David Gaertner, *The Theatre of Regret: Literature, Art, and the Politics of Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2020), 320pp. Paperback. \$89.95. ISBN: 978-0-7748-6535-7.

This book is a rich yet sensitive examination of the complexities at play in reconciliation in Canada and the way in which literature responds to these concerns. The book contributes to the growing conversations surrounding reconciliation by arguing that truth is the key element in overcoming ‘performances of morality’ (157) that have plagued Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRC) globally in what Gaertner terms ‘the theatre of regret’. The book successfully brings together literary and political analysis of the history of reconciliation globally, examining those created in countries such as South Africa and Chile and comparing them to the TRC in Canada to argue that settler-led reconciliation processes perpetuate colonial trauma by refusing to acknowledge historical truths surrounding national trauma. The book analyses formal apologies given by both the Government and the Church to emphasise that literature holds the propensity for thinking through a number of key elements that underpin reconciliation: acknowledgment, apology, redress, and forgiveness.

The originality of the book lies in Gaertner’s methodological approach, engaging with a broad spectrum of literature, including Indigenous authors Thomas King, Eden Robinson, and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, and broader Canadian literature by other ethnic minority authors, such as Joy Kogawa and Nalo Hopkinson. Such an engagement demonstrates that contemporary Canadian literature is directly and critically responding to formal apologies made by both the government and the Church, and is imagining new ways of overcoming the shortcomings within these attempts at reconciliation. In addition, in engaging with the imaginative potential in these texts and demonstrating the creative range of responses to apology and forgiveness, Gaertner puts into practise the centring of marginalised voices within the work of reconciliation that the thesis of this book hinges upon.

The strength of Gaertner’s monograph is further evidenced in the attention he pays to the pitfalls of a settler-led reconciliation process. He is right to highlight that acknowledgement and apology are meaningless when they are not then followed by substantial political and material change. In a striking and original analysis of Coyote’s speech in *Green Grass, Running Water* by Thomas King, Gaertner gives a fascinating insight into the way in which language plays into the politics of reconciliation, emphasising that deliberate choices between tenses, or the use ‘we’ versus ‘I’, and ‘sorry’ versus ‘apologise’ often shape the depth of the meaning and so must be taken into consideration when formulating an apology.

The book also provides an original perspective to conversations surrounding reparations as part of reconciliation. Gaertner argues dominant understandings of reparations determine that they are part of a material acknowledgment of the way in which trauma and structural inequalities caused by settler colonialism has marginalised Indigenous communities. However, Gaertner emphasises that gift giving is also an integral part of First Nations’ culture. Thus, by thinking of reparations as a gift, we might understand reconciliation as part of a discourse on responsibility and reciprocity, meaning that ‘in giving, one creates an obligation to relationship and an ethic of reciprocity that facilitates community.’ (168-169) Reparations then, and the act of giving a gift, provides an opportunity to put into practice Indigenous ways-of-being that prove settler Canadians are committed to

understanding and centring Indigenous culture in their attempt at reconciliation, moving away from settler-led conceptions.

Gaertner remains deeply committed throughout the book to the idea that settler Canadians should not feel entitled to forgiveness. By relying on forgiveness as a certainty there is a risk that the horrors of Canada's colonial past are moved on from too quickly and forgotten. Consequently, the crux and original thesis of Gaertner's argument is that rather than focusing on forgiveness, it is truth that must be centred. Canada must address the deeper structural inequalities that have occurred as a result of the past, such as the residential school system, and that still occur today in the treatment of Indigenous communities. In addition to this emphasis on truth, whereas previous examinations of reconciliation and the conversations surrounding it have been settler-led, Gaertner argues that it is imperative reconciliation centres Indigenous perspective and creates space for Indigenous voices. *The Theatre of Regret* does just this with depth and flair, emphasising through its engagement with a breadth of Indigenous literature that by engaging with Indigenous stories and the voices of survivors we might imagine new futures for Indigenous-settler relations that are not solely focused on the harmonization of reconciliation, but rather Indigenous led reconciliation and what this might look like in terms of self-sufficient kinship with the land. This can only be achieved, Gaertner argues, by balancing reconciliation with truth.

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