyant*, Adele's dementia means that there are memories buried deep within her psyche that Adele no longer recalls, except when she accidentally remembers because of her illness or when her scars are revealed. Her son explains that "This is how we awaken to the stories buried deep within our sleeping selves or trafficked quietly through the touch of others. This is how we're shaken by vague scents or tastes. How we're stolen by an obscure work, an undertow dragging us back and down and away" (32). For Adele, even memories that have been "forgotten" for almost a lifetime can resurface through their traces in the body. Perhaps this is the surest way of keeping memories active. In looking at the plaque, thinking through Derek's shifting perspective on his birthmark, and wrestling with one of Adele's reconstituted memories, one must ask constantly to what do they refer? Derek will never remember a father, as this is an embodied memory not a cognitive one; and Adele might not be able to piece together the fragments of her history, but this

is perhaps Young's most powerful argument about active memory work: "The surest engagement with memory lies in its perpetual irresolution" ("Counter-Monument" 270).

This "perpetual irresolution" can be seen as an antidote to the controversial name of a statue or building. For example, in July 2020, the statue of slave trader Edward Colston was forcibly removed by BLM protesters from a plinth in Bristol, England, and replaced a day later by Marc Quinn's sculpture of BLM protester Jen Reid, another fitting example of a guerrilla memorial. Reid's sculpture was also removed by the city council while it decided on the way forward for the city's statuary. As powerful as Quinn's sculpture is, it, too, could be subject to historicist revisioning if the future is not kind to Reid or if new interpretations see her in a different light. Instead, what if the plinth were to remain empty, and ordinary citizens could stand on it to tell their stories or merely just be? I am reminded of Woodford Square in Trinidad, where many influential speeches were given, and which functioned as a site for social gatherings. The openness of the plinth could allow for many under-represented voices to be heard, and the fluidity and diversity of human lives mean that it would be a memorial that is constantly varied, non-static, and unresolved.

Food and Living Culinary Museums

In *This Body,* particularly, food is a critical vehicle for keeping memory alive. Derek's aunt Victoria tries repeatedly to engage his memory of Guyana and his dead mother through the use of food. Here food functions as elegy, operating as a memorial for the loss of person or place or marking significant change. Food, then, can be seen as another type of marker of the past, a monument, not the permanent, statuesque type but a more fleeting kind, perhaps in keeping with the idea of a negative monument or counter-monument movement. For those not considered significant enough to be memorialized in stone, for example, foods, recipes, and cookbooks can be iterations of memories. And in recreating, cooking, or documenting certain dishes, people and places are reborn. McWatt's book is full of recipes, some from Victoria's native Guyana, others as markers of past events. At age sixty-one, and on the verge of retirement, Victoria is often reflective, returning to her early days in England or to her past in Guyana. The recipes in the book recall the first meal that she prepared at the hospital where she works, the Chinese

food that her grandmother cooked, the traditional Guyanese dishes, such as pepperpot, that she made — each recalling a certain event or person. As such, McWatt's novel, with its emphasis on the body, recognizes the connection between memory and food or recipes, a point that Rafia Zafar makes about a cookbook by Edna Lewis. That cookbook references the vanished slave community of Freetown, Virginia, and the specific dishes that the slaves would make. For Zafar, that cookbook functions as a "culinary memorial" (45) in that it can be viewed as an elegy for the lost community that otherwise could go unnoticed. Zafar also remarks that cooking can be seen as a "less recognised mode of mourning" or "an alternate mode of grieving" (36). If Queen Victoria's monument to Albert can be the physical manifestation of her grief, Victoria in *This Body* has found no less a significant manner in which to recall her past loved ones and past events through food. As she notes, "the smell of pastry is like a leak of pleasure from a voice" (6).

As a result of this connection between food and recollection, some critics have seen the kitchen as a "site of memory" (Meah and Jackson 511); however, I would like to shift the idea of memory from the spaces in which meals are cooked to the actual bodies doing the cooking. The point made by Angela Meah and Peter Jackson still seems to be in keeping with Nora in that they lodge memory and memorial in certain spaces: "[W]e attempt to recast the home and especially the kitchen as a private living museum" (515). They then see the cookbook as a kind of "archive": "Rather than discard these increasingly worn and fragile sheets of paper, she [the cook] assumes the role of 'curator' in preserving this collection" (521). Instead of seeing these spaces and items as keepers of memory, people can function as living museums, much as the examples of the artists Faustine, and Pirbhai and Turner, referenced earlier or as the fictional Adele and Victoria demonstrate. As a result, embodied memories really should be held in the cooks, not in the kitchens.

For those who find themselves living far from their homelands, these embodied memories of food are especially important. Unlike Adele, who tries to lodge her memories in certain spaces in Trinidad, Victoria recognizes that she carries these memories with her on her body. David Sutton would argue that these embodied memories of food are essential for those on the move: "[F]or migrants, I suggest, food is essential to counter tendencies toward fragmentation of experience" (77). It is not simply that food recalls past events or places but also that the memories of certain foods can be critical to the wholeness of self often under threat in the

diaspora. Throughout *This Body*, Victoria is seen kneading dough for the pastry for which she is renowned. She is obsessed with nutrition and seems to be aware that what her body needs is more than the sustenance of the bread that she is making can provide. Her emphasis on food is key to her psychic and physical health, and she acknowledges hesitantly that this physical connection to the food that she makes is kneading herself into shape in addition to the loaf of bread. At one point, she asks herself, "Who eats all this bread? Who needs all this bread? Victoria Layne kneads bread" (97). And, as she answers herself aloud, the distinction between "knead" and "need" is lost. She both kneads and needs; it is a need that rests physically in her body. As Sutton argues, "cooking is not simply an everyday practice, but an attempt to reconstruct and remember synesthetically, to return to that whole world of home" (86). Food, then, is written in and through the body, which then remembers. Terri Kapsalis draws attention to this physical connection between the body and memory in describing her grandmother's cooking in "Yiayia's Hands": "There are no index cards or folded, stained papers. The recipes are written into her hands, into the strata of her calluses" (27). The hands as receptacles of memory in Yiayia's case, or Victoria's, are distinct from the idea of the kitchen as a living museum or the cookbook as an archive. In both cases, the grandmother and Victoria function as living museums, as living markers of memory. It is not their index cards of recipes or their food-stained cookbooks that hold these memories; it is their bodies.

Natural Monuments not Constructed Edifices

McWatt's sustained portrayal of food as memory should be seen in keeping with her emphasis on memorializing peripheral bodies or places. In placing Victoria's love for the commoner Kola on the same level as Queen Victoria's love for Prince Albert, I contend that McWatt also posits the idea of natural monuments as equal to constructed edifices. If counter-monument or negative monument movements leach power from the well-known, imperial, hegemonic subjects and give it to a wider public, which then has the power to shape monuments and distribute memorialization differently, then an acknowledgement of natural or lesser-known monuments acts in a similar fashion. Although McWatt's text is full of traditional monuments, often they are seen in comparison with lesser-known or natural monuments. In *This Body*, McWatt references Guyanese monuments: the "great Kaieteur Falls" (194); St. George's Cathedral,

considered a Guyanese National Monument; Stabroek Market; the seawall; and the Essequibo River, one of many rivers that Derek's mother described as follows: "Nowhere in the world are there rivers like the ones in this country" (285). For the Guyanese, these monuments are as significant as the Eiffel Tower and Statue of Liberty are for the French and Americans respectively. Yet few outside Guyana or the Caribbean would necessarily have knowledge of them. And it is significant that Victoria and Derek have an epiphany of sorts while on a stopover at Pico Teneriffe in Barbados, another local, natural monument. Derek grows into adolescence when he devises a plan to save his aunt, who has sprained her ankle on the rocky cliffs. "He pauses for a moment, making further plans in his head, feeling the confidence that will become the man in him, with or without a father" (318). Victoria similarly decides to move beyond her memories of Kola into whatever love comes her way. She will not become a stone memorial to him: "There's still time yet for this body, she thinks. Before it calcifies with the wash of salt air. . . . *In loving memory, this stone commemorates* . . . still time for touch. And if that is as much as there is, well . . . feel me . . ." (321; ellipses and emphasis in original). She decides that her body still has some life left in it for a kind of fluid memorialization.

Toward a Revised Notion of Monumentalization

Both McWatt and Chariandy reach the conclusion that there are embodied memories that their diasporic characters carry within them. Adele might not remember all aspects of her past because of her dementia, but her son recognizes the history that she carries on her body and in his body. Victoria, who always acknowledged the memory that she carried with her of Kola, learns to let go so that she does not become ossified. In constructing Adele and Victoria as worthy of memorialization, the authors give weight to them as significant figures despite their marginalization in the diaspora. Conceptualizing these women as migrating signifiers of a lesser-known or lesser-acknowledged history allows under-represented voices to commemorate events, people, and places of importance to them. As with the counter-monument movement or guerrilla memorials, viewing people as monuments or migrating markers of memory takes power out of traditional, physical structures such as statues and allows anyone to add significance to the item or person remembered and to carry that significance in the diaspora. It allows them to become

"peoples of memory." It takes power out of the hegemonic statue and imbues the ordinary person with value.

As we consider markers of commemoration in Canada in the future, we might not want to replace one type of statuary or eponymous building with another. Wayde Compton writes in "Seven Routes to Hogan's Alley and Vancouver's Black Community" of the myriad ways that community was memorialized prior to the installation of a plaque in 2013. His edict to memorialize daily, with mundanity, in both small and large spaces, commemorating both well-known and lesser-known figures, seems to be a fitting way to consider Canadian commemoration in the future:

> I have come to think that . . . the temporary sites of memorialization that we have set up, at community and cultural centres, at conferences and as keynote speeches — these seem more important than a plaque might finally be. Speaking face-to-face with people, meeting folks and explaining to them that there was a history, and having them see the way we are drawn to the memory and turn it over and over in our mouths, speaking it alive again in these settings — all this is the ritual of memory, the extension of the lives that were lived through a black ancestry in *that* and *this* place. We remember in the present tense. (108)

Notes

[1] Nora defines a *lieu de mémoire* as follows: "A *lieu de mémoire* is any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community (in this case, the French community)" ("From" xvii). But there have been several criticisms of Nora's work, particularly of its exclusion of postcolonial or transcultural populations (see, e.g., Sengupta).

[2] Richard Allsopp, in his *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*, defines a *soucouyant* as a "legendary, evil, wrinkled old woman, who hides by day, but by night sheds her skin which she carefully hides in a jar" (520).

[3] Viewing Adele as a *soucouyant* need not be a negative depiction. Those of us of Caribbean descent need to reclaim our folkloric figures and take them out of the realm of negativity. There is a reason that the *soucouyant*, the *diablesse*, and others have remained within Caribbean culture. What does the *soucouyant* tell us about ageism and how we treat the elderly among us? What must an old woman be feeling to have the need to torment her community and take the skins of younger people in order to be accepted or seen? Rather than discarding these spirits as threatening or harmful, we should consider how to reintegrate these cast-off women back into the fold. Adele's "haunting" of her Scarborough community is really a cry for help, for which Adele receives an immediate response when her behaviour is considered abnormal.

[4] Images from Faustine's *White Shoes* exhibit can be found at www.youtube.com/watch?v=0JIye15J8-o.

Works Cited

Allsopp, Richard, editor. *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*. Oxford UP, 1996.

Chariandy, David. *Soucouyant: A Novel of Forgetting*. Arsenal Pulp Press, 2007.

Compton, Wayde. "Seven Routes to Hogan's Alley and Vancouver's Black Community." *After Canaan*, Arsenal Pulp Press, 2010, pp. 83-143.

Creet, Julia. "Introduction: The Migration of Memory and Memories of Migration." *Memory and Migration: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Memory Studies*, edited by Julia Creet and Andreas Kitzmann, U of Toronto P, 2011, pp. 3-26.

Erll, Astrid. "Travelling Memory." *Parallax*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2011, pp. 4-18.

Faustine, Nona. "Look Inside: 'White Shoes' by Nona Faustine." www.youtube.com/watch?v=0JIye15J8-o.

Hirsch, Marianne. *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*. Harvard UP, 1997.

Kapsalis, Terri. "Yiayia's Hands." *Taste Nostalgia*, edited by Allan Weiss, Lusitania Press, 1997, pp. 27-32.

McWatt, Tessa. *This Body*. Harper Perennial, 2004.

Meah, Angela, and Peter Jackson. "Re-Imagining the Kitchen as a Site of Memory." *Social and Cultural Geography*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2016, pp. 511-32.

Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: *Les lieux de mémoire*." *Representations*, vol. 26, Spring 1989, pp. 7-24.

—. "From *Lieux de mémoire* to Realms of Memory: Preface to the English Language Edition." *The Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, edited by Pierre Nora, Columbia UP, 1996, pp. xvi-xxiv.

North, Michael. "The Public as Sculpture: From Heavenly City to Mass Ornament." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 16, no. 4, 1990, pp. 860-79.

Rice, Alan. *Creating Memorials, Building Identities: The Politics of Memory in the Black Atlantic*. Liverpool UP, 2010.

Sengupta, Indra, editor. *Memory, History, and Colonialism: Engaging with Pierre Nora in Colonial and Postcolonial Contexts*. German Historical Institute, 2009.

Sharpe, Christina. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Duke UP, 2016.

Stubblefield, Thomas. "Do Disappearing Monuments Simply Disappear?" *Future Anterior*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2011, pp. 1-11.

Sutton, David E. *Remembrance of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory*. Berg, 2001.

Turner, Camille. "Portfolio." *Camilleturner.com*, www.camilleturner.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/CamilleTurnerPortfolio_Feb-2-2017.pdf.

Young, Hershini Bhana. *Haunting Capital: Memory, Text, and the Black Diasporic Body*. Dartmouth College P, 2006.

Young, James. "Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1991, pp. 267-96.

—. "Memorialising the Holocaust." *A Companion to Public Art*, edited by Cher Krause Knight et al., John Wiley and Sons, 2016, pp. 65-79.

Zafar, Rafia. "Elegy and Remembrance in the Cookbooks of Alice B. Toklas and Edna Lewis." *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S.*, vol. 37, no. 4, 2013, pp. 32-46.