

## Introduction

# Models of Care and Women's Writing/Modèles du care et écriture des femmes

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# Introduction: Models of Care and Women's Writing/ Modèles du *care* et écriture des femmes

DOMINIQUE HÉTU

In voice, there is the idea of a claim. The singular claims a shared, common validity.

— Sandra Laugier, “Voice as Form of Life and Life Form” 64

Là, ce qui ressemble à des passages, des traversées,  
à ce qui emprunte aux aspirations lointaines. Là  
s’installe ce nous: spectacle de territoires dérobés,  
de chairs grêlées d’ordre et d’obéissance. Nous, comme  
encore parfois la confiance, la révolte. Nous, cette  
résistance, ce débordement, cette amitié.

— Mélanie Landreville, *Vertiges de l’hospitalité* 46

**T**HE FIVE ARTICLES GATHERED HERE aim to show how care, as ethics and politics, is both amplified and complicated by literary studies in Canada and Québec. These articles do not simply use literary texts as examples of ethical or moral perspectives; instead, they question, complicate, and investigate how ethical and political acts of responsibility, attention, and hospitality can at times facilitate and at others undermine attempts at healing and belonging. In line with several publications in Canadian and Québécois literary criticism that have addressed questions of ethics in the new century, these contributions are concerned with the power and functions of storytelling for investigating and imagining configurations of the good life and at times subverting dominant national ideologies that perpetuate faulty universal ideals of self-sovereignty, independence, and autonomy.

As Fiona Robinson, a Canadian scholar in feminist political theory, remarks, care ethics “regards morality as existing not in a series of universal rules or principles that can guide action but in the practices of care through which we fulfill our responsibilities to particular others” (4). Accordingly, the essays gathered in this special cluster rely on exper-

tise in moral philosophy and literary theory for thinking through models of national identity and belonging, modes of otherness and alterity, and affective responses to bodily, emotional, and cultural harm. However, the focus on care ethics, representations of care, and caring poetics positions this work in a different light. More precisely, these essays initiate an inter- and multidisciplinary dialogue that impels a reading of literary texts by women through a feminist lens that addresses the burden of care work and structural inequalities on women and marginalized subjectivities. This work also mobilizes a feminist care-ethics perspective that challenges patriarchal power structures, dominant narratives, and universalizing configurations of the self that literature helps uncover, imagine, and resist. Reading care ethics and reading with care ethics, we hope to provide literary studies with thought-provoking discussions and foster alternative, caring practices for addressing the conditions of our time.

For instance, Emilia Nielsen's article on Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* examines the implications and challenges of queerness and disability for caring relationships. And, whether inscribed in love, grief, and illness, as in Ariane Grenier-Tardif's analysis of Marie Uguay's *Journal*; challenged by Indigenous configurations of relationality and the experience of healing, as in Kait Pinder's piece on Tracey Lindberg's *Birdie*; or politicized in transnational contexts of embodied memory of the past, as in the article by Asma M'Barek on Kim Thúy's *Ru*, care is embedded in both textual and narrative strategies, weaving aesthetic, ethical, and political elements in singular ways. Finally, my contribution uncovers affective and material connections between care, wonder, and ordinary life in the writings of Heather O'Neill. Our five articles thus employ different approaches to care ethics, working through the limits of situated knowledge, public and private power dynamics at play in Canada and Québec, and the slipperiness of caring postures, including our own as scholars and readers.

### A Turn to Ethics, A Turn to Care

In 2006, Jacques Rancière wrote that “[e]thics is indeed a fashionable word” (1). Particularly since the late 1990s, numerous research fields have revived their respective ethical debates and adjusted or acknowledged their ethical stances in response to contemporary crises and new models of democracy, showing how “the ethical turn is pluriform, not

singular, and that it is not ascribable to any one catalytic event” (Buell 3). More precisely, at the intersection of literary studies and moral philosophy, scholars<sup>1</sup> have argued that literature — if not the arts in general — provides a unique perspective on ethical and philosophical arguments and may be the site of social transformation through empathetic or responsible response. Others, like Richard Posner<sup>2</sup> and Jenny Davidson,<sup>3</sup> have rejected ethical criticism on the basis that literature cannot be held accountable for morally educating its readers or for improving them as citizens and humans.

If arguments or cautions against the moralization of critical theory, including literary criticism, raise important red flags,<sup>4</sup> new ethical criticism — what is often called the “ethical turn” — with scholarship at the intersection of ethics, deconstruction, postmodernism, and feminism, has certainly revitalized discussions about the Western historical “pulsion de généralité” (Wittgenstein) symptomatic of a “humanist expectation of a universal ethical code” (Brooker 105). As Steve Brie and William T. Rossiter ask in their introduction to *Literature and Ethics: From the Green Knight to the Dark Knight*,

can there exist a literary ethics — what might be termed an ethical hermeneutics — which comes after the radical relativism of post-modern literary theory, and which does not retreat back into the moral certainties of Leavisite liberal humanism, which privileged white, middle class, Western European and American male values?  
(2)

By bringing attention to the dangers of the “erasure of otherness, or absorption of the other into the self . . . that prominent philosophers, including Emmanuel Levinas, have decried as incompatible with ethical relations” (DeFalco 170) and with the relationality incumbent on political configurations of intersubjectivity and identity within power relations, the contemporary ethical turn may have been “a response to some kind of a Mayday call, a perceived zero hour, or a step towards identifying a crisis in values, a critical manoeuvre towards re-envisioning different ways of coming to terms with the intricacies and vicissitudes of the human condition” (Kamboureli 938).

And, as Québécois writers and scholars Catherine Mavrikakis and Martine Delvaux also cautiously remind us through appeals to Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Derrida, the ethical turn is not a guarantee of ethical

criticism or literature. Rather, Mavrikakis and Delvaux, in questioning the instrumentalization of marginalized literatures by dominant ideologies for cultivating a *faux-semblant* of ethical gesture towards difference, suspect that a lack of critical reflection about ethics and literature might serve to dissipate that difference in favour of the Same:

Plus l'autre est un autre identifié en tant que tel par la couleur de sa peau, son genre, son identité nationale ou géographique, sa littérature, moins il est autrui, plus il est un autre situé dans l'espace de l'Un, autre à qui on accorde un semblant de liberté sur notre territoire, qu'on accueille chez nous sous des apparences d'hospitalité. (83)<sup>5</sup>

Drawing on Derridean hospitality, they further suggest that ethics should be configured not only according to values such as harmony, decency, freedom, and honesty (84), but also in response to the risk entailed in a relation. Such risk appears in the possibility that literary texts respond to ideology with violence, refusal, and resistance, and in a relationality that is not governed by or submitted to control, appropriation, and homogeneity. Their plea is a reminder that ethical criticism, especially in its relationship to literature, should better take this risk into consideration and not negate the uncertainty that serves as a guarantee of the other's agency and subjectivity: "le lieu d'une perpétuelle interrogation, l'espace d'un risque constant pris dans l'élargissement de la liberté . . . c'est-à-dire de la rencontre, de l'attouchement, mais aussi du duel, du rapport violent" (84).<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, in her 2007 article "The Limits of the Ethical Turn," Smaro Kamboureli remarks that "not every ethical turn is necessarily a good thing" (941). Situating the turn to ethics in the Canadian political context — far-right conservatism at the time, under Stephen Harper — she observes that

the current preoccupation with ethics in academia, at the same time that universities are becoming more and more entrepreneurial, bears the signs of a fashion trend, what Lawrence Bull [sic] calls, "ethics as earnest noise" (3), "user-friendly to both mainstream and counter-hegemonic listeners" (5): a symptom of a culture aware of the stains on the ideological and material forces that constitute it. (941)

Kamboureli borrows Michel de Certeau's notions of strategy and tactic to further expose the power politics that inscribe ethical criticism:

“Strategy and tactic do not work in tandem, and so when a tactic discloses values that have to be repealed, a strategy, being an instrument of the dominant order, can help reinstall them. In other words, a turn to ethics can easily give way to its own negation” (940). Like Mavrikakis and Delvaux, Kamboureli suspects that a turn to ethics risks perpetuating, strategically, “the core values of majority society or recasting them in new guises” (940). She also recognizes that it could act as a “tactical response” and thus involve a “rather different task, namely, to contemplate the self and the other in relation to but also beyond the philosophical vestiges of the Western hegemony of the subject” (942). Kamboureli then relies on anthropology scholar Paul Rabinow to elaborate on this potential of the ethical turn as tactical response. The following excerpt, lengthy but pivotal, not only highlights where this potential is situated, but also relies on critical concepts that are central to the five articles presented in this issue about the ethics of care and women’s writing:

this turn is intent on disclosing the relations among, and genealogies of, different ethical practices in order to advance what is normally considered to be the *twin imperative in ethics*, in Paul Rabinow’s words, *to both know and care for the self and the other* (xxiv). *Knowledge and care* here do not imply that the self and the other are understood as immanent entities with already prescribed limits and needs; rather, they evince the need to approach at once the self and the other as “historical object[s] that] must be ripped out of [their] contexts” (Benjamin 67) while paying heed to the fact that method is not a mere means to an end but what constructs the very conditions that elicit the summons to turn to the ethical in the first place. (942; emphasis added)

Kamboureli’s terminological choice helps us, on the one hand, to situate the role of care within this ethical turn that persists today and responds to different political and socio-cultural events. On the other, it demands attention so as not to fall into the trap identified by Mavrikakis and Delvaux, which would consist of literature only giving hospitality and making space to a convenient, non-threatening selection of Others: “La littérature actuelle, au Québec et ailleurs, dans son désir de faire parler l’autre, se donne, se choisit une certaine altérité. Ce n’est qu’à certains autres, qu’à certaines voix qu’elle donne la parole pour venir doubler et refonder la sienne” (76).<sup>7</sup> Revisiting such ethical arguments is not to suggest that the ethical turn is necessarily a turn to an ethics of care,

but rather that the ethics of care, as a manifestation of this new ethical criticism, corresponds to such a tactical response in its disruption of hegemonic power structures.

What Kamboureli remarked under Harper — that ethics resembled a fashion trend and were mobilized, among other topics, to question the entrepreneurial transfiguration of academic institutions — persists today under Justin Trudeau. New questions of ethics have also emerged since, particularly following the celebration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Confederation and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report. Trudeau's discourse, shaped around values of compassion, openness, and equality (Tang), clashes with governmental practices often deemed damaging for Indigenous people and lands, equal opportunity, ongoing refugee crises and migrant policies, as well as the global climate crisis, as revealed by his decision to move forward with the purchase of the Kinder-Morgan pipeline, deemed an act of “moral cowardice” by climate activists (Jackson). Reading with care ethics helps underline those ethical and political contradictions that remain today, and, as Amelia DeFalco has argued, it facilitates the interrogation of “a larger national mythology of Canada as a caring country founded on collectivism . . . and compassion, on tolerance . . . and civility” (18).

The emergence of scholarly interest in the ethics of care in the social sciences and the arts is thus rooted in this broader ethical and political project of unveiling the caring hypocrisies of governing forces. This unveiling, in the context of our contributions, is mostly done “from below,” that is, from the perspective of those who are on the downside of advantage as they experience political and social asymmetries. As such, our work is also closely connected to growing feminist “dissatisfactions with dominant moral theories” (Held 28) and their hegemonic patriarchal structures. The work of pioneer care ethicists such as Carol Gilligan, Nel Noddings, and Sara Ruddick first embraced and revitalized theorizations of care, advocating an ethical reassessment of caring activities and moral relationality in order to challenge, theoretically and empirically, patriarchal configurations of moral development and valuable knowledge. These earlier configurations of care ethics received a fair share of criticism,<sup>8</sup> but they nevertheless served to illuminate the need for moral alternatives and new avenues for thinking “the different labors that involve and make care” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2). As Sandra Laugier argues, “Les critiques du *care* confondent le *care* avec l'idée que

la femme serait par essence figée dans une posture de sacrifice et d'abnégation. Mais, on l'a vu, c'est précisément cet essentialisme que combat le *care*" ("L'éthique" 121).<sup>9</sup>

More recently, Sophie Bourgault and Julie Perreault also note that care ethics has never been a homogeneous critical category: "Le *care* s'est ainsi constitué avec le temps comme un champ d'analyse féministe indépendant, comportant ses problèmes, sa propre épistémologie et ses débats internes" (11).<sup>10</sup> Drawing on and departing from these earlier theorizations, care ethicists have amplified the scope of care ethics to address contemporary issues on macro and micro scales.<sup>11</sup> Especially since the 2000s, their scholarly work has addressed local and international political theory, globalization, human and nonhuman interactions, health care ethics, ordinary life, contemporary practices of hospitality, and other socio-political issues that contribute to feminist theory and practice. Scholars such as Joan Tronto, Virginia Held, Sandra Laugier, and Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, to name but a few, "have shown how care is . . . marginalized and trivialized" (Tronto 124) and how it "engages much more than a moral stance; it involves affective, ethical, and hands-on agencies of practical and material consequences" (Puig de la Bellacasa 4).

In Canada and Québec, scholars in political theory, philosophy, and literary studies, such as Sophie Bourgault, Fiona Robinson, Amelia DeFalco, Marjolaine Deschênes, and Naïma Hamrouni, have developed expertise that uses care ethics to further investigate the "liens étroits entre travail, précarité, vulnérabilité et injustices de genre" (Bourgault and Perreault 13).<sup>12</sup> Literary scholar Maïté Snauwaert, making use of a branch of care ethics associated with medical humanities, health care,<sup>13</sup> and caregiving practices, is interested in matters of living, dying, and the many embodied and affective processes in between, such as grief. Others, like Julie Perreault, question, in much-needed scholarship, the means with which to move from power to care (16) to operate a feminist epistemological shift or "revirement épistémologique" (4) by critically placing white feminisms and Indigenous feminisms, as well as white care ethics and Indigenous conceptions of care,<sup>14</sup> in dialogue to better understand how hegemonic colonial dynamics must be addressed and dismantled.

As these scholars show, and as DeFalco astutely remarks in her important *Imagining Care: Responsibility, Dependency, and Canadian*

*Literature*, this turn to care ethics draws “attention to the central, yet contested position of care within national cultural discourse” (23) and, especially in literary studies, “encourage[es] readers to approach the myth of Canadian care with caution, replacing totalizing myths of Canada and its citizens as unified and identified by care with particular scenarios of complicated, often ambivalent relations of dependence and need” (23). The articles included in this issue respond to expressions and manifestations of some of these myths, and they do so by relying on, examining, and at times challenging care ethics.

### Which Literature, Whose Lives?

Gilligan begins the first chapter of her landmark study *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* by referring to Chekhov's play *The Cherry Orchard*. She uses the second act of the play to show the opposing worldviews of Madame Ranevskaya and Lopakhin, the young merchant who wants her to cut down the orchard. Gilligan employs this canonical literary text to demonstrate “how accustomed we have become to seeing life through men's eyes” (6) and the “different outcomes” and “different ways of imagining the human condition” (5) that emerge when “one begins with the study of women” (19). Gilligan does not only turn to literature in the opening lines of her chapter. She also refers to fairy tales, the writings of Virginia Woolf, and Shakespeare's female characters (Deschênes 211), among others, to further illustrate, throughout her study, her concern about how “women's moral weakness is . . . inseparable from women's moral strength, an overriding concern with relationships and responsibilities” (Gilligan 16-17). Turning to literary language, she bridges cognitive psychology, scientific discourse, and the arts to show the far-reaching impact of patriarchal biases on storytelling and narrative discourse, and thus on the social construction of identity and voice. Gilligan's ground-breaking feminist book marks a shift in the Western study of moral development and experience, breaking away from a “morality of rights” and making place for a “morality of responsibility” (21) and a “mode of thinking that is contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract” (19). Arguing that “theory can blind observation,” Gilligan also relies on the stories written and revisited by women partaking in one of her experiments to argue for the addition of “a new line of interpretation” that

would not categorize women's tendency to believe "in the restorative activity of care" as an anomaly (30).

Going against the grain of the ideal of independence and individual autonomy "animating most moral and political theories, including some feminist theories" (Laugier, "Politics" 208), Gilligan's "different-voice revolution" (215) resulted in a paradigm shift in ethics and moral thought by bringing into focus the invisibility and devalued state of care work and moral labour accomplished and carried mostly by women and other subaltern groups. This shift also allowed scholars to rethink the hierarchies and universal principles that shape Western societies, cultures, and relationships, and to revalue the possibility of privileging concrete, particular, contextualized life experiences to configure ethics and moral norms. Subsequently, her work contributes to scholarship that recognizes "the possibility of subjectivity defined not [only] by agency, self-assertion or autonomy, but by dependence and vulnerability" (Laugier, "Politics" 207-08). Furthermore, Gilligan's response to the ethics of care's biases and blind spots made way for an ongoing conversation, across disciplines, about "the ways in which we — in practice and in theory — treat the demarcation between the spheres of personal relations (familial relations, but also love and friendship) and the so-called impersonal spheres of public relations, with of course a hierarchy involved" (218). Such a shift in standpoint thus allows valorizing different experiences, perspectives, and life forms.

As Deschênes notices, Gilligan's bringing together of different knowledge domains reiterates the place of poetics as a field of philosophy and of narrative as a "ressource permettant aux sujets interdépendants (Gilligan) et aux identités fragiles (Ricoeur) de mieux vivre avec soi et l'autre" (208).<sup>15</sup> Seeing how literature plays a constitutive role in Gilligan's feminist reconsideration of ethics and reconfiguration of care as ethos, and noticing how she remains, more than thirty years after the publication of *In a Different Voice*, an oft-cited source in recent scholarly work and interdisciplinary studies in the ethics of care, it is surprising that the fields of literary studies and care ethics have not been placed in dialogue more often, and that scholarly work on the particularities and interconnections between the two disciplines remains scarce. Indeed, if a growing field of care-ethics studies has emerged from several professional and academic disciplines, an interdisciplinary field of research that combines literary studies and care ethics has been slower to develop.

However, as the following articles show, along with several publications in France, Canada, and Québec,<sup>16</sup> interest is growing and expanding, allowing for inventive connections and potentially different, and often disruptive, forms of critical and creative knowledge.

As noted in the introduction to a recent journal issue on care ethics and francophone literature, publications on moral values and ethical notions related to care, such as empathy, compassion, hospitality, and love in literature, abound (Snauwaert and Hétu). More precisely, the role of empathy in literature and the role of literature for “exercis[ing] and cultivat[ing] the moral imagination and associated empathic sensibilities” (Maibom 319) are explored and theorized extensively both in literary studies and philosophy, in interdisciplinary attempts to bridge the importance of storytelling with the need for relationality, justice, and belonging. For instance, American philosopher Martha Nussbaum suggests that narrative, non-theoretical language found in realist novels, such as those written by Henry James and Marcel Proust, offers a moral perspective on what is a truly human life: “we need to turn to works that show us in detail the ethical contributions of the inner life of vision, imagination and emotion, that explore the lives of characters over time, and show the importance of traits of character that extend and develop over time” (“Literature and Ethical Theory” 10). According to Nussbaum, literary discourse brings about a certain form of attention rather than strictly exemplifying moral actions: “the text in this way does not simply represent ethical deliberation, it incites it; and the reader’s acts are valuable sorts of moral activity” (12). In her opinion, however, only certain canonical literary texts would significantly enhance our understanding of the moral dimension of human life in a way that sustains and complicates theoretical and philosophical arguments of ethical discourse.

Attributing a moral high ground to Greek tragedies and canonical novels also limits the scope of poetics and genres that affect, represent, and question certain life forms and life experiences that deserve to be told: “Nussbaum re-creates a canon of (largely nineteenth century) realist fiction as the list of works for the moral edification of young minds” (Wrighton 157; see also Diamond). Such a claim also weakens the argument that literary experience in general offers a contribution distinct from the ethical domain. Indeed, if only certain acclaimed and canonical texts can serve as philosophical discourse, there is a danger

of imposing “good literature” and good narrative forms for understanding and representing the “good life.” Fortunately, other scholars have suggested using literature instead as a means of “moving away from models of cultural and political agency lodged in isolated heroic acts and simplistic notions of cause and effect” (Retallack 3). The articles gathered in this cluster also show that such limitations to a specific genre and historical period leave a variety of literary modalities and a diversity of life experiences and voices in the dark and do not elicit a full understanding of the scope of “poethics” (Retallack 11).

### The Contributions

One of the objectives of this special cluster is to examine how different literary texts respond to, question, and at times challenge “[t]he vision of Canada as a country built on respect and responsibility, tolerance and care” to better resist “a mythological reading that obscures a serious legacy of exclusion, prejudice, [and] neglect” (DeFalco 20). The articles collected here address contemporary Indigenous, Canadian, and Québécois literary texts by women writers not by strictly applying a care-ethics framework to their respective analysis, but by complicating the ethical stance of care with poetics and aesthetics to further delineate and problematize the role of literature in configuring, representing, and imagining the meanings and gestures of care. More precisely, the articles share a “thinking motif” in aiming to show the ambivalence of care (Puig de la Bellacasa 7) both as reading practice — because “it is not a notion to embrace innocently” (7) — and as critical approach, for we are cautious that projects “driven by a notion of care can serve colonizing projects” (Murphy, qtd. in Puig de la Bellacasa 9). As academics, as educated readers, we know that there is “a range of different understandings and appropriations of care . . . [that] need to be problematized” (10). We have thus attempted to address literary texts with care ethics in the hopes of showing how “[e]xpanding the sites and constituencies in which we think we care contributes new modes of attention and problematics” (10).

Another objective of this cluster resonates with one of Puig de la Bellacasa’s claims in *Matters of Care*: “rather than give up on care because it is enlisted in purposes we might deplore, we need to have its meanings debated, unpacked, and reenacted in an implicated way that responds to [the] present” (10). She reminds us that “Care is a

necessary activity, but [that] its actualizations are always relationally specific. Affirming this necessity does not imply universality. In every context, care responds to a situated relationship. On the ground, doings are always more ‘messy’ than they appear in principles [sic]” (163-64). Through analyses of contemporary fiction and life writing written in French and English by women of different backgrounds and origins, the writers here hope to facilitate an approach to reading creative texts that emphasizes the diverse possibilities for using, resisting, revisiting, and reclaiming care as ethics, politics, and poetics. Rather than attempting to offer a fixed definition of what care ethics in literature is, these essays prioritize open-ended, situated approaches to literature and critical reading so as to not impose biased knowledge on the texts, but to see what kind of specific knowledge a care-ethics perspective might uncover.

Asma M’Barek’s analysis of the novel *Ru*, by Kim Thúy, brings corporeality and vulnerability into focus. Suggesting that care ethics enables closer attention to bodily negotiations and patterns of invisibility within public and private spaces, and to what Jacques Rancière has termed “le partage du sensible,” M’Barek investigates how the novel problematizes conventional understandings of what is sayable, visible, and sharable. Her article examines the effects of fragmentation, the motif of the scar, and care work, arguing that the novel’s focus on vulnerable bodies repositions subjectivities and agencies usually confined to invisibility and absence. Drawing on Rancière’s concept of the dissensus, with which he theorizes political and aesthetic disruptions, M’Barek suggests that the novel performs a particular ethics of care in its revisiting of past events through figures of care work, responsibility, and vulnerability. M’Barek thus proceeds to show how *Ru* both aesthetically and politically uncovers, for this particular shared, collective experience, the often-invisible dynamics between care work and vulnerable inter-subjectivities. Her article convincingly demonstrates how textual and narrative choices contribute to both illuminating and problematizing “what matters.”

Emilia Nielsen also addresses connections between bodies and narrative, offering an analysis of Shani Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night* that reframes disability to argue that the care and care work performed and received by the characters “facilitate the making of collective affinity.” Paying close attention to the relational interdependence that shapes and affects, at times negatively and at times positively, the characters’

troubled sense of self, Nielsen investigates how mental disability and queerness operate as “valuable and integral” experiences that allow for a shared experience of difference and lead to healing and better expressions of care. In addition to zeroing in on the complex political, affective, and embodied dynamics of care for vulnerable lives, Nielsen mobilizes a “queer disabled perspective” and trans-inclusive politics to complicate earlier readings of the text as a comment on colonization and its effects. Her pedagogical perspective also tackles ethical responses from readers who might see, in the novel’s “remapping of disability” and “radical acts of care,” the transformative value of interdependence and the necessity to rethink affinity “across differences.” The article’s “crip theoretical reading” pushes further the critical potential of both disability studies and care ethics. It also shows how an ethics of care not only inscribes the world of the text, but also traverses — and is in turn traversed by — interwoven discourses on trans lives, queerness, and disability.

Loss, pain, and love resonate differently in Ariane Grenier-Tardif’s analysis of *Journal*, by Montreal poet Marie Uguay. Initially not destined for publication, *Journal* emerged as a feminist exploration of the heteronormative model of love and as a rich patchwork of personal writing where affect, embodiment, and the ordinary shape poetic language. Grenier-Tardif suggests that Uguay’s text is a form of complaint against this model and its alienating effects on women. She suggests it is also a poetic rendering of embodied suffering, as Uguay’s amputated body forced her to confront social and personal beauty standards and ideas of femininity. Making use of Patricia Smart’s expertise on women’s “*écriture intime*” in Québec and on a feminism that connects care ethics with that of bell hooks and other feminist theorists, Grenier-Tardif argues that Uguay’s personal writing is an intimate, yet political, negotiation of a woman’s struggle with and quest for love, a love rooted in the patriarchal hostility against women’s needs and experiences. She further shows how Uguay’s diary and poetic fragments help understand the complex textures of the emotional, physical, and material conflict that shapes and pressures Uguay’s intersubjective relationality. *Journal* exposes the constant effort of Uguay, as vulnerable body, to find healing and love despite the power dynamics of the dominant sexist ideology.

Kait Pinder’s article on Tracey Lindberg’s novel *Birdie* addresses body sickness, solidarity, and abuses of care, weaving and contrasting

the “formal properties of care” with care-related problems regarding the reconciliation process in Canada. Drawing on the novel’s metaphors of taste and complicating American and European care ethics with Indigenous scholarship on relationality, Pinder examines how *Birdie* informs “literature’s potential to transform national narratives of care.” On the one hand, her analysis relies on care ethicists to uncover the different ordinary forms of care that connect the characters and shape the network of women who surround and nurture Birdie. On the other, it addresses, through *Birdie*’s particular aesthetics, alternative models and expressions of care for configuring “the good life” in line with Cree language and tradition, and for challenging caring policies and strategies such as the TRC in Canada. This article brings into view how imagining and fictionalizing ordinary, daily care as a way of addressing vulnerable lives and historical, institutional systems of violence is a potentially transformative way of responding to injustice through responsibility, an act that might provide healing between individuals and communities.

Lastly, drawing on Veena Das and Sandra Laugier, among others, to unite ordinary ethics and the ethics of care, I argue that Heather O’Neill’s protagonists’ sense of wonder as well as their imaginations help to sustain their agency and creativity in the face of parental and social neglect. O’Neill’s attention to the magic that is still present in the caring work of “everyday survival,” as I phrase it, conveys the responsive and relational character that wonder shares with care. I suggest that this aspect of O’Neill’s work also offers ways of representing vulnerability and oppression that, because they come from within a “white trash culture” about which O’Neill writes, differ from the condescending pity that tends to inflect representations of poverty, especially when children are involved. While O’Neill’s fiction often examines caring relationships between people experiencing poverty, it does not deliver grand narratives of repair and recovery. Instead, as I demonstrate, O’Neill’s young characters’ imaginative interactions with their families and environments offer sustaining moments of respite that reinforce the creative “magic” present in often unsuspected corners of the characters’ social world. Furthermore, such a suturing of creativity and care underlines the work of storytelling — and of literature in particular — in “not only interrogat[ing] the stigmatization of poverty and abjection, but also [in] disrupting the perpetuation of symbolic violence.”

Concerned with conceptual and textual issues, the project of this

group of essays is twofold: it examines women's writing to further contemporary discussions about feminist care ethics, and it uses care ethics to provide new knowledge about literature by women in Canada and Québec. More precisely, these essays use care ethics to read and investigate attitudes and practices of care in literary texts where there is an apparent struggle for comfortable, hospitable living spaces, often used in the texts as symbols of fragile identity-construction processes. This work stems from a critical interest in imagined lived experiences in which subjects question and develop their relational and intersubjective identities in contexts that do not always favour or encourage such questioning and development. Gestures of responsibility, hospitality, and attention, as well as issues of relational proximity, recognition, and social transformation, invest the narratives with emancipatory aspirations that, without necessarily being successful, nevertheless open the door for new expressions of well-being.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the work of Booth; Hillis Miller; Garber, Hanssen, and Walkowitz; and Nussbaum. In French, the work of Ricoeur, Sandra Laugier, and Jacques Bouveresse, along with that of Liesbeth Korthals Altes and Isabelle Daunais, is foundational. Daunais's important article "Éthique et littérature: À la recherche d'un monde protégé" details the numerous contemporary contributions about ethics and/in literature in French.

<sup>2</sup> See Posner's renowned 1997 essay "Against Ethical Criticism."

<sup>3</sup> See Davidson's 2016 *Reading Style: A Life in Sentences*.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, Québécois writers and scholars Catherine Mavrikakis and Martine Delvaux, in a 2003 issue of *Dalhousie French Studies*, convincingly assess the risks of advocating for an "ethical literature" and warn against naive and privileged instrumentalizations of alterity: "C'est en ce sens que l'éthique, en matière de littérature, comporte un risque: celui de participer de la constitution de communautés homogènes, faussement éthiques. Car si autrui est réduit au même, peut-il encore être question d'éthique? Si, par souci d'éthique, la différence disparaît, l'éthique elle-même en fait les frais" (81). "This is how ethics, in terms of literature, contains a risk: that of participating in the creation of homogeneous communities, falsely ethical. Because if the other is reduced to sameness, is it still a question of ethics? If, under ethical concern, difference disappears, ethics pays the price" (my translation).

<sup>5</sup> "The more the other is identified as other based on their skin colour, gender, national or geographical identity, and literature, the less they are the other, the more they are situated in the space of the One, another to whom we give a semblance of freedom on our territory, whom we welcome in our home under the guise of hospitality" (my translation).

<sup>6</sup> "The place of constant interrogation, of constant risk taken in the enlargement of freedom . . . that is to say of the encounter, the touch, but also the duel, the violent relationship" (my translation).

<sup>7</sup> “Contemporary literature, in Québec and elsewhere, in its desire to make the other speak, gives itself, chooses a certain alterity for itself. It is only to certain others, to certain voices that it gives voice so they can double and rebuild its own” (my translation).

<sup>8</sup> Beyond the antifeminist backlash (Adorno), feminist thinkers such as Claudia Card cautioned that care ethics, as configured in early theorizations such as that of Nel Noddings, risk evacuating issues of “complicity with evil-doing” (101) and depoliticizing or underestimating the role of violence in relationships of proximity. If Gilligan’s work has been rehabilitated in contemporary philosophical and political work (Paperman and Molinier; see also Lancelle and Deschênes), her empirical study has also been criticized on grounds that its sample was too narrow, “and for drawing from overly homogenous groups such as students at elite colleges and women considering abortion (thereby excluding women who would not view abortion as morally permissible)” (Sander-Staudt; see also Tronto; and Bourgault and Perreault 9). See Saunders-Staudt for a thorough examination of the different critical responses to care ethics.

<sup>9</sup> “Critics of care conflate care with the idea that women are essentially fixed in a posture of sacrifice and abnegation. But, as we’ve seen, it is precisely this essentialism that care ethics pushes against” (my translation).

<sup>10</sup> “Care thus became, with time, an independent field of feminist analysis with its own problems, its own epistemology and internal debates” (my translation).

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed bibliography on care ethics organized by research field, see Hétu, “Les éthiques.”

<sup>12</sup> “close ties between work, precarity, vulnerability, and gender injustices” (my translation).

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, the work of Worms; Lancelle; Blum and Murray; and Mol.

<sup>14</sup> See the contribution of Whyte and Cuomo.

<sup>15</sup> “resource allowing interdependent subjects (Gilligan) and fragile identities (Ricoeur) to better live with the self and with others” (my translation).

<sup>16</sup> See Brendlé; Chavel; Carrière; Carrière and Hétu; DeFalco; Deschênes; Hétu; Marzi and Paperman; Snauwaert; and Snauwaert and Hétu.

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