

LIKE VELVET FROM ANTLERS

A NOVEL

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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ABSTRACT

Like Velvet From Antlers is domestic noir novel about a mother-daughter pairing and an exploration into how their intimate connection to a serial killer affects the minutia of their daily lives. The grounding principle of this work is a critique of romanticised serial killer narratives that play up the charisma of the killer and remove focus from the predominantly female victims. Writing back against the established—and booming—serial killer genres means creating a space where women retain bodily autonomy, the serial killer is not permitted to voice his justifications, and the voices of female characters are central to the story. To replicate fractured identities being woven back together through relationship, *Like Velvet From Antlers* takes place over the course of three decades—1987 to 2019—from four interlocked perspectives.

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for those of us who hurry down dark roads alone

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ARTIST STATEMENT

Situated within the true crime and domestic noir genres, *Like Velvet From Antlers* is a novel about a mother-daughter pairing and how their relationship with a serial killer affects the minutia of their daily lives. Julia Crouch coined the term domestic noir in 2013 and loosely defined it as fiction that “takes place primarily in homes and workplaces, concerns itself largely (but not exclusively) with the female experience, is based around relationships and takes as its base a broadly feminist view that the domestic sphere is a challenging and sometimes dangerous prospect for its inhabitants.” Additionally, Elisabeth de Mariaffi, in an article for *The Literary Review of Canada*, notes how domestic noir as a genre “exploded in 2012 with Gillian Flynn’s *Gone Girl*, a story narrated in part by a wife who has disappeared” and that a common element of the genre is that of a, usually female, unreliable narrator. Mariaffi further speculates if “there is not some comfort for women readers in a story written from a woman’s point of view, one that meets the societal perception of unreliability head-on, and often confirms those fears to be well and truly grounded after all.” Domestic noir then, is a genre going through a period of growth that brings together elements of thriller, horror, procedural, and feminist genres in a way that women may find more relatable and honest to their real-life experiences.

Like Velvet From Antlers does not sit perfectly in line with other domestic noir pieces. While Mariaffi’s *The Devil You Know*, Moriarty’s *Big Little Lies*, and Flynn’s *Gone Girl*, take various crimes as their focal points and the family sphere becomes a place of danger, the focus of *Like Velvet From Antlers* remains more firmly on the domestic side of domestic noir as the protagonists themselves are not directly involved in the central crimes of the novel. The approach *Like Velvet from Antlers* takes on domestic noir is more in line with how Kazuo Ishiguro approaches the dystopian science fiction narrative in *Never Let Me Go*. Ishiguro’s protagonist, Kathy, lives in a dystopian world where clones are raised for organ harvest. Unlike other popular dystopian narratives, such as Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* or Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, where the plot is formed upon the social issue at hand—the sentience of androids and enslavement of women respectively—Ishiguro’s narrative is more concerned with the small moments in Kathy’s life: her friendships with Ruth and Tommy and her experiences at the so-called school, Hailsham. Though the implications of society at large are crucial to the events of Ishiguro’s story, this society plays little part in *Never Let Me Go*, unlike the larger world of Atwood’s Gilead or Dick’s post-apocalyptic Earth. *Like*

Velvet From Antlers takes a similar sideways approach to domestic noir; the novel focuses in on the small moments in the lives of Beverly, Cassidy, Angela, and Hannah, and the crimes of the serial killer are seen from a side angle and both committed and resolved off-page.

Decentering the serial-killer narrative and prioritizing women's daily lives serves to critique the way crime genres have begun to romanticize the serial-killer figure. Domestic noir has not risen to popularity in a vacuum. Alongside these aforementioned fictional narratives there has been an upswing in the popularity of true crime and other literary and non-literary genres that focus on the serial killer or psychopath, often romanticizing the—almost always male—killer in the process. In their study, “Captured by True Crime: Why Are Women Drawn to Tales of Rape, Murder, and Serial Killers?” Amanda Vicary and R. Chris Fraley establish that not only has the true crime genre amassed a following, but that the readers of the genre are more often female than male (85). In an article for *The Globe and Mail*, Jana Pruden acknowledges “we are currently in the midst of what some are calling a ‘true crime boom,’ thanks to a resurgence in great true-crime writing and longform journalism, and the popularity of true-crime podcasts like *Serial*, *S-Town* and *In the Dark*, and documentaries like *Making a Murderer* and *The Jinx*.” Podcasts like *My Favorite Murder* (Hardstark and Kilgariff) and *Crime Junkie* (Flowers and Prawat) combine these two elements—true crime as booming industry and the more frequently female following—as both podcasts are hosted by pairs of female friends sharing their obsession with true crime. These podcasts take different murders and disappearances to discuss each week and the crimes described frequently involve the heinous deaths of women at the hands of serial killers, like the Green River Killer and the Golden State Serial Killer. Television shows such as *You* (Berlanti and Gamble), *Dead To Me* (Feldmen), and *Conversations With a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes* (Berlinger) further illustrate how both domestic noir and true crime have permeated many entertainment sources. Collectively, there is a genre forming that places a romantic focus on the murderer and directs the gaze (or ear) of the audience towards the dismembered bodies of women.

Like *Velvet From Antlers* grew out of an obsession and critiquing of these kinds of media. Much of this true crime/domestic noir boom puts focus on understanding and often empathizing with or romanticizing the serial killer. Based on the novel *You* by Caroline Kepnes, the Netflix series of the same name centres the serial killer, Joe, as protagonist and allows him the space to continually justify his actions to the audience. Joe is portrayed by actor Penn Badgley; an actor

oft cast as the romantic counterpart in movies like *John Tucker Must Die* and *Easy A* (IMDb “Penn Badgley”). The same sort of casting choice occurs *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile*—an adaptation of Elizabeth Kendall’s memoir *The Phantom Prince: My Life with Ted Bundy*—where Zac Efron plays Ted Bundy. Being portrayed by Efron, who is known for playing romantic roles in *The Lucky One*, *Hairspray*, and *High School Musical*, places Bundy in that same category: expected love interest (IMDb “Zac Efron”). Though both Badgley and Efron may have been selected for their range and ability to portray the desired character, their filmographies suggest that they exist in the public’s mind as desirable men, which in turn locates that same desire onto the serial killer figures they portray. The purpose of *Like Velvet From Antlers*, in many ways, is to write against these narratives and create a domestic noir story that pushes the serial killer off to the side and brings focus back to the lives of women under constant threat. Writing back means establishing a space where women retain bodily autonomy, the serial killer is not permitted to voice his justifications, and the voices of female characters are central to the story.

Although *Like Velvet From Antlers* is a fictional work, its consideration of true crime is consistently more important than mystery, procedural, thriller, and other fictional genres that may look at the serial killer. This is due to the immediacy of the harm coming from the booming true crime genre; it is one thing to romanticize and give voice to *You*’s fictional character, Joe, and quite another to do the same for Ted Bundy. Blending true crime and fiction is not a new concept; Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*, an early prototype for contemporary true crime works, fictionalizes events to the extent that Capote frequently inserts dialogue between the suspects, Richard Hickock and Perry Smith, in moments where only the two men could have known what was said. *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile* does the same thing with Ted Bundy’s story. This genre blending set the precedent for *Like Velvet From Antlers* to be considered in line with the true crime genre as it reaches outward to consider people like Ted Bundy and the recently identified Golden State Serial Killer—Joseph DeAngelo—as well as inwards to the fictional killer, Franklin. Domestic noir as a genre provided the arena for elements of true crime to play in a fictional world.

Because of these oft-sideways and critical considerations of genre, *Like Velvet From Antlers* became an interdisciplinary—or inter-genre—work, incorporating elements of horror with literary realism, and domestic noir with a more traditional women’s literary canon.

Important inter-genre examples are Suzette Mayr's *Dr. Edith Vane and the Hares of Crawley Hall*, Maria Mutch's *When We Were Birds*, Helen Oyeyemi's *Boy, Snow, Bird*, and Sarah Waters' *Affinity*. These works, three novels and one short story collection, each bring together elements of realism and the supernatural or otherworldly: In *Dr. Edith Vane and the Hares of Crawley Hall* a frazzled university professor is haunted by hares until she becomes one; in *When We Were Birds* characters pull feathers from their necks and peregrine falcons become human; *Boy, Snow, Bird* blurs the lines between human identities, realism and fairy tales; and *Affinity* guides the reader into believing a ghost story that never was. All these works, in one way or another, straddle the line between realism and fantasy.

Like Velvet From Antlers works to straddle a similar line between conventional genres. The dream state that frames *Like Velvet From Antlers* offers access to the more fantastical and horror genres. The dream state appears four times in the novel and is the place where Beverly and Hannah, both dead, collide with the comatose Angela and reanimate thirty murdered women and girls in one body, which leads to a collective consciousness of the murdered. The fantastical elements of the dream state remain distinct from the body of the novel. A reader may interpret Angela in her comatose state as hallucinating conversations between herself and Beverly or as existing on a plane between life and death. Containing the dream state to Angela prevents this surrealism from entering the rest of the novel. The dream state is a place where human, animal, natural world, and individual identity blur lines so that communal healing can occur for the women.

These dream state scenes align most closely with the body horror genre. Ronald Cruz, in his article "Mutations and Metamorphoses: Body Horror is Biological Horror" says that body horror is "characterized by the manipulation and warping of the normal state of bodily form and function" and is "one of the more horrifying flavors of the horror film genre, for it plays on our natural aversion to pain and damage to the human body" (161, 167). Body horror aligns with the true crime genre as both explore dismemberment and mutilation. Of particular concern to *Like Velvet From Antlers* is the possibility for the dismemberment of women's bodies to be viewed voyeuristically. Because of this concern about the frequent presentation of women's bodies as objects both dead and alive, *Like Velvet From Antlers* uses the dream state to reverse the expectations of body horror and pulls dismembered bodies together instead of apart. It is important to reverse this process of destruction and dismemberment and have the mother figure,

Beverly, bring these women's bodies back together because one of the driving principles in *Like Velvet From Antlers* is the articulation of connections between women even as they are physically pulled apart.

The same concerns about potential voyeurism and the dehumanization of women kept the acts of violence in the novel off the page—the only scene of physical violence that plays out for the reader is Cassidy's accidental harming of Angela during a fight. The murdered women, with the exception of Gemma Graham's foot, are never portrayed as dead; they retain voice and agency as they exist in the dream state. True crime, as a genre, is overwhelmingly filled with in-depth descriptions of women's bodies post-mortem; while it is important for the public to understand the severity of the violence that women face, this detailing also serves to place the worst moments of a victim's life on public display without her consent.

Similarly, in sexual assault and rape cases, women are made to detail the ways in which men violated them, which effectively retraumatizes the women. An example of this re-traumatization infamously occurred in New Jersey in August 2018 when a judge “questioned a woman about how she tried to stop an alleged sexual assault [...] after she fully described her assault allegations to the court” (Romaine and Simko-Bednarski). Women have been made, time and time again, to detail the violences men commit against them for the public, their friends and family, and a court so that others may decide how severe that violence was. Though the murder of women is inarguably violent and therefore not truly being presented for debate, removing it from the page serves not only to prevent a voyeuristic gaze upon the dead female body, but also removes the violence from a position where the reader may place judgement upon the women's behaviour or the severity of the crime. *Like Velvet From Antlers* does not ignore the violence, instead the serial killer, Franklin, is approached most closely through the character of Hannah, a border collie. Hannah, as a non-human, female entity provides a space to approach Franklin's violence without coming fully in contact with it.

Body horror also suggests the idea of mutation. *Like Velvet From Antlers* addresses this concept of mutation by altering the narrative from forced mutation into deliberate metamorphosis. Metamorphosis appears thematically throughout the novel with the images of Baba Yaga and her chicken-legged cabin, Frida Kahlo's *The Wounded Deer*, the physically flooding of spaces that alters landscapes, and the encapsulating imagery of a deer in velvet. The largest space of metamorphosis within the novel is the dream state, where the often-voiceless

victims can exist and speak, which gives space for these murdered women to retake their voice and power. Part of this reclamation occurs in the final iteration of the dream state where the now collective voice considers the notion of the triple goddess, namely the Russian Baba Yaga, the Nordic Hel, and the Greek Hecate. In her essay “The Politics of the Goddess: Feminist Spirituality and the Essentialism Debate” Kathryn Roundtree articulates how the image of the triple goddess can be taken as essentialist or empowering: Roundtree says, “critics of the movement claim that Goddess worship leads women to valorize fertility, nurturance and other ‘maternal’ qualities as ‘natural’, universal and static feminine traits, while adherents claim that the Goddess allows them to embrace, if they wish, the maternal aspects of womanhood, but also the warrior, the virgin, the destructive crone, or any other of the Goddess's ‘thousand faces’, all of which are as valid as the nurturing mother” (138 emphasis original). *Like Velvet From Antlers* explores the idea of the triple goddess not only by invoking the names of mythological goddesses, but by placing the collective body of victims, the mother figure of Beverly, and the crone, Hannah, within the dream state together as a symbolic representation of the most frequently cited faces of the triple goddess figures: maiden, mother, and crone. These bodies are both collective and distinct, transforming as they decompose back into the earth, and they are capable of choosing how they will move forward—which aspect of the triple goddess they wish to exemplify.

Populating the dream state with Eurocentric mythologies is not entirely unproblematic as much of the identity of the collective consciousness is made up of Indigenous women and girls. Having the collective consciousness process their own metamorphosis in the terminology of Eurocentric goddesses leaves a space for these Indigenous women to be seemingly colonized even after death. To counter that colonization, these speakers bring another transformative figure into the dream state, that of the trickster, Wisakejak. Trickster figures appear in several Indigenous cultures and are represented differently depending on the precise culture they come from. It is not the intention of the dream state to present one version of Wisakejak or for the novel as a whole to claim any ownership or creative leeway over trickster stories. The mentions of Wisakejak in the dream state are meant to articulate how, though many of the identities within the consciousness share and know European mythology, the triple goddess is not the only way to understand or process metamorphosis. The consciousness also references Miss Chief, a fictional character created by Cree artist Kent Monkman whose “gender-fluid alter ego Miss Chief Eagle

Testickle often appears in his work as a time-traveling, shape-shifting, supernatural being who reverses the colonial gaze to challenge received notions of history and Indigenous peoples” (“biography”). Without appropriating Miss Chief from Monkman, it is the hope of *Like Velvet From Antlers* that referencing outwards from the novel towards disruptive and powerful artwork from a Cree artist serves to help show that although now a collective identity, the collective consciousness is made up of women from many cultures, both settler and Indigenous, and neither viewpoint is permitted to dominate the other.

While the dream state frames the novel and true crime and domestic noir considerations capture the broad strokes, the focal events of *Like Velvet From Antlers* are more akin to the realist work in Alice Munro’s *Open Secrets* or Julian Barnes’ *The Sense of an Ending*. Munro and Barnes pull their readers in close to tell the stories of seemingly average lives and hold aside what one may consider the main ‘story’ of their works in favour of characterization. Being an inter-genre work, *Like Velvet From Antlers* functions as a critique to the existing domestic noir and true crime canons as well as brings the everyday threat of violence that women face into the world of realism and the women’s literary canon. Though less recent, works like L.M. Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables* and Jane Austen’s collective works, illustrate the joys, tensions, and importance of women’s day-to-day lives, while simultaneously offering social critiques and insight—Anne Shirley’s desire for education above marriage, discrepancies in social class in *Pride and Prejudice*, and a critical awareness of the Caribbean slave trade in *Mansfield Park*. In the same tradition, Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* offers a domestic novel in the epistolary tradition that Lisa SurrIDGE, in her book *Bleak Houses: Marital Violence in Victorian Fiction*, argues “[stripped] the whitewash from respectable homes by depicting marital violence in the estates and manors of the rich” (65). It is this same peeling back and revealing of the day-to-day violence in women’s lives that *Like Velvet From Antlers* aims to accomplish by keeping one foot in the domestic sphere. *Like Velvet From Antlers* also works to depict the domestic reality of the neuroatypical character, Cassidy, who exhibits symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, and social anxiety disorder.

Writing Cassidy as an atypical character was an important and personal choice because I live within the spaces of anxiety, depression, and Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). Within these diagnoses, the term “disorder” frequently appears, implying that the person with an atypicality requires fixing as opposed to being a person who simply functions

differently. As a person who has lived with a spectrum of so-called “disorders” since early childhood, I find this terminology unhelpful and prefer the language of neurotypicality and atypicality. The term “neuroatypical” rose to popularity in the late 90s early 2000s after Judy Singer, a sociologist with Asperger’s, began using it to define her own experience. Neuroatypicality, or neurodiversity, is most frequently used by those on the autism spectrum as a way of saying that “some features usually described as illness are in fact only atypical or ‘neurodivergent’ [meaning] they result from a specific neurological wiring. Therefore, it is merely a human difference that must be respected like any other such difference” (Ortega 431). This terminology and the diversions included within the definition of neuroatypical are not firmly agreed upon by advocacy or medical groups, thus my decision to use it may be divisive to some; however, it is the terminology that I find most productive as it works to shift potentially harmful narratives of illness and disadvantage into narratives of difference which can then highlight points of strength in neuroatypical people.

Developing Cassidy as a neuroatypical character from my own atypical perspective created a unique set of editorial challenges because my neurotypical audience approached Cassidy’s behaviours from a perspective entirely other than my own, which lead to drastic misreadings of Cassidy’s situation. These misfiring connections became especially evident in the section “Cassidy, 12: August 2003.” In this section, Cassidy is young and has no ability to recognize her own atypical behaviours and name them for the reader. In one scene, Cassidy’s father, Max, places his hands upon her shoulders and says to her, “How’s the new swimsuit, Cassie? Very grown up, huh?” and Cassidy has a negative emotional response, “Cass knew he meant well, but she crumpled in on herself without moving. The weight of his hands unbearable, his dad scent too close” (71). From my own atypical perspective, the logic between being touched but not in control of that touch has a direct correlation to feelings of panic; however, early neurotypical readers interpreted Cassidy’s negative response as potentially indicative of Max being an abusive father. The literary canon around neuroatypical characters proved to be unhelpful in the development of Cassidy for a neurotypical audience. Broadly, there are two types of narratives featuring neurodiversion: the first contains works whose plots are about the specific atypicality and how the protagonist’s life is affected by this atypicality. Some examples of this type are John Green’s *Turtles All the Way Down*, where the character Aza has Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and generalized anxiety, and Mark Haddon’s *The Curious Incident*

of the Dog in the Night-time, in which the young protagonist, Christopher, is implied to be on the autism spectrum. The second type features atypical characters from an outside perspective so that family members or neurotypical characters can provide the audience with clarification on any atypical behaviours; this type is well exemplified in Robia Rashid's television series *Atypical* which features Sam as a character on the autism spectrum but also follows the stories of Sam's family members. Neither of these examples assisted in the development of Cassidy because *Like Velvet From Antlers* is not strictly a novel about neurodiversion and therefore the space dedicated to the discussion of Cassidy's anxiety is necessarily limited. Further, in the section "Cassidy, 12: August 2003" the close third-person point of view combined with Cassidy's young age and inability to critically reflect upon her atypical behaviours creates a unique space where the techniques provided by the canon to assist in clearly painting neuroatypical characters for neurotypical audiences are rendered—at least somewhat—useless. I wanted to find a way to include neuroatypical characters in the narrative without having that narrative be about neuroatypicality.

Due to the unhelpful exploration of the neuroatypical literary canon as well as my own experience living with neurodiversions, it became part of *Like Velvet From Antlers*' work to provide casual representation of the kind of neuroatypical character not frequently featured in the canon: one with a level of generalized anxiety that is not widely understood or recognized by neurotypical readers. The canon has provided characters in varying places along the autism spectrum, and portrayed OCD, eating disorders, and body dysmorphia at their most dangerous points, but chronic or generalized anxiety and anxiety symptoms that do not always manifest in visible panic attacks are underrepresented. I believe that this has occurred in part because of how invisible anxiety can be to onlookers and therefore how easily society at large can believe it to be an insignificant issue that is simply "not that bad" if the person with that atypicality has not been hospitalised. This social belief is fundamentally untrue; living in a state of chronic anxiety fundamentally alters the experience of one's everyday interactions and patterns of behaviour. This different sense of the everyday is not to be misinterpreted as entirely negative; living with anxiety or any neuroatypicality can and does have positive side-effects.

I made editorial and craft choices based on the social invisibility of anxiety and early neurotypical readers' struggles with drafts of *Like Velvet From Antlers*. In order to draw the reader's attention back to how Cassidy responds to her mother as well as her father and to

directly place the word “anxiety” in the reader’s mind, I added the lines “Like when Mom sat on the edge of Cass’ bed” and “Dad said it was probably the anxiety, but sometimes he seemed to forget” (71-72). Word cues, such as “grounding” also work to prod the reader—grounding being an oft-used technique of those suffering from panic attacks (76). These changes provide context and direction for the reader without allowing Cassidy a greater ability to reflect upon her emotions than she ought to have at twelve years old. In “Cassidy, 25: August 2016,” I use an extended flashback in order to bracket the actions and thoughts of the eight-year-old Cassidy with her twenty-five-year-old self. This bracketing method aligns with the atypical literary canon, as it works to provide a somewhat outside perspective on the actions of the younger Cassidy. Lastly, I did implement a technique provided by the canon: showing Cassidy from an outside perspective. In the section “Angela, 30: July 2019,” Angela draws comparisons between Cassidy and Ellie and provides the more expected view of Cassidy’s neuroatypical behaviours—specifically panic attacks, her desire not to be comforted by touch, and her struggle making appointments which is a less obvious symptom of Cassidy’s anxiety. In this section I chose to highlight one of the positive aspects of Cassidy’s anxiety as it pertains to her relationship: Angela writes a list of the reasons she loves Cassidy and the reader is shown the first two: “*She’s empathetic as fuck*” and “*She makes mac-n-cheese from scratch when I have my period (and when I don’t)*” (150). Both points indicate that Cassidy is empathetic and caring, which are traits commonly strengthened by anxiety. Writing from and about a neuroatypical brain proved to have its challenges, but *Like Velvet From Antlers* attempts to balance an accurate representation of Cassidy’s neurodiversion with accommodations for neurotypical readers, such as sentence and word cues, flashbacks, and an outside perspective.

In total, *Like Velvet From Antlers* is composed of eight discrete domestic sections that explore different kinds of domestic realities from Cassidy’s atypical reality to Heather’s stay-at-home mother reality. The combinations of events and characters over a thirty-year timeline is meant to show the varying ways in which women’s lives and relationships occur and how the domestic sphere is not a monolith. The need for feminine diversity in *Like Velvet From Antlers* stems from a critical consideration of feminist works and theories. Judith Butler, in her work *Gender Trouble*, clearly articulates the dangers of biological essentialism and argues that gender is a performative action. Gender as performative applies to creative works in a side-on manner, such that the truth of Butler’s theory is not as relevant my belief in her general thesis, as that

belief may carry into an imagined space. In the case of *Like Velvet From Antlers*, a consideration of performativity lead to the question of what kinds of feminine performances are acceptable, and the novel attempts to answer that by showing that there are endless way to perform the feminine gender, none of them superior to any other. Beverly's story arc occurs in three sections that are focussed on her romantic relationships, her desire to distance herself from her overbearing mother, and her obsession with murdered women. Cassidy's two sections are dedicated a coming of age story about first menses and a contemplative remembrance of how her anxious behaviours present. Angela's sections begin in her place of work and explore how her experiences in the queer community differ from Cassidy's, how her position as a visible minority affects her daily life, the division of emotional labour in her relationship, and her traumatized awakening in the hospital. All three women are educated in their fields, as a pediatric nurse, veterinary radiologist, and linguistic PhD candidate respectively, and they appear both within the home and without. Through the secondary characters of Heather and Debby, the novel also validates the stay-at-home mom and women in fields outside of education and health care. Though most of the characters are mothers, Cassidy is uncertain of her own desire for parenthood. There are only a few male characters in the novel, but they, too, are made to represent a diverse spectrum of masculinity and to provide a counterpoint to Franklin's violence. Beverly's father, unnamed, is mostly absent from her life and subservient to her mother; Max is an active father who works hard on his marriage and is present in the emotional lives of his children; James and John, the brothers of Cassidy and Ellie, are gentle and caring, protective of their sisters but not violent; Debby's husband, Richard, is viewed as belittling and arrogant by Beverly; and Heather's husband is only known to be less practical than Heather. These varied male roles and gender performances are meant to affirm the novel is not working to critique individual performances of masculinities, but rather critiques the broader social structure of the patriarchy, in which anyone can be complicit.

Another notable look at feminist theory takes place in the novel as a critique of paternal lineage to the detriment of the maternal line. This criticism was influenced by Rebecca Solnit's lyric essay "Grandmother Spider," in which she writes, "I think a lot about that obliteration. Or rather that obliteration keeps showing up. I have a friend whose family tree has been traced back a thousand years, but no women exist on it" (64). Solnit goes on to critique the biblical tracing of Jesus' patrilineage and the many other ways in which society has forced women to disappear or

be silent. The critique of Christian religions and their patriarchal tendencies is made manifest in the novel by Beverly in the section “Beverly, 49: December 2018” when Beverly wonders how Joseph’s lineage has any relevance to Jesus’ own lineage, since Jesus was conceived without genetic material from Joseph. *Like Velvet From Antlers* is primarily concerned with matrilineage: Cassidy belongs in the novel as Beverly’s daughter regardless of who her biological father is. Though there are men present in the novel, it is not their stories or voices that contribute to the body of the work. Solnit’s discussion of erasure and silencing contributed to another element in the novel: that of Indigenous silencing.

Like Velvet From Antlers is primarily a settler narrative, as the world is predominantly processed through the gazes of Beverly and Cassidy. Focussing on these kinds of characters and domesticities—middle and upper-class white Canadians—in a novel about missing and murdered women is not without its problems. As made clear the documentary *The Disappearance of Madeleine McCann*, directed by Chris Smith, money, power, and ethnicity alter the way in which missing people are investigated and how much attention the case is given. This is especially true in Canada and has been made explicitly clear by the National Inquiry into Missing Indigenous Women and Girls. The National Inquiry concluded that “violence experienced by Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people amounts to genocide” (5). The National Inquiry goes on to say how colonialism bore a gendered violence which deliberately cast First Nations and Métis women as a “menace” and “prostitutes” which “made it easy for early police misconduct (including rape and murder) to go relatively unpunished” (17). *Like Velvet From Antlers* does not address this national genocide unproblematically. Though Beverly is aware that some of the murder cases she is obsessed with get less media attention, she too thinks less about them and prefers the stories about women like Gemma Graham and Annie Epps, or cases that she deems “interesting.”

Within the novel, Beverly functions as a colonial/settler gaze. Her perspective is one likely shared by many Calgarians in the 1980s—that of a general ignorance towards not only the genocide being committed but also the way in which police forces were and are complicit in allowing violence to continue at greater rates when it is directed towards vulnerable communities. This ignorance is easy to maintain in a city like Calgary, which is vastly a city of European settler descendants. As of 2016, the Indigenous population in Calgary made up 4% of the total population. This number has increased significantly in the last decade but still falls far

below the percentages of other minorities in the urban area (“Ethnic Origin”). It was logical then, that Beverly, being born in the 1960s into a middle-class Calgarian family and sheltered from the truth of atrocities like the Sixties Scoop, would retain her settler mindset. The novel as a whole, however, works not only to show how sheltered Beverly is but also calls into question media portrayals of Indigenous women. This work is done through the reappearance of Beverly’s “creepy murder scrapbook” throughout the novel. Initially, Beverly notices that there is a discrepancy between the media’s treatment of Annie Epps and Greta Ahenakew, but she doesn’t understand the cause. Later, we see Cassidy contemplating how the news stories in the scrapbook feature either falsely-angelic white girls or unfairly-villainized Indigenous girls, and that there is a gap in the representation of Indigenous women who are not deemed “troubled” and other vulnerable populations as the media refuses to acknowledge the systemic issue and instead allows for those girls to vanish from the public eye—as does Debby in the RCMP, being assigned to solve the case of Jenny Robson, but not that of Greta Ahenakew. Although Beverly eventually learns about the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), she, as a product of her generation and settler community, still chooses to vastly ignore their cases.

Beverly’s deliberate ignorance is called into question as the novel moves from holding Gemma Graham’s case as its main interest, to the ending scene where Greta Ahenakew holds focus—it is Greta that Angela is primarily concerned with when she wakes up from her coma. This shift in priorities is meant to exemplify how girls like Gemma Graham have always been searched for and their cases have held priority, but it is important for Canada as a whole and for individuals to prioritize the cases of MMIWG. The collective consciousness also calls Beverly’s perspective into question in the dream state. The collective voice, initially dominated by Angela and Gemma, comes to be more reminiscent of Greta, as she speaks to the consciousness in Cree and tells Beverly that they cannot kill Franklin because doing so will prevent many of the girls’ families from ever getting justice or any form of truth. It is the intention of *Like Velvet From Antlers* not to try and tell Indigenous stories, but rather to provide an example of how settler Canadians can begin thinking about media bias and instead of accepting what they are told, as Beverly does, go and listen to Indigenous communities and families as Angela intends to.

As the dream state and collective consciousness are populated by a multitude of voices and cultures, it was important that the rearticulated body and original identity of the collective consciousness not belong to the dominant European-settler culture. The rearticulated body is

initially inhabited by Angela, who, as a queer, Chinese Canadian woman, represents a non-normative identity—normative in Western society being white, cis-gendered, heterosexual male. Angela’s presence ensures that the rearticulation of the murdered women’s bodies and identities is not processed through the mind of a white woman and the collective identity of these women does not come from a normative, white saviour archetype. It also felt genuine that Cassidy, in her middle-class Calgary social circle, would encounter Angela as Chinese Canadian because of the large Chinese diaspora community in Calgary.

Despite the novel moving towards a better understanding of the importance of the MMIWG cases, Indigenous women in *Like Velvet From Antlers* are still mostly notable by their absence, both from much of the body of the novel and in the media’s portrayal. Much of this absence occurs in the novel because of the vastly settler perspectives of the narrative voices and the predominately white-settler communities that they exist in. Some of this silence is filled by Angela’s interest in and mentions of Kent Monkman’s artwork. By placing Monkman’s art in the minds of the reader, *Like Velvet From Antlers* works to remind the reader that despite the absence of living Indigenous persons on the page, Indigenous peoples are very much alive within the city and creating art of their own. The novel also makes references to Greta’s grieving family and her children. The intention of *Like Velvet From Antlers* is not to suggest that Indigenous peoples are absent from urban areas, or gain value only after death, but rather to give an example of how people like Beverly may begin to reprioritize and start actively listening to the stories of Indigenous people—Beverly herself begins this movement in her final moments on the page when she accepts that her form of justice will not work for everyone else. *Like Velvet From Antlers*, while largely a novel about settler identities, tries not to ignore the important stories surrounding vulnerable communities or the MMIWG crisis and genocide. I, as a white, middle-class Canadian, tried to find a space in my novel where I could write with honesty and integrity, not appropriate or attempt to tell the stories of Indigenous women, but rather point to the importance of listening to those voices.

Beyond the dream state collective consciousness, concepts like metamorphosis, reanimation, and pulling bodies together lead to the formal choice to write *Like Velvet From Antlers* as a polyvocal narrative. Polyvocality is a term derived from polyphonic, which was initially used in the 1790s to describe music that incorporated the playing of more than one note simultaneously, and became metaphorically applied to fiction with multiple narrators in 1950s to

refer to a “a work of fiction having a number of independent and often antithetic narrative voices, none of which is given predominance, and over which the author's voice does not predominate” (“polyphonic, adj.”). *Like Velvet From Antlers* features the voices of Beverly; her daughter Cassidy; Cassidy’s fiancée Angela; and the dog, Hannah. In the final moments of the novel, the women that Franklin has murdered, notably Gemma Graham and Greta Ahenakew, take back their voices in the shared space of their collective, reanimated body.

The usefulness of employing of a polyvocal narrative when discussing traumatic events is exemplified in works like Chimana Ngozi Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Katherena Vermette’s *The Break*. In regards to *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Nida Sarfraz, Rehana Kousar, and Khamsa Qasim argue the “polyvocal mode of narration is employed in postcolonial mode of historiography. This method of narration gives rises to multiplicity of voices through multiple narrators. Such a work is delineation of multiple characters' perspective. It does not portray single author's point of view. Every narrator presents [their] own version of reality” (162). While Adichie’s work looks at all sides of the trauma surrounding the Nigerian-Biafran Civil War, Katherena Vermette’s *The Break* looks at a more personal and familial trauma. Vermette employs the polyvocal narrative to convey the fullness and complexity of her story as it follows the lives of four generations of women as they go through collective trauma when one of their young daughters is sexually assaulted. *The Break* also includes the narrative voice of the perpetrator, Phoenix. While *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *The Break* follow a true polyvocal tradition of showing many voices and sides of a story without authorial judgement, *Like Velvet From Antlers* deviates from this tradition in the character as it does not give voice to: Franklin.

While *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *The Break* leave it to the reader to discern the complexity of their postcolonial and neocolonial narratives, *Like Velvet From Antlers* deals with concerns of power and voice differently. Adichie and Vermette are dealing with complex scenarios, such as intergenerational trauma, post-colonialism, and neo-colonialism that make right and wrong and empathy more fluid for the reader. *Like Velvet From Antlers* is not a postcolonial narrative; however, it does deal with the silencing of specific voices and the focus on one side of a shared history—the side with more power. The true crime genre has already done enough work to give voice to the serial killer with productions like Joe Berlinger’s *Conversations With a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes* in which recordings of Bundy speaking about his crimes are played for the audience. Not only do works like this focus on and romanticize the serial killer, but they allow

them to speak about their own crimes and effectively hand the narrative over to the killer. *Like Velvet From Antlers* removes the narrative from the voice of the serial killer and leaves it in the hands of the women around him. The polyvocal narrative further allows for multiple perspectives to be given on elements such as Beverly's scrapbook and the biased media portrayals of missing girls. While *Like Velvet From Antlers* ostensibly has the reclamation of female embodiment at its heart, one of the contributors to the polyvocal narrative is the border collie, Hannah, who is also an important figure in the dream state. This decision, to give voice to a dog instead of to other victims or women, is based on three interlocking elements: a consideration of the Macdonald Triad, an embrace of eco-feminism, and a rejection of androcentric narratives.

The Macdonald Triad, proposed by John Macdonald in 1963, is a set of three childhood behaviours that he believed—based on 100 psychiatric patients—were predictors for violent behaviour later in life. The behaviours were fire setting, enuresis (persistent bed wetting after the age of five), and cruelty to animals. Numerous attempts have been made to replicate his results with varying outcomes, depending on the controls and definitions used (Parfitt and Alleyne 306). The Triad is not a perfect indicator system of violent behaviours, however, in a review of the literature, forensic psychologists found that it is “more likely that animal cruelty is an indicator for future offending behaviour, nonviolent as well as violent” as oppose to the previous violence graduation hypothesis which suggests that offenders will move from violence towards animals to violence towards humans as their pathology develops (306). The connection between cruelty to animals and violence against people is not a concept unique to the Triad. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* provides not only an example of violence within a domestic space, but shows a “parallel between beaten women and animals [that] emphasizes the links between legal powerlessness and martial violence,” which was not an uncommon way of thinking at the time Anne Brontë wrote the novel, as by “1848, there was already ample philosophical precedent supporting a link between human and animal violence. William Hogarth's *The Four Stages of Cruelty* (1750–51), for example, depicts animal abuse escalating to the murder of a pregnant woman” (SurrIDGE 85, 67). Brontë's linkage of cruelty to animals and spousal abuse is similar to the effect *Like Velvet From Antlers* works to achieve through the voice of Hannah, whose character not only allows the reader to approach Franklin's violence from an distance, but exemplifies the link between treatments of women, animals, and the planet alike.

With the Triad and interconnected animal and spousal abuse in mind, *Like Velvet From Antlers* draws in an eco-feminist perspective. Eco-feminist can be simply defined as a “socio-political theory and movement which associates ecological (esp. environmental) concerns with feminist ones, esp. in regarding both as resulting from male dominance and exploitation” (“ecofeminism, n.”). Vandana Shiva articulates this connection between patriarchy and ecological destruction as stemming from the West’s “expressions of a patriarchal ideology which is threatening to annihilate nature and the entire human species” and that “development could not but entail destruction for women, nature and subjugated cultures, which is why, throughout the Third World, women, peasants, and tribals are struggling for liberation from ‘development’ just as they earlier struggled for liberation from colonialism” (qtd. in Garrity-Bond 187). Janet McIntyre-Mills argues that anthropocentric forms of humanism have “led to an unethical divide or boundary between the human and the animal,” where the human is seen as the controller, but she further offers a solution or way forward, suggesting, “the divided nature of control and compete is only one part of the story. The continuum of relationships with nature and with animals needs to be seen as co-evolving. Cooperation and nurturing are the other side of the story” (887). McIntyre-Mills and Shiva both articulate the systems of patriarchy and androcentrism as artificial narratives that can, and must, be unwritten in order for the planet to survive. Ivone Gebara adds that she “wishes to broaden the playing field of who is doing the naming, historically performed by an elite group of males, to now include women and nature” (qtd. in Garrity-Bond 189). Broadening the field of naming and story telling has implications on the way we all live in this world as “any life situation, behaviour, or even belief is always the fruit of all interactions that make up our lives, our histories and our wider earthly and cosmic realities ... Our interdependence and relatedness do not stop with other human beings: They encompass nature, the powers of the earth and of the cosmos itself” (Gebara qtd. in Garrity-Bond 190). The way forward, then, lies in the peeling back of old, androcentric narratives and either returning to, or moving into, the creation of narratives that stem from more voices, both human and animal. With considerations of building these alternate narratives, *Like Velvet From Antlers* works to involve the voices of both human and animal subjects. Though Hannah’s presence in the novel is minimal, her section sits in the center of the novel, spatially holding together beginning and end, and it is her actions that permit the women in the dream state to achieve their goal of unmasking Franklin.

Taking eco-feminism and the Macdonald Triad in hand, *Like Velvet From Antlers* draws the connection between living in an androcentric world and an offender being violent towards both women and animals: both are seen as equally beneath him and exist for his constant exploitation. Creating such a link between women and the natural world in the serial killer genres, be that true crime, horror, or thriller, is important because the genre typically holds the killer in a very androcentric way: at the centre of the story. All revolving bodies are secondary and are often referred to by their relationship to the killer: as “*his* victims.” This possessive terminology removes ownership of their bodies from the women and places it in the hands of the male killer; the women now belong to him. Domestic noir, as a genre, has begun the work of moving the domestic space and women to the centre of the story, however, these stories still revolve around the crime or crimes being committed. Other elements of women’s lives are put off to the side in favour of focussing on the criminal element and there remains a central focus on a male pathology. By featuring multiple women’s voices in a polyvocal narrative as well as Hannah’s voice, *Like Velvet From Antlers* attempts to invert this androcentric valuation. At the center of the novel are the voices that androcentrism places as less powerful. The importance of Hannah to this inversion—as oppose to only moving the women to the center and Franklin to the side—is the full unsettling of the androcentric view, wherein all bodies, both human and animal, become more important than the male.

On a more micro level, *Like Velvet From Antlers* utilizes point of view to further distance the reader from Franklin and to draw them closer to Angela and the collective voice in the dream state. Seven of the eight discrete sections of the novel—those that begin with the subject’s name, age, and date—are told in a close third person and in (mostly) simple past tense; these include all of Beverly and Cassidy’s sections as well as Angela’s non-dream state ones. Keeping these sections in third person highlights the shift to first person present tense that occurs in Hannah’s section as well as the dream state. For Hannah, the distinctive use of the ‘I’ voice not only felt like a natural extension of her non-human existence—she is not human, therefore her story should not present in the same manner—but also serves the technical purpose of keeping the reader grounded in Hannah’s experience of events instead of a more distant third person which opens up the potential to see Franklin’s behaviour separately from how Hannah does; there is no larger narrative force overlaying thoughts on Hannah’s story or interpreting her experiences for the reader. The present tense, for Hannah, allows her to exist in linear time differently; she is not

in some future point looking back and contemplating events. Though she is capable of reflection, Hannah exists in her present moment more intimately than her human counterparts. In the case of the dream state, using the first-person present allows an easily accessed sense of disorientation when Angela wakes up and serves to delineate her dream state experience from real world events. In the dream state, Angela is more similar to Hannah in that she exists only in the present moment, which pulls together the eco-feminist view of women and nature—the dream state, as a place that is quiet enough for the women to hear Hannah speak, envisions an intimacy between the women and Hannah that is not possible in their androcentric reality. Beyond the ‘I’ voice, the dream state presents a first-person plural ‘we’ as a composite consciousness made of Angela and the thirty murdered women. Using the first-person plural in these moments keeps the reader close to the experiences and emotional lives of the ‘we’ and presents their stories as reliable. As established, domestic noir confronts the idea of women being unreliable narrators of their own lives, and the dream state works to do that with the collective voice: there is no space to question if the women are reliable or not, their memories are directly shared with one another in an unquestionably true manner.

The shattered nature of the novel’s timeline and the encapsulating dream state serve to control aspects of the narrative. *Like Velvet From Antlers* began as a collection of non-linear interconnected short stories but over the writing process it became more evident that each story needed to occur in a particular order as they leaned on each other for cohesion more so than other interconnected short stories, which are often distinct enough to be read individually without confusion. The principle of working with interconnected short stories, that of discrete moments that join through time, character, or location, remains in what is now the eight body sections of the novel, divided into three parts: “Part One: New Growth” covers the story of Beverly’s new relationship with Franklin and her unexpected pregnancy; “Part Two: In Velvet” centers on Cassidy’s coming of age and her struggles with anxiety—this section is bisected by Hannah relating her life with Franklin; and “Part Three: Shedding Antlers” details Beverly’s collapsing certainty about her life choices, and Angela’s struggles in her relationship with Cassidy. Each section is meant to represent a different emotional arena as well as invoke a cycle of inevitable events like a deer’s antlers growing, being in velvet, and shedding away each season.

The original idea of presenting *Like Velvet From Antlers* as non-linear, discrete pieces was inspired by works like Joan Didion’s *The Year of Magical Thinking*. In her memoir, Didion

uses shifting time to show how grief and memory function: making seemingly disparate connections across time and space, and often looping back in waves. *Like Velvet From Antlers* also makes these jumps and connections across its thirty-year timespan: Beverly meets Franklin and becomes obsessed with Gemma Graham, which leads to her pregnancy and her concerns of psychopathy in Cassidy, which in turn helps develop Cassidy's mental health struggles because she often feels she lacks her mother's confidence, this leads to Cassidy's inability to deal with her emotions and the accidental injuring of Angela, from there the murder of Beverly is triggered, which leads the reader back to the opening scene in the dream state. Though these sections occur sometimes twelve or thirteen years apart, the actions in each section are intimately related.

Although the main timeline of the novel, sans the encapsulating dream state, is now linear, many of the sections rely heavily on flashback and memory. This is most evident in the section "Cassidy, 25: August 2016," where only half of the story takes place in 2016 and the other half is flashback to the summer of 1999 when Cassidy is eight years old. The guiding principle of these larger flashback segments remains Didion's functional memory across time. Experiences from Cassidy's eight-year-old self still affect her at twenty-five. Formally, flashbacks serve to fill in information gaps without allowing a narrative to become exposition: the story is kept in the action. This allows the present narrative to continue without it appearing that the protagonist has been lost in thought for several hours as they recount their personal histories for no reason other than informing the reader.

Playing with the timeline in regard to the dream state allows *Like Velvet From Antlers* to prime the reader. Without first having encountered the dream state that begins "Part One: New Growth," in which the reader learns Beverly may be dead and possibly murdered, the first section of the novel, "Beverly, 18: July 1987," reads quite differently. Priming the reader in this manner, to be on the lookout for danger, allows *Like Velvet From Antlers* to introduce Franklin as a romantic subject without romanticising him, as the reader has information that Beverly does not: the knowledge of her eventual death. By the time the reader encounters Beverly with Franklin in "Beverly, 49: December 2018," they are also aware that Franklin is a serial killer and that he is the man who murders Beverly. It is important to have Beverly in a romantic relationship with Franklin because it shows how often the wives and partners of serial killers are either not aware of their loved one's predilections or quickly suspect them of violent crimes

when the police ask for the public's assistance in identifying suspects. An example of this phenomenon comes from the investigation into Ted Bundy before he was formally identified. Episode two of the documentary *Conversations With a Killer: The Ted Bundy Tapes*, titled "One of Us," identifies Elizabeth Klopefer (now Elizabeth Kendall) calling in and saying, "I'm concerned about my boyfriend, named Ted Bundy, who you should look at." Klopefer further goes on to say, "In my own mind, there were coincidences that seemed to tie him in. Yet when I would think about our day-to-day relationship, there was nothing there that would lead me to think that he was a violent man capable of doing something like that." The most unsettling part of Klopefer's phone call, is that she was not alone in suspecting her intimate partner of violence against women. Detective Kathleen McChesney, in the same documentary, immediately after Klopefer's interview is played, says, "We had a lot of women who called and said, 'I'm concerned that my boyfriend might be this offender'" (00:9:12-00:11:06). This admission is troubling because it suggests that many women are in relationships with men they believe capable of violence, or as in Klopefer's case, they personally have never witnessed or been given reason to believe their partner is violent, but are suspicious of them for other reasons. It was therefore important for *Like Velvet From Antlers* to explore the dual way in which Franklin exists in the world: as the seemingly normal man that he presents to the public and to Beverly and as they monstrous human who murders and dismembers women.

The encapsulating dream state not only prevents the reader from falling into the romance alongside Beverly, but it also frames the whole narrative with the expectation of violence. As mentioned, part of the purpose of *Like Velvet From Antlers* being inter-genre is to suggest that violence is part of the normal, domestic lives of women. The body-horror-centric dream state surrounds the narrative and is permitted to hang over the other sections like a dark cloud. The reader is brought back to this horror at the beginning of each part, which functionally prevents them from forgetting the violence that is occurring in the larger world, regardless of how each section may end—five out of eight times the discrete sections end with bodies coming together in a positive manner. This dark-cloud effect replicates the way that violence exists in real women's lives; though a woman may never have been assaulted she is taught to carry keys between her fingers, never walk home alone at night, be careful with taxis and on public transit, never leave her drink exposed, and other techniques that place the burden of safety upon women

instead of the perpetrators. Being aware of potential violence is a reality of existing in this world as a woman and *Like Velvet From Antlers* works to make the reader conscious of this potential.

Like Velvet From Antlers is built on a foundation both critical of and steeped in the true crime and domestic noir genres. The polyvocal narrative cradles voices of women who retain bodily autonomy, even post-mortem, and works to pull their bodies together in a space of power and collective healing. The novel fashions a world in which violence is always around the corner but never held at the center; it looks through an eco-feminist lens to draw connections between women and nature, moves body horror mutation into chosen metamorphosis, and centers the varied domestic lives of women in exchange for the androcentric serial killer narrative. *Like Velvet From Antlers* intimately explores violence, memory, relationships, and a diversity of womanhood and is meant to draw connections across time and space that help to form healing bonds between women, the natural world, and those who love them.

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