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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The albatross has a lousy reputation in the English language. Samuel Coleridge's Mariner has one metaphorically hanging around his neck, and Charles Baudelaire thinks of the albatross as the poet's "kinsman," both hindered by their own ability. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines an albatross as both a bird as well as a "source of frustration, obstruction, or guilt, from which it is difficult to rid oneself." Collectively known as a weight, a group of albatrosses even sounds cumbersome. But we at *The Albatross* aren't burdened by our avian namesake. Instead, our feathered inspiration offers us an opportunity to stretch our wings, to push the limits of our imaginations. "To imagine an albatross," as contemporary Canadian poet Don McKay tells us, "a mind must widen to the breadth of the Pacific Ocean" (40). Like McKay, we hope to "prod things / until their atoms shift" (41)—to challenge the traditions that might keep us earthbound.

The excellent undergraduate work in this volume does just that. Unintentionally (but wholly welcomed), this year's incarnation of *The Albatross* focuses on the critical intersection between literature and gender, sexuality, race, and colonialism. From Victorian fiction to digital humanities, the subject matter of these essays attests to the social and political efficacy of literary studies. For instance, Alissa Cartwright and B. R. Reid discuss texts—Ella Hepworth Dixon's *The Story of a Modern Woman* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, respectively —that transgress, subvert, and ironize the limitations of Victorian sexuality and gender. Eric Henwood-Greer also writes of gender and sexuality, but in the context of the later half of the twentieth century. Written for a history course, Henwood-Greer's analysis of gay pulp fiction is one of two papers that come to us from outside the English department. While originally meant for a Women's Studies course, Gurkiran Dhillon's potent critique of the filmic adaptation of *Eat, Pray, Love* is a skillful analysis of the political stakes of literature and film. Henwood-Greer and Dhillon's papers exemplify the symbiotic relationships that structure the academic ecology that history, literature, sociology, and politics cohabit.

Of course, not all relationships are structured with respect and mutuality in mind. Kristina Holm, making her second appearance in *The Albatross*, writes of music

and violence in *A Clockwork Orange*. Holm demonstrates that the boundary between the aesthetic and the violent is often troubled in a society that "rests its decorative laurels on a foundation of violence" (this volume). These entangled conditions are also salient in both of Taylor Bachand's pieces. Her poem "Crow Watcher," inspired by Don McKay, articulates both the simultaneity and independence of ecologies. Her speaker watches the non-human happenings that occur right outside the window, giving a beautiful meditation on what divides human and animal. Her essay, "Art and Resistance in Thomas King's *Truth & Bright Water*," investigates the stories and knowledges that are and are not meant to be shared in the colonial context and considers the role of the settler reader in the consumption of Indigenous texts.

This issue also speaks to the variety of modes that literary criticism can take. Sékel Pollok offers a distinct take on Gertrude Stein's "Melanctha." She uses digital tools to graph and map Stein's selective verbal "palette" to great effect. And Matthew Thibeault's "A Third Fragment" features *The Albatross*' first dramatic extract. He writes not a conclusion but a continuation of T.S. Eliot's unfinished *Sweeney Agonistes*. Pollok and Thibeault's engagements testify to the larger value of literary criticism. It is not about coming to definitive conclusions about a text, but instead criticism ought to disrupt the workings of the text to evince further questions.

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The Albatross has never been a burden for me. It has been an honour to work with such talented people—contributors and staff members alike. The works contained in the covers of this journal prove, for me at least, that literary studies are anything but for the birds. And to you, gentle reader: thank you for picking up this modest volume and taking the time to read it. Thank you.

McKay, Don. "How to Imagine an Albatross." *Canadian Literature* 103 (Winter, 1984): 40–41.