Counter Revolutions: Susan Frances Harrison's Textual Recycling

by Shelley Hulan

Confederation-era Canadian poets were frequent recyclers. Work they published early in their careers resurfaces in their later texts, sometimes revised, occasionally under different titles, and once in a while incorporated into new pieces.[1] The results of this practice are uneven, since some poetry declined with its author's advancing years, creating a downward spiral that can lead contemporary scholars either to analyse the earlier work without reference to the later or to try to say something useful about later work concerning which they feel the less said the better. One of the poets who forces this choice is Susan Frances Harrison ("Seranus"), whose 1886 short story collection *Crowded Out! and Other Sketches* seems destined for entry into the nineteenth-century Canadian canon and whose poetry volume *Pine, Rose and Fleur de Lis* (1891) is excerpted in some Canadian literature anthologies,[2] but who self-published several later collections (Campbell 182), including *In Northern Skies, and Other Poems* (1912), *Songs of Love and Labor* (1925), and *Penelope and Other Poems* (1934).

Most critical commentary on Harrison's work, and indeed all the scholarship published on it in the past decade, concentrates upon her prose fiction rather than her poetry.[3] But an untitled sonnet the young Harrison published in the Canadian literary journal *The Week* has long fascinated me, as has its reappearance in a sonnet sequence that Harrison printed privately four decades later. I find the accretion of images in the first haunting, and the accumulation of racial and ethnic types in the second mystifying. Depending upon how one reads it, the early sonnet's reuse in the later text either neutralizes its blistering indictment of women's sacrifices to a patriarchal settler economy or redeploys that indictment to historicize, and continue to critique, that same economy. On one hand, the incorporation of the early sonnet into the later sequence encourages readers to view with scepticism the notion that settler economies make meaningful advances in their treatment of labour, pointing out that while labourers (and the kinds of labour they perform) change over time, those

who profit most from *all* labour tend to belong to a racially homogeneous group whose members originate in a limited number of "Nordic" nations. On the other, the particular location of the early text within the later one initiates what might be understood as an attempt to escape the poem's earlier focus on economy altogether. Thanks in large part to the inclusion of this early sonnet, the turns towards and counter-turns away from the critiques made in the sequence create significant challenges for its analysis that are aggravated by the embarrassment that some of its contents provoke in twenty-first-century readers unaccustomed and unsympathetic to the generalizations Harrison's speaker makes about her subjects. That embarrassment may lead readers away from the later text and towards a close reading of the standalone sonnet, which does not share the apparent inconsistencies of the longer piece. In this paper I argue against that retreat and for a full and frank discussion of poetry that provokes what may be a very productive discomfort.

My interpretation begins with a discussion of the 1884 sonnet in its standalone version and concludes with an examination of its placement in Harrison's 1925 sequence, which sets most of its sonnets in an urban marketplace of the period following the First World War. This reading order inflects the sonnet sequence with its pithier predecessor from the beginning, sharpening the contrast between it and the text of which it subsequently becomes part.

I

This is the poem as it appeared over Harrison's pen name, "Seranus," in the 3 January 1884 edition of *The Week*:

SONNET.

Do you remember—but I think you do
  This recollect, O cruel love, at least!—
  How once you took my hand and marked its creased
Life-furrowed palm? "An old-world hand," said you.
"You my new world, who make an old world new,
  With lines and seams like these! How long have ceased
  The glacial drifts from bitter north and east;
The grinding weights of suffering that drew
Their cruel lengths over this little palm?
  Striated so and graven, cut and marred,
  Skin-crumpled, yet not dimpled, is ill-starred!
For you no happy ease, no gracious calm,
  But agonizing in the narrow way,
  And Love, the boy, born on a bitter day."

The high number of enjambed lines in the octave suggests the immediacy and emotional intensity of words spoken aloud to a listener with whom the speaker is on intimate terms. The speaker recalls a past scene and demands that the companion whom she addresses in the second line do the same. The formal requirements of the Petrarchan rhyme scheme followed through the octave increase this intensity rather than dilute it, as the *a* and *b* line endings cast backward and forward to reconstruct the remembered event in the present. "[R]hyme is always recollective," contends Gillian Beer, since "there *is* no rhyme until the second word enters" (196). It can therefore "resurrect" the vanished past (Beer 196). By "mak[ing] things memorable," it can also appear to "vouch" for the truth of the memory (Beer 192). Yet at the same time it fuses this "affirmation" with "instability" (Beer 192), for its effectiveness depends on the poet's skilful deployment of the limited options that the English language makes available for the purpose (Beer 194). Thus the "incantatory" powers of rhyme (Beer 190) never fully banish readers' awareness of time as fleeting, an awareness that "Sonnet"'s Shakespearean elements reinforce. Meanwhile, the poem's Petrarchan features underline love as its dominant theme. The speaker's description of the remembered scene suggests that the sonnet's silent listener, and initial speaker of the lines she now repeats, is male, since the taking of the hand is conventionally the act of a man on the verge of an intimate declaration to the woman whose hand he holds.[4] The inference that she who once listened is the person who now utters the speech a second time strengthens with the ghastly labour imagery of the final couplet. While the biblical allusions of "agonizing in the narrow way" (see for instance *KJV* Matt. 7:13 and Luke 13:24) may be understood as describing the struggle to quell romantic desires in favour of a self-denying religious path, the speaker's recital indicates that the love in question is more secular and physical than sacred and spiritual, and that the birth in question may be a literal birth. When she frames its reference to "Love, the boy" with an address to her listener as "cruel love," she associates "love" with flawed human beings rather than with an ideal abstraction. This re-delivery of the speech does not completely deny love's ideal status. The second speaker's introduction, however, makes a harder distinction between love's transcendent qualities and the physical suffering that it may impose on the "lover," a differentiation that echoes Christina Rossetti's several deployments of the phrase "narrow way."[5]

The speech that the woman speaker repeats from memory is a familiar nineteenth-century set piece on women's emotional indenture to love, which guarantees male survival and dominance at the cost of the female

body and indeed the whole female person, since childbirth gives the woman in this poem no clear place in the future. Reciting her companion's words converts them from prophecy to testimonial; readers cannot be sure that the silent listener acknowledges ever uttering the words, let alone takes responsibility for the foretelling. The re-delivery thus lends weight to the forecast that the lines contain while distancing the original speaker from them, a distance that strengthens the woman's implicit claim that she alone carries the costs of falling in love, with the benefits of her doing so all going to the patriarchal economy[6] to which her companion belongs. The sacrifices outlined in her premature loss of youth and beauty to age and decline ensure continuity from man to "boy"; love compels her, the boy-bearing vessel, to make the sacrifice but may exclude her from the future that the child heralds and symbolizes. The presentation of the speech as a memory reinforces the impression of the woman's vulnerability, for her silent listener can erase her from the past and the present as well as the future by refusing to admit to ever having said the words. Her opening plea suggests, indeed, that he neither admits to remembering his speech nor takes any interest in what happened to his companion after he made it.

In a succinct fourteen lines, Harrison thus traces a violent cycle that sustains a male line by surrendering women's bodies to their emotions while granting men freedom from equivalent costs. She was not the only writer in Canada to point out the depredations that patriarchy makes on women; Isabella Valancy Crawford's much better-known example *Malcolm's Katie* appeared in print in the same year as "Sonnet." *Katie*, however, affirms that love is more than a false abstraction, with a content that exceeds the regulatory and exchange systems that frequently co-opt it. Harrison refuses that opiate. "Sonnet"'s power to disturb lies in the uncompromising critique that its brief, bleak images convey. Although the conventions of the sonnet form give Harrison options for resolving the contradictions that these fourteen lines identify, the brevity of the form also enables an ironic magnification of those contradictions that she fully exploits. "Sonnet"'s presentation of this twice-made speech draws attention to the time that elapses between the two deliveries as a medium of liberation for the first speaker and enslavement for the second.

II

Forty years after its first printing in *The Week*, "Do you remember" reappears in a twenty-two-sonnet sequence that Harrison self-publishes in 1925 as part of a collection entitled *Songs of Love and Labor*. As starkly as

the 1884 sonnet portrays the costs of a patriarchal economy to its female speaker, *Song of Love and Labor*[7] praises the advantages she enjoys in a capitalist one. The poem celebrates "the common man," several examples of whom the speaker gives early in the sequence. These "common men" share a single profession, shopkeeping, and are individuated by the types of wares that they sell and the countries from which they hail. The speaker describes sellers and merchandise as she proceeds down a busy market street, her gait and mien clearly suggesting her status as a shopper, with the confidence of one who has both purchasing power and choice.

Mobility helps thematically to unify the sequence's early sonnets as something that the shopkeepers and this customer possess in different ways. The speaker's freedom of movement allows her to meet her subject, while the people whom she finds behind the various counters have all migrated from distant places to keep shop in a new land. As she meanders happily from store to store, the speaker expresses many times a view similar to the one that Harrison's contemporary and Tory economist Stephen Leacock articulated when he observed work and workers in postwar industrial Canada: "The brave independence of the keeper of the little shop contrasts favorably with the mock dignity of a floor walker in [a factory] 'establishment'" (23). That independence makes the small business owner the true inheritor of "pioneer settler[s] in America two hundred years ago" (Leacock 24). Leacock's insinuation that those pioneers' *biological* descendants perform the factory's "dull and meaningless toil" (24) invites the question that Harrison's depiction of merchant row answers. Who are these shopkeepers? They are newcomers who have arrived among more recent non-Anglo and non-Nordic migrant groups to set up trade "within the Ward." Given Harrison's many years' residency in Toronto (MacMillan 204-05), the place name likely refers to that city's St. John's Ward, an immigrant precinct where a century of new arrivals first settled until it was gradually demolished after the Second World War to make way for Nathan Phillips Square, opened in 1965. Shopkeepers' names—J. Catelli, V. Leone, Dimitri—introduce Mediterranean countries of origin. Other stalls feature tenants from further East whose signs advertising "Chop Suey" and palm reading divert the speaker as foreign entertainments.

Harrison's and Leacock's work appeared during a decade of intense debate in Canada over attempts to relax immigration rules that for the previous quarter century had officially prioritized migrants with the agricultural know-how to be successful farmers. Following the First World War and against often-xenophobic opposition, new policies welcomed candidates able to contribute to the nation's increasing economic diversification

in cities and towns. Harrison's portraits of individual shops and shopkeepers evince support for a more multi-ethnic country. Moreover, both Harrison and Leacock[8] identify a pressing political impetus for some of this new immigration that Harrison sets out in the first sonnet of *Song of Love and Labor*:

> The Reds of Russia ne'er had sworn to slay,
> To filch, maraud, and ravish, to betray
> Even themselves, had not been kept asunder
> Too long the rich and poor, the high and low.
> The callous noble, the pale and trembling slave,
> Will pass, are passing […].
>
> (1.5-11)

Revolution results from entrenched material and political inequality, but it resolves neither. That task instead falls to "common men" who work hard and reap the rewards of their own labour. This reference to Russian revolutionaries expresses a Western suspicion, articulated in Canadian dailies, that the former ruling elites of Tsarist Russia had secretly joined forces with the Bolsheviks to maintain the same monstrously inequitable distribution of power and wealth that they enjoyed before 1917 ("Despairing Cry"). The lesson of the Revolution, as *Song of Love and Labor*'s speaker understands it, is that political upheaval improves little in ordinary people's daily lives. What improvement does come does so only with their physical escape from the conflict. It's a rising merchant class, not the "Reds," who equalize "noble" and "slave" by opening small businesses and plying many trades.

The sonnets thus promote bourgeois values against a recent Communist threat and to that end take up a pro-immigrant position more progressive than the one that many Canadians held. Even after the First World War ended, business and political leaders in the country continued to assure the public that Canada would "encourage only those [immigrants] who have the inclination and the qualifications necessary to fit them for work on the land" (Cox), a pro-rural policy that dated to Clifford Sifton's tenure as Minister of the Interior from 1896 to 1905 (Brown and Cook 55-56). Such outmoded notions dovetailed with a postwar push to attract more British settlers (Brown and Cook 323) and with an Immigration Act that continued to block almost anyone else's entry. The shopkeepers whom the speaker introduces represent more than emancipation from political serfdom. They are antidotes to Anglo-Canadian insularity. If her descriptions of exuberant multicolour displays of fruits and vegetables, the "dazzling satin" that

brightens a "shabby window" (5.10), and "[s]weetmeats of saffron" (11.6) in the candy store exoticize their subjects, they also depict owners who spend their days in ways that are anything but exotic, labourers who face all the worries and tedium of anyone who works for a living. Superficial markers of difference affirm a stronger sameness between these recent arrivals and residents of longer standing.

The speaker adds that a more global incentive for moving, hunger, ties these new immigrants to those who may consider themselves more native to the nation:

> Why are they here, upon Canadian strand?
> Freedom, and Peace—is that the boasted vaunt!
> No—but the Fear of Famine grey and gaunt,
> Stalking, as stalk their wolves, throughout the land.
> When Hunger rages, call no people wise,
> Nor strive to heal their woes by word of mouth […].
> (6.1-6)

The intertextual resemblance here to *Malcolm's Katie*'s "panting, human waves / Upheav'd by throbs of angry poverty, / And driven by keen blasts of hunger, from / Their native strands" onto the prairies (II. 201-04) identifies the recent migrations with those of nineteenth-century British settlers, reminding readers that, no matter what year they arrive, all migrants share certain motives for coming, most importantly the need to survive that trumps the love of homeland and prompts the search for prosperity. A shared experience of privation leads to the same moves for the same reasons notwithstanding the ethnic differences that separate some new immigrants from the Euro-settlers of an earlier era. Therefore, the speaker counsels her audience, "Cast away […] / […]'alien', epithet frosty," for "'friend'" and "'neighbor'," "'brother'" even (6.9-10).

Positioned in the opening sonnets devoted to descriptions of various stores, this advice casts the speaker's audience as fellow Caucasians whose time in the country began before the subjects of her observations arrived. She and this audience constitute the other half of a bourgeois equation that requires people to buy the merchandise on offer. As she invites these readers to look at the market through her eyes and instructs them on the appropriate attitude to adopt towards the people she meets, she reveals her own status, and perspective, as a white citizen of the "older" group. An emancipated middle-class woman welcoming ethnically-diverse immigrants as fellow seekers of a better life, this speaker stresses a commonality across ethnic and cultural divides that is enabled by the opportunities that she

believes private enterprise offers, while at the same time it signals that her authority within this system exceeds that of those who serve her in these stores by a wide margin.

The server/served binary on which Harrison constructs this welcome therefore betrays a cleavage between the two groups, for it recognizes as "difference" only what appears so from a white Euro-settler point of view. Perceiving "Pale Jewish faces lit by lustrous eyes" (5.7) as enticing and attributing Dimitri's inexhaustible range of sweets to biology (his "streak / Of Turkish blood" [11.4-5]) reveals unacknowledged Anglo-Caucasianness as a defining difference between speaker and subject, one all the more significant for being tacit. These descriptions depict the "foreign" against a silent norm of whiteness and white purchasing power that, perhaps because of the speaker's enthusiasm for her subject, leads to ever more offensive stereotypes and, for today's readers, an inevitable critical embarrassment:

> The Chink will wash for you, the Jew will sew,
> The huge Cigar suspended o'er your head
> Recalls good Florizel if you have read
> Aright, and when the shadows gather, lo –
> The street is one long fiery glittering lane,
> The Trades remain—thank God—the Trades remain.
> (13.9-14)

The allusion to Robert Louis Stevenson's dashing pop-fiction private eye, the London-man-about-town knockoff of Shakespeare's Bohemian Prince Florizel,[9] underscores the point: The speaker regards these streets and their non-Nordic tenants as all part of the same cheap spectacle, the "glittering lane" that entertains her by night as the shopkeepers cater to her by day. She even permits herself a self-aggrandizing *frisson* at its unthinkable demise: "Were Commerce dead, then might the world lay down / To die, herself, turning her face to the wall / […] / No use for Money—what would life avail!" (14.1-2, 12). "Idleness and Beggary" (14.13) is the answer and, if there is "[n]o one to sell since no one comes to buy" (14.10), it's a future only she can prevent by continuing to perform her duty as a consumer.

In this language, obviously, one comes upon the impasse that may turn modern readers away from further analysis of Harrison's *Song of Love and Labor*. The sequence does take a liberal middle-class attitude toward opening Canada up to more ethnic diversity, displaying a social and political open-mindedness grounded in the kind of historical understanding of settler experience that forbids bigotry. Yet Harrison's diction is both bigoted

and racist, an illustration of George Elliott Clarke's insight that genuine equality can elude liberal imaginations—especially those inspired by faith in the socially symmetrizing potential of capitalist exchange relations—as thoroughly as it does their conservative counterparts, with their commitment to hierarchies of class and race (11-15). The contrast between such bellicose proclamations as those of the passage just quoted and the reticent beauty of "Do you remember" only increases the temptation to abandon *Song of Love and Labor* altogether as precisely the type of failed poem to which diminished authorial talent (and perhaps judgement) leads.

But the sharpness of the contrast between such passages and the subtler lines of "Do you remember" urges their comparison even as it risks turning contemporary readers away. Because the 1884 sonnet is included, with minimal revision, in the 1925 poem, its speaker becomes the speaker of the other twenty-one sonnets in the sequence, and the speaking persona remains consistent across the series. By extension, the enslaved labouring woman of "Do you remember" transforms into the happily wandering consumer whom the storekeepers of St. John's Ward labour to serve. Even as the unpalatable stereotypes of *Song of Love and Labor* seem to render further analysis unappealing, the inclusion of "Do you remember" poses two questions: How—and *why*—does one get from the blunt condemnation of patriarchal economy in the 1884 sonnet to the florid descriptions of the marketplace in *Song of Love and Labor*? How and why does the same female speaker voice both?

A brief aside two-thirds of the way through the sequence undermines the notion that "Do you remember" appears in *Song of Love and Labor* merely because it was easy for Harrison to stick it in. "Shall I so read the stars of my career," the speaker suddenly demands, "[t]hat they must spell defeat, predestined woe? / […] / Or shall I work, work on, my will compelling" the "service of pen" (17.1-2, 5-6)? A few other references to the speaker as a writer occur in the sequence, but this aside lingers longer on the vocation, affirming the ongoing dedication it has demanded of the speaker and challenging the idea that she would allow mere expediency to shape her work. Although nothing in *Song of Love and Labor* invites an overtly autobiographical reading of the poem, her statement on the attention that writing requires suggests that careful planning preceded the inclusion of "Do you remember" in the later text. The aside anticipates the 1884 sonnet's appearance in another way, too, for like her incarnation in "Do you remember," the speaker here apprehends an uncertain future, echoing the 1884 sonnet's forecast of a bleak fortune by alluding to the "fitful horoscope" of her writing life (17.8).

Along with this anticipation of "Do you remember" in its grimmer aspects, the speaker's question about her career precipitates a new reflection on money that registers a similar unease about the system that she has just been celebrating. Necessary as money is to the business of getting and spending that she has praised with such gusto, that medium of exchange makes "[o]f man a devil till his thirst he slake / At poisoned founts of lust and low desire" (15.10-12). Deanna Kreisel's recent work on the idea of the "economic woman" in the novels of George Eliot and Thomas Hardy points out that influential Victorian writers such as John Ruskin made new alignments between women's sexual promiscuity, "economic stagnation" and other much-feared dangers of the rapidly expanding capitalist market (5-9). As Harrison's speaker lauds commerce and her own freedoms on market row, her identification of male hoarding with loose womanhood—a familiar Victorian association of greed with the loss of a woman's chastity—dampens her enthusiasm for the order from which she seems so clearly to gain. Like the question concerning the writer's craft, this observation reveals an oncoming anxiety that moderates her erstwhile ebullience.

When "Do you remember" finally appears near the end of the sequence, then, *Song of Love and Labor* has altered in tone from triumphalist to hesitant, a change that eases the older sonnet's insertion into a text that has heretofore differed significantly in its mood while maintaining a similar focus on economy. The 1884 sonnet's divergences from the sequence therefore do not surprise readers as they otherwise might; indeed, they even allow for a perception of similarities that explain its inclusion. A common focus on settler lives and settler economy seems evident, since the references in "Do you remember" to the speaker's "old world hand" intimate her own settler background. While the use of hackneyed metaphors like Old World and New hardly proves beyond doubt that either she or her companion originate from Europe, the repetition of these phrases in the close confines of a single couplet lays peculiar stress upon the transition from "old" to "new" worlds, drawing as much attention to the movement between the two as to the geographic areas named. An early settler context further suggests itself in the crags, winds, and northerly "glacial drifts," all of which are used to describe the same hand and all of which evoke a Canada in which climate and geography supply the most striking features, as they did for many early settlers who wrote about this place.

Examining "Do you remember" as bringing an earlier settler moment into *Song of Love and Labor* opens the sequence to a new historical analysis that treats the two settler economies as points on the same trajectory.

Regarding them as part of a single timeline makes them amenable to a reading according to the logic of substitution,[10] the economic principle that holds that some or all of a system's components can be replaced by other components able to accomplish the same tasks. Such an interpretation might posit that by bringing together two disparate moments in settler time, *Song of Love and Labor* tracks a settler history in which the labour once performed by women such as the speaker—labour that maintained a fragile economy at enormous cost—metamorphoses into the more various labours of new migrants as they arrive in greater numbers.

Who would begrudge this woman her window-shopping and sociable wandering if it means a life less ground down than the 1884 sonnet predicted for her? This interpretation affirms a measure of progress for women, at least women who belong to the same Euro-settler group. It also continues to support the system that once seemed mortally to threaten her, since the substitution principle helps sustain, not undermine, the system in which it affirms the use of replaceable parts. Thus what is good for this woman may not be so good for the many people who now serve her. In effect, the incorporation of "Sonnet" into *Song of Love and Labor* makes a second critique of settler economy possible: while the labourers are replaceable units in the system, the system always includes some people who consume more than they produce. That group, too, may find itself replaced by others, as the rise of the speaker to *her* privileged status as consumer demonstrates. Yet when it comes to the power position at the top of this economic pyramid, that replacement still seems constrained to a specific race and to certain national origins if not to a single sex, at least according to the two moments in its evolution that the 1925 sequence features.

This second critique softens the body blows of the first, for if the migrant store-owners of St. John's Ward find themselves portrayed as a spectacle for their white visitor's delectation, the same substitution logic that permitted *her* change in status may one day change theirs. Even so, juxtaposing "Do you remember" to this celebration of Anglo-settler consumerism exposes the economy's underbelly. Accepting it means accepting its inequities, not to mention the speaker's merry ethnocentrism. By inviting an immediate comparison of one depiction of the economy to another—a depiction composed later but presented by the same persona—"Do you remember" as recycled in *Song of Love and Labor* unifies the two into a single historicized, evolving entity in which gains for (some) women seem evident. Simultaneously, the incorporation draws attention to a fea-

ture of this economy—its always-replaceable components—about which readers today may feel very ambivalent.

If this juxtaposition were the only role that the 1884 sonnet performed in the longer work, then it might provide *Song of Love and Labor* a coda that legitimates views of Harrison as a poet whose later writing brings diminishing returns to her audience. But Harrison's placement of "Do you remember" four sonnets from the end of *Song of Love and Labor* puts it in a position to cast readers' attention forward to the closing poems as well as backward to the critique of the earlier sonnets that it makes available. Several closing sonnets develop "Do you remember" in a very different direction from that backward glance, supplementing the story outlined in the sonnet with a complete revision of the future of the woman to whom the standalone version gives little or none. These concluding lyrics reveal her lover's untimely death before he could propose and relay her struggle to decide whether to accept a new suitor.[11] If this scenario suggests a farcical return to the substitution principle, what is striking about the speaker's reflection is its emphasis on love as a source of the irreplaceable—on things that, once gone, are gone for good. It is possible, in her view, to fall in love twice, but never twice to feel "[t]hat first strange pang that o'er our being steals" (20.2) in the initial instance. The loss of the first love, moreover, causes (at least for Harrison's speaker) an irremediable loss of language—the language that names bereavement—that she believes her poetic skill inadequate to recover (21.1-3; 22.1-4). The dead lover's soul is forever gone, hopefully but not certainly reborn "as our beliefs forecast" into an immortal one (21.12). Accepting the second suitor, the speaker denies any possibility of substituting one love for the other. Choosing a mate because one feels "not strong enough to walk alone" (22.7) is a far cry from choosing a mate because one experiences a "transfigurate" passion (20.5) for him.

The final sonnets of the sequence thus assert that love is incommensurate with the logic of substitution that the 1884 sonnet helps establish within the sonnet sequence. The 1884 sonnet simultaneously sets up a double critique of settler economy and withdraws from that critique, recuperating love as a thing transcendent and thereby negating the standalone sonnet's adamant rejection of love as an enslaving lie. Once so uncompromising on that point and the patriarchy it supports, "Do you remember" now attempts to change the subject, and in an important sense it succeeds. For with the shift to these reflections the speaker is no longer labourer, nor former labourer whose position has improved, nor privileged buyer of goods for sale. She defines a new position for herself without referring to

production or consumption, a position determined by the decision that she makes as one lover who feels obligated to another. That decision rejects self-sacrifice as well as self-indulgence. Choosing to commit to another, she reintroduces herself as a sovereign agent, not an object of exchange, enacting what she sees as a reasonable desire not "to walk alone."

If my interpretation of *Song of Love and Labor* is at all convincing, then it suggests that Harrison succeeds in re-employing the 1884 sonnet in the 1925 sequence to deliver not one but three distinct treatments of economy, each available to a reading as a potentially radical comment and each also bearing some notably conservative marks, each grappling with issues of human disposability and each implying that what is disposable at one point in an economy may not be so at another. Only the combination of earlier and later writing makes these multiple readings possible. *Song of Love and Labor* possesses a complexity that downward-spiral narratives of aging Confederation-period writers do not explain.

I began this discussion by affirming that "Do you remember" fascinates the scholar in me owing partly to its incorporation in *Song of Love and Labor* and partly to its power as a compelling standalone piece. When I try to think of what I want to say about the sonnet and the later sequence, however, the teacher in me speaks up before the scholar does—specifically, the teacher of potential scholars who may take an interest in early Canadian literature. That teacher often gripes about how writers like Harrison make her job harder. Many students would eschew an extended study of poetry such as *Song of Love and Labor* on the perfectly sensible ground that ethnocentric texts and racist language generate few useful insights. But unwillingness to engage with such texts—an unwillingness conveniently masked by the maxim that "if you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all"—means that ethnic difference and racist depictions are frequently ignored when they surface in early Canadian literature. *Song of Love and Labor* teaches that early twentieth-century texts by Confederation-era writers ought not to be read as if they are frozen in time. They bear significant signs of rethinking and re-engagement. Neither self-consciously experimental nor revolutionary, the unease that they evoke in readers may nevertheless point them in previously-overlooked critical directions. Above all, the kind of approach they demand in 2013 "involves self-reflection, vulnerability, and an awareness of one's own conditional/conditioned language" (Budde 246), requiring reading practices that not only scrutinize the writing but the reasons for readers' unwillingness to talk about it.

Notes

1 See for instance Charles G.D. Roberts's "Westmoreland Revisited" (*The Week* 20 Dec. 1883, 38), which became the much-anthologized "Tantramar Revisited." See also David Bentley's reference to Bliss Carman's "A Sea Child" in *The Confederation Group of Canadian Poets* (340 n.36).

2 See for example Carole Gerson and Gwendolyn Davies, *Canadian Poetry From the Beginnings to the First World War* and Wanda Campbell, *Hidden Rooms: Early Canadian Women Poets*.

3 Tracy Ware has gathered nearly all the scholarly articles on Harrison's *oeuvre* in his critical edition of *Crowded Out! and Other Sketches* (2010). Jennifer Henderson's "Taste and Colonial Conjugality" appears in *Canadian Literature*'s Summer 2012 issue. Sylvia Mary Leigh's "Susie Frances Harrison: An Approach to Her Life and Work" (U of Western Ontario, 1980) is to date the only full-length master's thesis to focus on Harrison's poetry and prose. More recently, Jennifer Chambers devoted a chapter of her doctoral dissertation (U of Alberta 2005) to Harrison's work. About a quarter of that chapter discusses Harrison's villanelles, with the remainder focusing on her prose fiction.

4 Eighteenth-century courtesy books, and some of the etiquette books that followed them in the nineteenth century, emphasized modesty and reticence as feminine qualities that well-bred ladies should cultivate (Curtin 204-08), qualities inconsistent with such forward actions as taking another's hand, especially when making statements such as the one the speaker of "Sonnet" remembers.

5 See for example "Paradise," "There remaineth therefore a rest," and "Lines to My Grandfather," all included in *The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti* edited by William Michael Rossetti and published in 1904.

6 I use "patriarchy" here in the following sense: "A form of social organization in which the father or oldest male is the head of the family, and descent and relationship are reckoned through the male line; government or rule by a man or men" (*OED*). Although the connection between the "love" addressed in the second line and "Love, the boy" stems from the personification of the later reference rather than the articulation of a specific patrilineal relation, the choice of personifying term suggests the continuity of a male line through the speaking woman.

7 The sonnet sequence has no title. I refer to it as *Song of Love and Labor* on the grounds of its position at the start of the volume and the poem's first line: "Tools and the Man, I sing: The Song of Labor." I have chosen to use italics for the title owing to the poem's greater-than-average length.

8 Leacock, *Riddle* 11-12.

9 See Stevenson's *New Arabian Nights*, first published in 1871 (Gosse 4).

10 I am indebted to Catherine Gallagher's *The Body Economic* for this term.

11 Perhaps to this end, Harrison makes two revisions to "Do you remember" that may be regarded as significant, changing the phrase "O cruel love" to "O absent Love."

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