

The Dalton Camp Award



2017

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The 2017 DALTON CAMP AWARD

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Presented by Friends of Canadian Broadcasting



www.friends.ca



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FRIENDS OF CANADIAN BROADCASTING announced the creation of The Dalton Camp Award in December, 2002 to honour the memory of the late Dalton Camp, a distinguished commentator on Canadian public affairs, who passed away earlier that year.

The Dalton Camp Award is available to one Canadian each year, the winner of an essay competition on how the media influence Canadian democracy. The Award consists of a cash prize of \$10,000 as well as a bronze cast medal by the late Canadian sculptress Dora de Pédery-Hunt. Under the rules, the Selection Committee has the option of awarding \$2,500 for the best essay by a post-secondary student.

Friends' goal is to encourage Canadians to reflect and express themselves through original essays on the link between democracy and the media.

The Selection Committee is chaired by Jim Byrd; the other members are Pauline Couture and Stephen Kimber.

The 2017 winner is Taeja Liu and the winner of the best essay by a post-secondary student is Brooks Decillia. Friends of Canadian Broadcasting is pleased to publish their essays herein and on friends.ca, where details of the 2018 Dalton Camp Award will be available.

Friends wishes to thank *The Globe and Mail*, the *Toronto Star* and *The Walrus* for their cooperation regarding the Dalton Camp Award.

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THE MEDAL

The late **DORA DE PÉDÈRY-HUNT** was Canada's foremost medal designer and sculptress. Among her designs are the dollar coin and a cast medal of Norman Bethune presented by Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau to Mao Tse-tung in 1973. In 2003, she was awarded the J. Sanford Saltus Award Medal, the American Numismatic Society's prestigious medal for signal achievement in the art of the medal.



WINNER OF THE BEST ESSAY



Taeja Liu is a writer and world traveller nearly finished her gap year. She likes to eat strawberry cheesecake and perfect her Instagram aesthetic. She will soon be in Vancouver studying Health Science at Langara (and hopefully building a future in which she adopts her own cat).

WINNER OF THE BEST ESSAY BY A POST-SECONDARY STUDENT

Brooks Decillia is a longtime journalist and public broadcaster. He was a national reporter for CBC News for a decade. Brooks also served as executive producer at CBC News (radio, TV and online) in Calgary. He is currently a PhD candidate at the London School of Economics.



THE IMPACT OF WATCHING ORPHAN BLACK

WINNING ESSAY BY TAEJA LIU

“Live fast, die young, bad girls do it well.”¹ The first episode of Canadian sci-fi thriller *Orphan Black* premiered on Space the spring of 2013. Recommended to me by a classmate, I binge-watched season one the following February. Above are the lyrics that played during the debut episode in which Sarah Manning (Tatiana Maslany) alters her appearance to impersonate her clone Beth Childs (Tatiana Maslany). In doing so, she straightened her hair and allowed the audience to do the opposite. She wore what can aptly be described as punk lingerie: all black undergarments with alluring cut-outs and see-through sections that casually taunted, “You can’t mess with me, but I’m already messing with you, mate.” The show’s appeal extends beyond an engaging plot about bioengineered illegal clones to encompass a cast of Canadian female leads and feature diverse, well-developed queer characters. Those lyrics unfailingly bring me back to the viscerally pleasant surprise I felt at the opportunity to see a thoughtfully constructed queer on-screen character.

It is for this reason that representation in media matters. Whether the platform be blockbuster movies, late night news, or YouTube subscriptions—it all matters. TV shows, *Orphan Black* included, are not merely entertainment. The role these stories play in our society is profoundly significant. Of specific importance is who tells what stories to whom. Queer inclusivity has improved in recent years due entirely to how our

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complex social structures are shifting to highlight minorities in both media and democracy. The increasingly open queer dialogue brings us, as a nation, to the inevitable realization that we have a gross surplus of white, cis-gendered, heterosexual male narratives. Once upon a time in a rainbow-less kingdom called Canada there lived extremely powerful creatures called men who unfairly controlled all levels of society from government to education to corporations. We can’t lie and tell ourselves that tale has a happy ending. People with existing privilege to the extent of insisting their identities are the default don’t need further empowerment. Instead, we need platforms to shift the focus on the perspective of cis-het white men to events pertaining to the queer community. Optimistically, this will create a positive feedback loop between media and democracy that will lessen the unfounded advantages particular Canadians unfairly possess.

Unfortunately, it is easy to set up echo chambers in which queer entertainment and politics reverberate among those who are already aware while the rest remain ignorant. It’s easy to scroll past the post on Facebook about how the *All Families are Equal Act* passed in Ontario² or ignore a Netflix recommendation for *The L Word*. Search engine results and social media feeds are filtered to show content based on personal preferences. To avoid these counter-productive echo chambers, queer media should be widely available to represent the sexual diversity of Canadians off screen. This is a necessity for queer individuals to be seen by the majority of the population as viable participants in Canadian society. The opposite of love and acceptance is not hate, but indifference. Nothing will change if those with the means to produce content or pass laws don’t prioritize moving Canada in a queer-positive direction. This is the crucial link between media and democracy: more visibility in one means more in the other.

Orphan Black allows its queer audience to see themselves in the portrayal of bisexual characters Cosima Niehaus (Tatiana Maslany) and Delphine Cormier (Évelyne Brochu). Their blossoming love story is what rooted my *Orphan Black* obsession—I couldn’t help but love me some genuine lady love. The engagement felt by the show’s viewers extended online in the Tumblr community dubbed Clone Club. This network of people became the basis of the internet trend referred to as “The Great Gay

Migration™” in which users flock collectively to any show with a lesbian character, especially following a death. This phenomenon highlights the scarcity of spaces in which queer identity can safely be discussed and validated. Commonly, a continuous hesitance underlies any attempt to express feelings towards queer characters without simultaneously creating vulnerability. But with *Clone Club*, there’s an entire community of peers discussing the gayness of *Orphan Black* in minute detail. “I have never thought about bisexuality. I mean for myself, you know? But as a scientist, I know that sexuality is a spectrum. But, you know, social biases, they codified attraction.”³ Delphine’s line echoes the process of coming out to oneself: suppression, rationalizing, acceptance. It’s truly a breathtaking line that brings surprisingly happy tears to queer eyes. Ongoing throughout the first two seasons, even from the Canadian perspective, the legalization of same-sex marriage in the US was a frequent topic of interest. Having never been explicitly educated on any kind of gay history, I had to incognito Google, “Is gay marriage legal in Canada?” The affirmative results instantly relieved me—it had been legal since 2005. Confusion quickly replaced relief. If it was legal, why did it still feel like it wasn’t okay?

Despite Canada being a country that at least maintains a passive tolerance towards the queer community, queer youth grow up being spoon-fed the subliminal message that ‘gay’ is synonymous with ‘bad.’ Those M.I.A. lyrics hit where it hurts: “Live fast, die young, gay girls go to hell.” Modern technology provides a constant, convenient feed of information to consume. You are what you eat, and in 2016 alone Canadians were force-fed a feast of dead queer characters from popular programs. These fast food narratives benefit corporation, not consumer. Another lesbian ‘accidentally’ shot or strangled to death? Shocker. These pointless, plot-pushing deaths serve as a brutal reminder that the reality on the other side of the screen isn’t much different. Canada is still striving towards fully acknowledging and accepting the queer community in order to overcome the stigma and outright fear its citizens feel from deviating from the socially-acceptable straight standard.

According to Statistics Canada, 1.7% of the population identifies as homosexual; 1.3% as bisexual.⁴ Not accounting for people who are closeted, under 18, or otherwise identify as queer, that’s approximately

1,066,212 Canadians. That’s a lot of people! Yet overwhelmingly, the privileged agenda is prioritized. This is not a situation unique to LGBTQA+ people. In fact, it’s prevalent among all disadvantaged groups—women, people of colour, people with disabilities, neurodivergent people. However, marginalization persists to be a harsh reality with potentially life-threatening consequences.

It starts young—we are raised in a society prejudiced to the proud. Two thirds of queer students feel unsafe at school for statistically good reasons: “51% of LGBTQ students have been verbally harassed about their sexual orientation and 21% have been physically harassed or assaulted.” Trans kids particularly feel the brunt of this discrimination—74% have experienced verbal harassment and 37% have been physically harassed or assaulted, purely based on their gender expression.⁵ Growing up hearing classmates referring to negative things like homework as ‘gay’ locks kids in the closet. Children aren’t always taught how to acknowledge diversity appropriately and this absolutely makes it dangerous to live as a queer person. We need shows like *Orphan Black* available for the public to watch and critically evaluate their perception of queerness. Think high school—see hordes of teenagers in flickering, fluorescent hallways. Smell the pungent body odour produced by pubescent sweat glands. Feeling soul-crushing peer pressure and all-consuming desperation to be accepted doesn’t make a safe, healthy environment to come out in.

For most of Canadian history, homosexuality was criminalized and punishable by death. It took a tremendous amount of time and effort before Bill C-38 became federal law on 20 July 2005, legalizing same-sex marriage—which is not the be-all and end-all of gay rights. Change began in May 1969 when Bill C-150 decriminalized gay sex. Over the next four decades, media attention was garnered through protests and riots, which publicized the horrors of police brutality and systematic oppression of queer minorities. Today’s outrage over the death of prominent lesbian icons like The 100’s Lexa is rooted in queer history that dates back to these decades of discrimination. For example, on 5 February 1981, “Toronto police arrested almost 300 men in raids on 4 bathhouses. The following day a crowd of 3,000 people took to the streets” in violent protest.⁶ These are the lessons Canada’s school system leaves out. It is a history that is screamed and shouted, yet barely heard as a whisper.

In the late twentieth century, police brutality, workplace discrimination, and physical assault against queer people became topics of controversy. With no out role models to look up to, how could Canadians understand that gay Canadians were still Canadians? And if recognized, how could they be unempathetically labelled as anything but “other”? The first openly gay MP was British Columbia’s Svend Robinson in 1988. He, along with many other LGBTQA+ figures, began to change public opinion on queerness and fuel changes in policy on both provincial and federal levels of government. In 1996, protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation was added to the Canadian Human Rights Act with the passing of Bill C-33. This recognized that all Canadians should be able to contribute to and be protected by their own country’s laws.

Over many decades, the focus has shifted as both queer rights and deaths accumulated. However, allowing queer Canadians access to the same quality of life regardless of sexuality remains the endgame for the so-called Gay Agenda. Letting queer characters like Cosima and Delphine love each other on television normalizes the free expression of queer love in real life—it is as simple and as complicated as that. At the turn of the century, same-sex marriage became an attainable goal. In 2002, Ontario was the first province to legalize same-sex marriage; British Columbia followed in 2003. By 2005, Bill C-38 passed, and Alberta, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and PEI joined the rest of the country in legalizing same-sex marriage. In the current decade, trans rights and visibility have been emphasized. While the struggles have lessened with increased awareness granted by media coverage and legal reform, the struggles of decades past are still applicable in Canada today. Nowadays nobody should be afraid of social, legal, or financial repercussions for being here and queer.

Canada has a long history of being an unsafe place to come out in with the triple whammy of legal persecution, social suicide, and/or lack of education on queer subject matter. Slowly but surely, being gay is actually starting to feel okay, with increased awareness of this sensitive situation. I am adamantly optimistic about the future successive generations will enjoy in which queerness has tipped past public displays of affection being a luxury to simply being an unabashed kiss

between lovers. A future where Canadians can enjoy narratives that follow the legacy of diverse representation that shows like *Orphan Black* leave. Considering the context of Canada’s history, TV is not trivial, but a fundamental reflection of the progress our society has made. I invite every privileged person to imagine themselves as invisible. To imagine themselves endlessly searching every mirror society has created and hardly seeing any semblance of their reflection. This is the terrible reality of today Canadians of tomorrow will be spared, thanks to countless progressive people—all of whom make watching *Orphan Black* possible.

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IN DEFENCE OF CBC

WINNING ESSAY BY **BROOKS DECILLIA**

In the fall of 2014, about two years before the British Broadcasting Corporation's Royal Charter expired, the venerable public broadcaster unveiled an all-star version of the classic 1966 Beach Boys' hit *God Only Knows*.

The BBC officially remixed the song—with the sanguine blessing of the song's creator Brian Wilson and the help of superstars such as Sir Elton John, Chrissie Hynde and Stevie Wonder—to mark the launch of the public broadcaster's new music service.

The cynical¹ suggested the reinvented love song was a not so subtle subliminal message from Dear Old Auntie: value your public broadcaster because "God only knows" what it would be like without our extensive worldwide TV, radio and online services.

A WORLD WITHOUT CBC

In Canada, Kellie Leitch, Member of Parliament for Simcoe–Grey, and candidate for the leadership of the Conservative Party, recently imagined a world without the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. She promised to dismantle the public broadcaster if she became prime minister. "The measure of a conservative," she said in a statement, "is in their efforts to, as the great British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher described it, 'roll back the frontiers of the state.'"²

It is curious, indeed, that Leitch invoked Thatcher in her call to put Canada's national public broadcaster out of business. Thatcher was, of course, no fan of the BBC. So angered by the BBC's coverage of the Falkland Islands War and events in Northern Ireland, the British prime

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minister tasked a committee dominated by "prominent free marketeers" in 1986 to examine scrapping the licence fee that pays for the United Kingdom's public broadcaster.³ To the surprise of the free enterprise prime minister, the Peacock Enquiry heralded the BBC's "quality and status" in British life.⁴ Thatcher eventually conceded that the BBC adds value to British public discourse.

Leitch's promise to kill the CBC is perplexing for another—more important—reason. The leadership hopeful seems to celebrate media diversity in her statement about the CBC. "For Canadian democracy to thrive," argues the Conservative leadership hopeful, "we need to hear from the different voices in the press." Leitch echoes, it appears, the idealized notion of a robust news media playing a vital role in democracy. To be certain, an independent media provides a crucial check-and-balance in democracy. A diverse and thriving media is a public good. But leaving it up to the private sector to fulfill that public good is a troublesome proposition, especially in this precarious time for Canadian media. The coming pages beg to ask about the practicality, as Leitch suggests, of Canadians "hear[ing] from... different voices in the press." Moreover, this discussion also argues that the CBC is vital to enabling those diverse voices to get heard.

DWINDLING MEDIA

Canada's beleaguered media continues to wither. Print media is beset with plummeting revenue and layoffs in newsrooms across the country. In the past decade, it is estimated that Canada has lost half of all of its journalists.⁵ The federal government is so concerned by Canada's troubled media that it is studying the country's \$48 billion media and cultural industries and contemplating "what the media landscape would look like without the country's two largest newspaper companies."⁶ These are troubled times for Canada's newsrooms. A former *National Post* journalist told the *National Observer* that the situation is so grim at Postmedia that journalists have resorted to *scalping* stories from CBC's website. "They would look for regional CBC stories," according to the anonymous journalist, "get that and put a *Post* spin on it. That's how they found stories."⁷ Clearly, the ability of Canadians to hear those "different voices" in the country's media, as Leitch suggests, is growing increasingly difficult.

For decades, critics of the CBC have contended that the public broadcaster should concern itself only with what private media can't or won't do. It seems we have arrived (or soon will) at that moment. Private media is struggling to do what critics of the CBC said commercial media could do better—and more efficiently—than the public broadcaster. Some experts even suggest local newspapers and TV will vanish.⁸ Surely, this is the time for a healthy public broadcaster.

MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

Canada's faltering news media present important questions about our democracy. Joshua Benton has argued the decline of local media in the U.S. helped, in part, to give rise to nativism and Donald Trump.⁹ Many supporters of the U.S. President, as Benton stresses, felt alienated from their local institutions. "The braided fabric"—factories, churches and local newspapers—of their communities, writes Benton, "unraveled", leaving many Americans disconnected. With their newspapers—the local "backbone" of news—gone, people in the U.S. have turned increasingly to national media such as Fox News and far-right websites such as *Breitbart News*. Media scholars worry about the influence of these news sources. Researchers at the University of Michigan, notably, concluded that this increasing reliance on online media is distorting reality for many, "isolate[ing] people in information bubbles only partly of their own choosing."¹⁰

In this increasingly fractured world, where *fake news*—misinformation that people too frequently believe—oozes through the web, the CBC—with its commitment to public service and editorial integrity—offers a social barricade, of sorts, against distorted news, disenfranchisement, cynicism and polarization in Canada. Christina Holtz-Bacha and Pippa Norris, in fact, found that public broadcasting audiences are more politically aware.¹¹ Moreover, in a vast country such as Canada—with a history of unsettled federalism—public broadcasting offers, as Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff contend, "a shared public life" and a "we-feeling."¹² Outside of Canada's major centres, the CBC is, as John Doyle recently observed, "a vital presence, providing local coverage and Canadian content, which, though diminished, is vastly appreciated by residents of cities big and small and in rural areas."¹³

The CBC, is a *public good*, as Wade Rowland has argued.¹⁴ All too often, though, the crown corporation does not get spoken about as a public service comparable to schools, hospitals, universities, and public museums.¹⁵ Yet, with diminishing media and the creep of political polarization, the CBC's services are required now just as much as in its nascent days of stemming the growing influence of U.S. radio broadcasts in Canada. "Everybody who is smart in bureaucracies and governments around the Western world," argues philosopher John Ralston Saul "now knows that public broadcasting is one of the most important remaining levers that a nation state has to communicate with itself."¹⁶ Even the prominent conservative and former media baron Conrad Black extolls the contribution CBC makes, calling the public broadcaster "a necessary instrument of public policy."¹⁷

If democracy is to be taken seriously, stresses Nicholas Garnaham, public broadcasting must be defended and enhanced. Democracy, he writes, is not served "by sectionalized, ghettoized media talking only to a particular interest group or the party faithful."¹⁸ The CBC speaks to a wider—less segmented—audience. It distinguishes itself by covering the far reaches of the country and its diverse population while other media neglects much of rural and northern Canada because it is "too expensive. Not sexy enough. No ratings."¹⁹

A NEW START

It is also worth noting that CBC is popular with Canadians. Local CBC Radio One morning shows are number one in major cities across the country. CBC News' website is consistently one of the most popular online news sources in Canada. For many Canadians, CBC is their only news service. Moreover, a 2013 survey found that 80 per cent of Canadians feel the "CBC plays an important role in strengthening Canadian culture and identity."²⁰ And in the last federal election, thousands of Canadians planted "We Vote CBC!" signs on their lawns.

The Liberal government's most recent budget invested \$675 million over five years to "modernize and revitalize CBC/Radio Canada in a digital era."²¹ But that's not enough. It's time to look seriously at making the CBC commercial free. Plus, the corporation's governance structure must be overhauled to make the public broadcaster more independent of government.²²

This essay began by wondering if the BBC's re-mixed Beach Boys' hit *God Only Knows* contained a hidden subtext about that venerable broadcaster's future. It closes by asking what Canada would be without CBC. Would it be worth creating a comparable organization? Would it be worth the public expense? The answer is, of course, an unequivocal yes. The CBC is not only popular, but it enriches the cultural and democratic life of Canada, constituting an intangible public good that is immeasurable, especially now when so much other media continues to vanish. And, perhaps, if public broadcasting skeptics such as Margaret Thatcher can come to realize the value of the BBC, maybe—*God Only Knows*—those here in Canada who wish to kill the CBC will face facts and finally recognize the profound contribution the public broadcaster already makes—and can continue to make—to Canadian life.

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