

HIS STORY

The commodification of men's same-sex sexuality in Canada

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I want to tell you a story. I want to tell you his story, Antoine's story.

The reason I want to recount this story is because it has a lot to tell us about male sex work in Canada. In the telling of his story I argue that in order to understand the contemporary place of male sex work within Canada, we need to gaze through the lens of a frontier nation, a new world seeking to break free from the social and sexual conservatism of Western Europe. Through the telling of his story, Antoine's story, I argue that narratives of commodity exchange between men in frontier Canada were defining features of social and indeed sexual relations. Through this telling, I argue that the liberties and new ways of being within the Canadian North American frontier facilitated new forms and new freedoms for same-sex sexual commodification, which reside with us until this day.

The analysis suggests that Victorian norms and morals imported from Western Europe acted to obscure the presence and market economies of same-sex sexual exchanges between men through a focus on heterosexual forms of frontier sex work (Van Kirk, 1980, 1984; Weist, 1983; Backhouse, 1985; Cannon, 1998; Perry, 2001). In the telling of his story, I will take the reader on a journey West, across a rough and rugged frontier, focusing on the fur trade that financed and that provided the 'mountain men' and their young 'helpers' with their primary motivation. Antoine's story is important because it shows how a key to understanding male sex work in contemporary Canada, lies in recognition of the subjects and objects of sexual exchange between men in Canada's frontier era. His story can help us to see that it is not only desire, need, or communication that drives the shape and form of same-sex sexual exchange industries but also the influences of colonial and frontier histories as well.

Previously I have written about the history, epidemiology and social structure of male sex work in Canada (Allman, 1999). Indeed the earlier edition of *Men Who Sell Sex* included a chapter with a specific focus on HIV (Allman and Myers, 1998). Now, 15 years later, I want to depart from all that. In part, because what Ted Myers and I argued in the late 1990s remains very true today: from an HIV-risk perspective, in Canada, male sex workers (the vast majority of whom report an exclusively male clientele) are little different in sexual risk profiles from other men who have sex with men. Their internal lives may be different, their risk of other harms may be elevated, but their risks of contracting and transmitting HIV and STIs are virtually the same.

With time, I have come to understand that in very important ways the exchange of sex between men for material goods, and the commodification of sex between men is profoundly historical. While HIV has led to a problematisation of male sex work in a

manner hitherto unconsidered, and while the sexual revolution and same-sex sexuality rights movements have allowed us to see such commodified exchanges in new ways, in this chapter I argue another perspective altogether. Namely that, in Canada, the unique relationships which these commodified sexual exchanges embody are informed by Canada's history as a frontier nation.

This history is not intended to suggest that Canada's frontier past and the push of European settlement from the Eastern Harbours to the Western Wilds was part of a bacchanalian orgy where men young and old cavalierly traded sexual favours *for money or furs*. Rather, it is argued that, along with the heterosexual sex work that occurred, varying manifestations of commodified same-sex sexual exchange took place between men as well. However, the same forms of social censure that made discussion or disclosure of same-sex sexual behaviour within the Victorian era so difficult, acted in similar, if not deeper, ways to obscure the commodification of such behaviour.

Sex work along Canada's frontier path

Understanding the fur trade in Canada is essential to understanding the Canadian frontier, as it was the fur trade that provided the impetus for Canada's Western expansion and settlement. By the mid-1500s, efforts to begin reaping furs from the Canadian wilds and sending them across the Atlantic to Europe were underway. The frontier was a rough and rugged place: a man's place, where the reputed delicacy of European womenfolk was believed to have little place. European accounts claim the sex work that did develop over many years centred around relations between frontier men and Aboriginal women, and was a core process in the structuring of the Canadian frontier and remained so, long after the appearance of European women, who began to arrive in greater numbers in the 1820s and 1830s (Backhouse, 1985).

Backhouse (1985) referencing Van Kirk (1980, 1984) explores the context of sex work and sex work-like interactions both sexual and otherwise, between male fur-traders and Aboriginal women in Canada. These authors describe how in the early days of the Canadian frontier, such exchanges would frequently lead to forms of sanctioned marriages; marriages *à la façon du pays* (after the custom of the country).

Reflecting on Aboriginal Peoples within the colonising social context of the Canadian frontier, Backhouse argues that in the 1880s new forms of legislation amending the Indian Act of 1859, while aimed at curbing sex work, served actually to create even more stringent conditions under frontier rule. She argues the legislation, rather than addressing the exploitation of Aboriginal Peoples had the opposite effect. It proved destructive to Aboriginal ways of life and pushed more Aboriginal people towards the commodification of sexual activity.

Initially, heteronormative sexual relations had a functional basis on Canada's fur-trading frontier. Not only did these partnerships allow European fur traders access to a great deal of knowledge and experience as how to best contend with the harsh Canadian climate and varied geography. In addition, they helped to *socially* acclimatise fur traders as well. van Kirk (1984: 9) goes as far as to suggest that relationships between fur traders and

Aboriginal Peoples ‘were, in fact, the basis for a fur trade society’. These alliances created ‘reciprocal social ties that served to consolidate ... economic relationships with the incoming strangers’. In effect, they drew the European frontier-class into the core of Aboriginal kinship circles, modifying potential discord and mistrust along the way, and contributing to the mixed North American Indian-European Métis culture that would develop.

Importantly, the new forms of kinship circles the fur traders found themselves sharing, and the social roles embodied within these Aboriginal ways of life were markedly different from the European forms to which the colonial fur traders were accustomed. Not only did these new kinship groupings embody different attitudes to sexual relations and their place within marital unions, but also different manifestations of sexuality and its expression.

Visibilities of same-sex sexual activity and exchange

In considering same-sex sexual activity within Canada’s frontier fur trade, Benemann (2012) makes a very strong case as to how such activities may fail to be evident within existing historical records. His belief is not that those who authored primary documents through frontier-era letters or journals or other writings necessarily suppressed same-sex sexual activity, but rather that to write of sex between men simply never occurred to them. How might this be? Benemann’s proposed answer is simple: Western European, Victorian era norms about sexual comportment and activity prevented it from being a reasonable and speakable possibility. Such reasoning makes an attractive case for the invisibility of same-sex sexual exchange in primary documentation of the frontier years, as well as subsequent invisibility in works that cite it.

While the non-heterosexual sexual activities of European men of the fur trade have been long missing from the historical record¹, an altogether different but overlapping subject has been the object of intense scrutiny and discussion: namely, the role of North American Indigenous third sexuality known as *berdache*. It is from discourse surrounding this personhood that much about same-sex sexual interaction and exchange as it existed in Canada’s frontier can be gleaned.

Anthropologists, sociologists and others have used the term ‘berdache’ to describe forms of gender-diversity within Aboriginal and First Nations cultures (Thomas and Jacobs, 1999; Roscoe, 1998; Kroeber, 1952). Despite debates about its etymological evolution and wide variations in spelling (broadashe, bundosh, bowdash, bardash, berdascia, bardaje, bardaj, barah, berdach, berdash, bredache, bredaches, berdzches, bird-ash, birdashes, bradaje) (Guerra, 1971; Broch, 1977; Callender and Kochems, 1983; Williams, 1992; Roscoe, 1998; Thomas and Jacobs, 1999; and most notably Roscoe, 1995), the underlying meaning of the term in non-Aboriginal parlance, continued to reflect being a ‘kept boy’, a ‘male prostitute’, or a ‘catamite’. (Angelino and Shedd, 1955: 121). Among contemporary Aboriginal Peoples, such language is considered rife with colonial baggage, and is seen to be ‘derogatory and insulting to the image and identity of gay, lesbian, transgender, and other people’. (Thomas and Jacobs, 1999: 93). Notably, the designation berdache is less

about sexuality and sexual relations and more about a gender designation or gender crossing (Cannon, 1998: 5 referencing Whitehead, 1993), or, as some writings from an Indigenous-knowing lens describe it, a third gender beyond the male-female divide (Schnarch, 1992; Wilson, 2008 and 1996, Deschamps, 1998).

Callender and Kochems (1983: 443–444) have suggested that, in large part due to colonial hostility, as North America's original third gendered peoples, the berdache became increasingly less evident following European contact and Western expansion. However, as with other forms of frontier era same-sex sexuality, it may well be that any historical precision is so culturally biased by the prudish lens of settler observation as to strongly skew and obscure, if not negate, the facts of *berdachehood*.

Berdache and related terminology is not without discord, and arguments have been made as to why it is important that it, and the often parallel but very distinct label Two-Spirit, should be recognised as colonial terminology being applied to sacred ways of being, and avoided (Herrera-Sobek, 2010).

Terminology aside, Benemann (2012: 9) makes a strong case that for men of the fur trade, steeped as they were in the British tradition of seeing both sodomy and homosexuality as grievous, 'unpardonable sins', the existence of a far-away exotic social climate where same-sex sexual attraction was 'not just permitted but ritualised' was transformatively utopian. The fact was that 'Euro-Canadian' women were in short supply all across the colonial era frontier, which only served to exacerbate the situation, opening up new possibilities for same-sex sexual relationships and same-sex sexual exchange economies (Dick, 2009: 109 referencing Perry, 2001).

The nineteenth-century Canadian frontier provided a form of bachelor culture in which the kinds of 'coercive social pressures to marry' that were so prevalent in Europe were quickly displaced by other forms of more readily available sexual intimacy (Dick, 2009: 144). These intimacies took a form less modelled on the traditions of civilised European courtship and were more influenced by the 'the peripatetic life of a trapper ... the brief encounters that that life dictated ... [like] immediate sexual attraction and perceived material benefit' (Benemann, 2012: 8). Such relationships may, as Perry (2001 referenced in Dick 2009: 112) suggested, have met with an 'environment of passive tolerance towards same-sex erotic practice' owing to the fact that cross-racial heterosexual relationships could well be 'considered more threatening to the established norms of colonial society'.

Trade as a structural driver of men's same-sex sexual exchange

Trade formed the base of the earliest introduction between the inhabitants of Canada and those from afar, expanding in earnest in the sixteenth century. Before 1870, when it became Canada, Rupert's Land, as it was known, was an enormous tract of wilderness, which from the perspective of Europe as *the civilised continent*, stretched across North America. The Canadian frontier was a wild, wilderness, larger than all the countries of Europe combined. Yet it was not only the magnitude of space which captivated the imagination of the 'mountain men'. Rupert's Land also represented a frontier of social change, where the norms and morals of Western Europe had less sway; where what it meant to be a man could

take on new meanings and could be experienced through new behaviours and ways of being.

Largely, the history of Canada as a frontier nation is a story of a fur trade. A trade motivated by Western Europe's near-insatiable appetite for the hats and cloaks for which the fur pelts of the New World were used (Van Kirk, 1984).

In Central Canada, on the Saint Lawrence River, the Great Lakes and environs North, the fur trade of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was established enough to have developed a number of modern rituals that 'reversed the customary ordering of power'. Without the constraining and hierarchical traditions of European societies, manservants could find the value of their services transformed. In short supply, such services could now command "payment" in the form of alcohol, money, or goods' (Podruchny, 2002: 1).

Podruchny (2002: 16) reflects how, in contrast to the strict sexual regulation imposed on the fur trade frontier by Western Europe's religious organisations, different manifestations of sexual expression and experience witnessed in Aboriginal communities would have represented, to the fur traders, a remarkable social and cultural shift.

The fur trade was a visceral, intense, physical frontier. *Voyageurs* (also known as *émigrés*) is a term used to refer to the frontier's equivalent of indentured servants. Said to be always male, and most often young, the non-literate nature of their training and experience means that very little written record of their experiences remains. That which does exist, was written by clerks and by the European explorers who would have hired and transported manservants across the Atlantic. Thus, much of the understanding that we do have of these young men and their experiences, has been 'shaped by the cultures and personalities of the writers, who perceived the voyageurs across a gulf of class and language' (Podruchny, 2002: 3).

Some interpreters of this historical record have sought to reframe the existing documentation in ways that validate assertions here (Benemman, 2012; Oman, 2002; Barman, 1997; Whitehead, 1993). They have argued that status differentials between men of the fur trade coupled with the liberation embedded in frontier life, acted to lay a foundation for a same-sex sexual exchange culture. In essence, voyageur culture, as an evolving hybrid of European and North American world views, fostered such exchanges. However, as Maynard (1997: 196) alludes, while the young men of the frontier may have been the catalysts for many of the Wild West's plot lines, particularly where same-sex interactions between men of different social classes, abilities and means are concerned, the narratives that were recorded and which remain 'were written by others'.

The fur trade was an enormous economic engine. The harsh nature of the frontier, the geographical and ritual distance from home, and the inherent difficulties of movement and survival created anomic contexts. Men of the frontier would venture away from home for long periods of time. Often seasons or years would pass between a man's initial voyage and his return home. Nor was it so unusual for men not to return home at all. In such a context, a man might well retain some of the cultural traits of his birth country but would often develop traits that might seem unrecognisable back home. The enormity of the land, the brutality of the climate, and the often predictable cycle of seasons and weather,

regulated life and led to new forms of civilised routine. When the weather dictated it, mountain men and the voyageurs would often retreat to collective camps where they would live communally, enjoying 'a season of plenty, of relaxation, of amusement, of acquaintanceship with all' (Oman, 2002: 46)

From roughly November until March each year, the men of the frontier would leave their own, often solitary, trapping routes and come together in camp formations. They would 'construct teepees or Indian lodges that would house about half a dozen men. It was a style of life they would have learned from the First Nation communities with whom they came into contact. Spending much of their time on domestic activities, repairing clothes and equipment, seeking sustenance, amusement, warmth and relaxation. Their division of labour was proscribed and regulated along traditional gender lines, re-envisioned. Camps were known to divide into groups of 'trappers' and 'camp keepers.' As described by Benemann (2012: 72), trappers tended to provider roles, hunting for food and maintaining the horses, whereas 'camp keepers cooked, cleaned, dressed beaver, made leather thongs, and guarded the camp in the absence of the hunters'. Older trappers were known to take on the more arduous, expert and dangerous roles inherent in hunting activities while younger men tended to take on the more traditionally feminine roles. 'Having a younger man to provide creature comforts made winter encampment much more pleasant' (Benemann, 2012: 73). Men of the frontier era embraced a form of confirmed heterosexual bachelorhood. In some ways, they were joyful, eager, lustful renegades, hiring men for work, companionship, protection and even comfort (Benemann, 2012 referencing Perry, 2001). Men like Antoine Clement.

Antoine Clement as historical subject and sexual object

FIGURE 17.1 Antoine Clement by Alfred Jacob Miller, 1858–1860, Walters Art Museum ²

Although he has a documented presence in history that is very slight, contemporary male sex workers in Canada may well claim a man like Antoine Clement as one of their own. What historical references to Antoine do exist most frequently place him at the side of the Scottish captain and explorer Sir William Drummond Stewart (1795–1871). Stewart was a character. A member of the landed gentry who became obsessed with the ways and means through which the fur trading mountain men of his era lived their lives, he spent years

crossing fur trading routes throughout North America, at a time when the national divide between Canada and the United States of America was as fluid as sexuality on the frontier itself.

Benemann (2012: 13–14) follows a well-trodden path, painting Stewart in all the vibrancy with which Sir William lived his life. Aristocrat, patron, dandy, novelist, hunter and explorer; he was lured to the ‘western wilderness’ in an effort ‘to escape the tightening bonds of Victorian sexual morality’ (Benemann, 2012: 13–14). Once there, he appears to have become obsessed with the beauty, strength and wild exoticness that his long-term companion, Antoine, represented.

Stewart was a passionate author. Although his two semi-autobiographical novels were not particularly successful, they are telling. They depict North America’s Western frontier ‘as a place where gender and ethnicity are unpredictable, fluid, and malleable [where] men turn into women and women into men, Indians reveal themselves to be European aristocrats, and aristocrats reveal themselves to be Indians at heart’ (Rico, 2007: 167). For Stewart, the ‘boisterous and decadent’ frontier (Benemann, 2012: 220) acted to revitalise his aristocratic masculinity in a way his Victorian era homeland could not. For Sir William, the frontier was a ‘place of fluid identities and utopian possibilities’; an escape where his wealth and privilege could afford him nearly any illicit, immoral or comforting act his heart desired (Rico 2007: 190).

Where Stewart met Antoine and what precisely Antoine meant to Sir William remains a matter for speculation. Was Antoine a guide and teacher? An employee? A lover? Was he Two-Spirit? Was he an exploiter or was he exploited? Taken advantage of or an advantage taker? Was he kept by Stewart as a creature comfort? Was he, in Stewart’s eyes, an equal? These questions and more, the whole nature of his – of their – story, remain extremely difficult to answer. What we do know is that Antoine’s father was a Canadian of European descent and his mother part Cree. We know that he is referred to as being of the Delaware Tribe (Rico, 2007). We know that he was described as the ‘wild child of the Prairie’ (Ross 1967 cited by Rico 2007: 171, and Benemann, 2012: 226), and that for many years he was inseparable from Stewart. He was known to be Sir William’s ‘headman’ in a company of voyageurs, émigrés, and hired hands that included other young men called ‘Louis, Auguste and Pierre ... and a cook named Jean or John’ (DeVoto, 1947: 309–310). We know from Stewart’s writings and from the writings of those in his company that Antoine was a headstrong young man with a terrible, explosive temper, while at the same time being an extraordinary huntsman a mountain lad of exquisite talents. Indeed, he was known as ‘the most noted hunter on the plains and the most fearless man [you] ever saw – the only one who would walk straight up to a grizzly bear’ (Kennerly 1948 cited in Rico 2007: 171). A pursuer of beasts, with such extraordinary ability, it is said he once took down a hundred and twenty buffalo on the way to rendezvous, singing, as he rode off towards the herd, ‘*Dans mon pays je serais content*’ (In my country I would be happy) (DeVoto, 1947: 315).

DeVoto (1947: 314) writes that ‘whereas Stewart could trace his ancestry to the Conqueror’ Antoine knew little of his background. Yet, ‘the levelling process of the mountains’ had a perfectly equalising effect. Together, side-by-side, horse next to horse,

the couple were described as ‘well mounted, armed with Manton rifles, neither knowing what fear was’.

But what is the line between history and narrative? between the record as handed down and the interpretation of that record? Throughout the small literature that describes the relationship between Sir William and Antoine there runs an interpretive tension between those who construct their relationship as a form of frontier-era romanticised ideal, and those who would be more inclined to frame the nature of their twosome as a premeditated effort on the part of Antoine to gain materially, through his own commodification. That is, that Antoine should not be understood only through Stewart’s frontier-infused objectification, but also as a brave and wily young man in full reflexive control of his own subjectification.

Historians who have not understood Stewart’s sexuality, or who have been unwilling to acknowledge same-sex sexual relations, have tended to view the relationship between the two men in much the same light as the relationship between other trappers and voyageurs, as a series of contractual duties like those between an employer and an employee.

<AQ2>However, others like Benemann (2012), tend to view Antoine’s response to Sir William’s affections as a form of survival, a form of sex trade, claiming that, ‘the material benefits that he gained from being Stewart’s partner were as much an incentive as his sexual attraction to the man’.(Benemann, 2012: 90)

Lending credence to this interpretation is the example provided by Rico (2007: 175–176) describing how in 1844, during a time when Sir William had returned to Scotland to lodge at his castle Murthly, a supplier of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company wrote to him explaining that Antoine had recently visited with the request that the man

furnish him with money to bear his expenses to Scotland. I am very much at a loss to determine how to act in order to carry out your wishes – from your note to Antoine ... I am led to believe that you wish to have him to Murthly, but I confess I have some fears that Antoine might be led to squander the money ... and that you might regret his having started.

Several weeks later, the same Rocky Mountain Fur Company supplier wrote:

I sent for Antoine Clement and mentioned to him your propositions and the conditions on which I furnish him the means of going to Scotland which seems to meet his views ... but I learned that he had gone to his old haunt the Market House Tavern and was on a drunken frolic for a week.

Rico’s interpretation is that ‘although Clement was not particularly eager to see Stewart again, he did see the notion of a visit to Scotland as a possible source of cash’. Rico contends that Antoine was in fact ‘playing’ Stewart; that Sir William was being exploited, rather than the other way around.

For those of us willing to entertain the notion of sexual exchange on the Canadian frontier, such history leads to an interesting question. Was the ‘patronage and friendship’ of

Stewart with Antoine a reflection of love, lust and same-sex sexual desire, or rather the result of a web of ‘strategies that a man of little education and property’ like Antoine employed ‘in order to survive’ (Rico 2007: 176)?

Some evidence to the suggestion that Stewart had a taste for sexual exchange and that this fondness followed him across the frontier and his seemingly destined meeting with Antoine is found in a passage of one of Stewart’s novels. Benemann (2012: 41) recounts, how in the book *Edward Warren*, Stewart describes a scene in which a Swiss teacher discovers the protagonist ‘Ned’ to have letters tattooed on his back. Written in an era when tattoos were rare and known to grace only the flesh of sailors and criminals (and even then almost never on their back) the depiction is quite unusual. By way of explanation, Benemann reflects there was only one group of men ‘for whom having a tattooed back was not uncommon’ These were male sex workers in Germany who often were marked on their backs with large tattoos depicting, for example, a cat chasing a mouse down the curve of the buttocks, or two police officers waiting to make an arrest. Accompanying such tattoos could be found the phrase, spelled out in thick letters: *Durch diese hohle Gasse muss er kommen* (Through this hollow path he must come) – a known poetic reference to the Swiss national hero, William Tell. A double entendre? A shaded confession? Sir William’s story does not tell.

Narrative as his story: Lessons from the nineteenth-century frontier

The push of the frontier and the relations and customs developed across the fur trade of North America were instrumental for the burgeoning urbanisation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Elements embodied within the types of relationships that developed between men along the mountains, lakes, rivers and streams of the Canadian frontier would come to be transposed to these urban settlements. Ways of being, promoted by the pull towards the frontier and the push away from Victorian prudery created what Maynard (1997) has described as a distinct moral economy. For young men like Antoine, and the émigrés and voyageurs of the day, the social relations between men in New World Canada represented a thin line between vulnerability and exploitation and the capitalising of one’s potential for personal economic gain.

The North American frontier, both that of the United States of America and Canada, represented more than simply a new world. For the men who ventured across it, the frontier was in many ways an exotic adventure, where sexuality differed from that which they had previously known, where the types of relationships between men, and their exchange economies were transformed as a result.

And while it is true that the historical record available is lacking, providing in many ways only ‘a set of images and ideologies ... that often pass for “experience” as opposed to wholly factual truth’ (Forsyth, 2005: 76), the narratives embedded in the history of the frontier, the fur trade and the great colonisation of Canada, reflect, at least for the colonisers, tectonic shifts in sexual norms and customs (Barman, 1997). The worth of the common man, as reflected in values ascribed to his youth, strength, labour and robust sexuality, created new economies and new social and sexual orders, in which sex between

men was differentially valued in terms of morality, philosophy, possibility and economy.

Eurocentric subjectivities, particularly those that play on a process of ‘othering’ with regards to the North American frontier, are reflected in the mainstream’s historical gaze (Weist, 1983). Biases of interpretation, which in themselves represent social, material and moral orders, have led to particular understandings and interpretations. Men’s shared values, and evolutions in those values, have been cast in certain lights, because to envision them otherwise would imply that such are not the only histories in need of reconsideration.

When we study those on the margins, as we do when we study male sex work in Canada, the narratives by which we problematise or counter-problematise often have the tendency to crowd out either factual accounts or alternate explanations. Hence, the story of male sex work in Canada has tended to follow one of several narrative arcs. Male sex work as street life (Visano, 1987), as exploited youth (Maynard, 1997), as HIV risk and resilience (Allman, 1999), as stigmatised profession (Morrison and Whitehead, 2007), and as experience and advocacy (van der Meulen, Durisin and Love, 2013). What the literature has not done with any great frequency, and what this chapter has sought to address, is to offer a more historical interpretation of the world’s oldest profession as it applies to men’s same-sex relations.

It is not sufficient to fall back only on familiar narratives for explanations of social facts. Were we only to use a single lens to describe the subjectivities of men who sell sex in Canada – victim, criminal, deviant, labourer (Corriveau and Greco, 2014; Vanwesenbeeck, 2013) – we would run the risk of repeating ourselves and repeating each other. Unfortunately, against the context of male sex work in Canada – not just across cities and risk factors – but across histories also, such reification remains the norm. Though I too have risked falling back on a familiar narrative gaze; one that McKegey (2014:1–2), in the introduction to *Masculindians*, describes as ‘depictions of indigenous men that rehearse hypermasculine stereotypes of the noble savage and the bloodthirsty warrior’. If in the recounting of Antoine’s story, such gaze is evident, it is as narrative device – not with intent to reproduce colonial imageries or to oppress, but in aid of reimagining same-sex sexual exchange on the Canadian frontier.

I wanted here to tell you a story about how, in when what is now known as Canada was First Nation and Inuit land, exchanges between men took a variety of forms. Some of them familial, some of them social, others cultural, still others economic, and some of them – suggested by their history as narrated to us – wonderfully and remarkably sexual. Colonisation did not end this history. It may have sought to erase it, rewrite it, and reinterpret it. But like our way of living with this land, these histories are woven into the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual nature of our nature. Existing relations between all genders influenced the men who colonised Canada. It was for the settlers a new frontier where new forms of intimacy, exchange and commodification were possible. Those possibilities remain today: on the darkened street corners; in the back pages of the dirty, ragged press; along the technosexual channels of new media; and in the red and white body fluids of those who exchange them – for money, for drugs, for shelter, and for love. Antoine’s frontier was the journey of many. His story is in many ways our own³.

Notes

1. A literature in Australia has begun to identify and document its settler-era same-sex relations (Bongiorno, 2013).
2. Antoine Clement by Alfred Jacob Miller (Fig. 1) is reproduced under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>) and the GNU Free Documentation License (<https://www.gnu.org/copyleft/fdl.html>). Available at <http://art.thewalters.org/detail/33932/antoine-cleme0nt/>
3. Appreciation to the University of Toronto Libraries and the Walters Art Museum. To Randy Jackson and Renée Masching for an Indigenous knowing lens; Negar Chavoshi and Matthew Taylor for contributions; Laura María Agustín, Melissa Hope Ditmore, Will Pritchard and Andrew Sorfleet for insight; Ted Myers for encouragement, and James Watson and Editors at Routledge for clear heads and steady hands. In memory of Antoine Clement. May the four directions forever guide your journey.

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