

THE LEAGUE OF
CANADIAN POETS

FEMINIST CAUCUS
REVIEW COMMITTEE
REPORT

2019 – 2020

INTRODUCTION

Dear League and Feminist Caucus members,

The Feminist Caucus has been less outwardly active than usual this past year as we formed a review committee to assess where the Caucus stands today in terms of its recently revised mandate, and how we can improve and extend our equitable support. I am very grateful to the members of the Committee, especially my fellow focus group leaders, Anne Burke, Eric Fulsom and Rita Bouvier, and their group members. In lieu of an annual report for this year's AGM, I am attaching my analysis of the four groups' findings, as well a series of proposed next steps for the coming year.

Now more than ever, the Feminist Caucus is a vital part of the League of Canadian Poets. Together, we can make a difference. I hope you will join us.

Yours in solidarity,

Ayesha Chatterjee
Chair of the Feminist Caucus



FOCUS GROUP REPORT

Focus group leaders:

Rita Bouvier (Saskatchewan)

Eric Fulsom (Ontario)

Anne Burke (Alberta)

Ayesha Chatterjee (Ontario)

Analysis of Focus Group Reports

The general consensus is that the League continues to need a **single caucus**, focusing on **intersectionality**. It needs to be inclusive and it should provide a safe space for poets from all marginalised groups to share insight, experience and mutual support. A couple of things that were mentioned several times was the need to feel welcomed and to feel safe. An opinion was also voiced that the caucus should perhaps be renamed to include the words diversity, equality, inclusion. This is something to be discussed in the next step. It's important to note that the caucus is not the same as the Diversity and Equity Committee which deals with those topics at the institutional level, although there will—and should—inevitably be overlap in the Committee and the Caucus's goals, and ideally each will inform the other's workings.

The following statement is important to acknowledge and be aware of in the Caucus' workings: to quote Glen Coulthard (*Red Skin-White Masks*, p. 32 Introduction):

“In a spirit of reconciliation and decolonization, Canada’s historical colonial relationship with Indigenous people needs both acknowledgement and redress of social (racism) and economic disparities (resulting poverty), taking into account the multifarious ways in which capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy, and the totalizing character of state power interact with one another to form the constellation of power relations that sustain colonial patterns of behavior, structures, and relationships”.

There is an interest in **intergenerational dialogue**, which would also begin to address the concern of ageism (another topic mentioned). **Mental health issues**, **financial support** were topics that came up in several groups. Finances are something that can perhaps only be addressed at the institutional level, but mental health can and should be one of the focuses of the Caucus. One suggested way of addressing this is through meditation workshops, for example.

There is support for an **LGBTQIA2S group**, although not necessarily for a separate caucus. It's suggested that a preliminary exploratory committee be formed, with a clear agenda, as a part of the Feminist Caucus. This would provide space for the LGBTQIA2S group to meet on their own terms as well as help the larger group understand the challenges facing LGBTQIA2S communities. This could be a model for other groups within the Feminist Caucus. It would provide a platform for the sharing of experiences, discussion of specific issues, general support and mentorship within groups, and at the same time offer opportunities for dialogue in the wider Caucus. There are very likely commonalities in the challenges faced by marginalised groups, and having a larger Caucus (the Feminist Caucus) will mean unity in opposing/correcting inequity and injustices and also to celebrate work and ideas. There's power in numbers.

FOCUS GROUP REPORT

continued

There is clearly a widespread interest in connecting personally and in having a **safe and ethical space** to meet other poets to exchange ideas and learn. Access to opportunities is particularly difficult for poets in more rural or remote areas. Now that Zoom is a household name and given the current pandemic, the Caucus could look into finding platforms for regular virtual meetings to network, share work and provide mentorship opportunities in a wide range of subjects. These **virtual meetings** could be organised regionally or nationally or a combination of both. At the same time it must be acknowledged that a section of poets may not have or want access to technology, so the Caucus needs to find ways to reach those poets as well. When it is safe to do so, regular meeting spaces, perhaps in cafes or similar could be encouraged where poets can drop in and exchange knowledge, particularly at a professional level.

One suggestion that the Caucus should take up is **partnering with other feminist arts organisations**, e.g. the Feminist Art Collective in Toronto. This is potentially a wonderful way to generate new, perhaps multi-disciplinary work.

A member of one focus group suggested **using technology to reinvent the annual Feminist Caucus panel discussion**. This year the Caucus is publishing a series of three mini podcasts, each podcast a conversation between two poets/panellists on the topic of postcolonial feminism. The annual chapbook will be created by the poets/panellists on that topic.

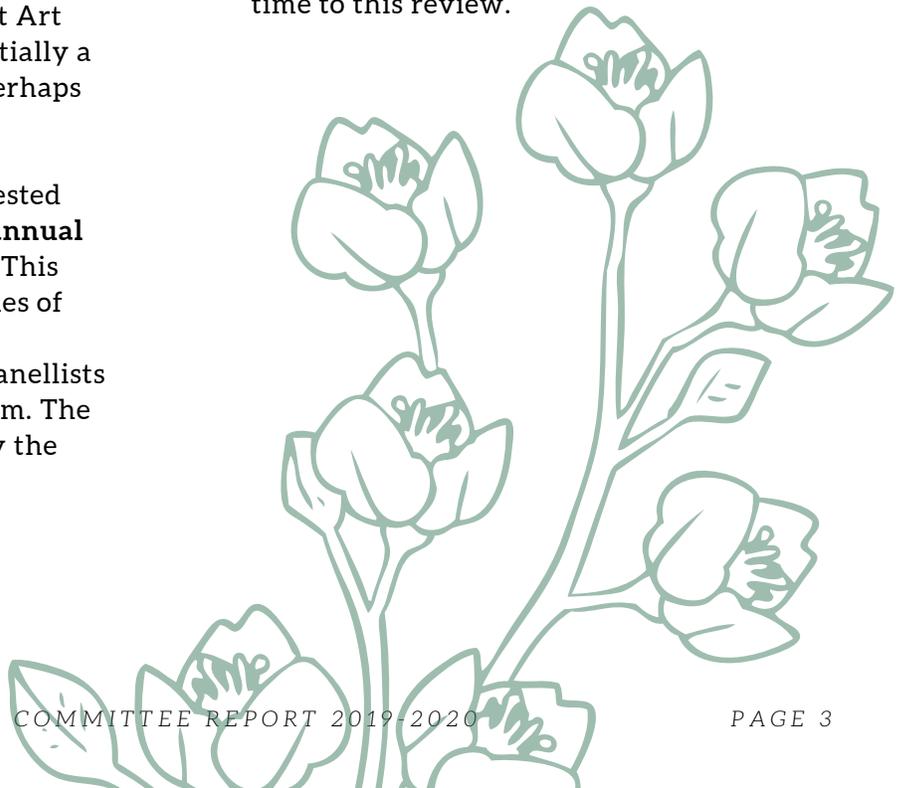
NEXT STEPS

We will be reaching out to form a preliminary LGBTQIA2S group within the Caucus.

In the next few months, we will begin to hold a regular Caucus meeting in one of the League's regional areas to see how best to make smaller Caucus meetings work on a regular basis. We can then hopefully use what we learn from these meetings to hold similar meetings in other parts of the country where there is interest. These meetings could be used to exchange ideas, showcase intersectional poetry, have workshops, hold discussions, network and learn. It may be a good platform in these times for grassroots activism.

The review committee is also drawing up a list of feminist arts organisations with which the Caucus can then connect and partner.

I would like to sincerely thank my fellow members of the Feminist Caucus Review Committee and all the poets who participated in the Caucus focus groups to provide deeply thoughtful insights and feedback, and who gave so much of their time to this review.





Established in 1966, the League of Canadian Poets is a national non-profit organization dedicated to supporting poets, building poetic communities, supporting inclusive and equitable free expression, and promoting Canadian poets and Poetry.

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