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apology, under erasure

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Abstract

On 9 December, 2013 Premier Kathleen Wynne of Ontario delivered *Ontario's Apology to Former Residents of Regional Centres For People with Developmental Disabilities* at the provincial legislature. The apology was delivered a week after the *Huronias Class Action Lawsuit* was settled for \$35 million. The poem uses the form of erasure as a response to the inadequacies of both the apology and the settlement.

Keywords

Institutions, apologies, Ontario, disability history, poetry

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Mr. Speaker, A government's responsibility is to care for its people, to make sure they are protected and safe. And therein lies a basic trust between the state and the people.

It is on that foundation of trust that everything else is built: our sense of self, our sense of community, our sense of purpose. And when that trust is broken with any one of us, we all lose something – we are all diminished. I want to address a matter of trust before this house and my assembled colleagues, but I am truly speaking to a group of people who have joined us this afternoon and to the many others who could not be here today. I am humbled to welcome to the legislature today former residents of the Huronia Regional Centre and Rideau Regional Centre in Smiths Falls and to also address former residents of the Southwestern Regional Centre near Chatham, along with their families and supporters. I want to welcome all of you and I want to honour your determination and your courage and to thank you for being here to bear witness to this occasion. Today, Mr. Speaker, we take responsibility for the suffering of these people and their families.

I offer an apology to the men, women and children of Ontario who were failed by a model of institutional care for people with developmental disabilities. We must look in the eyes of those who have been affected, and to those they leave behind, and say: "We are sorry." As Premier, and on behalf of all the people of Ontario, I am sorry for your pain, for your losses, and for the impact that these experiences must have had on your faith in this province, and in your government. I am sorry for what you and your loved ones experienced, and for the pain that you carry to this day. In the case of Huronia, some residents suffered neglect and abuse within the very system that was meant to provide them care. We broke faith with them – with you – and by doing so, we diminished ourselves. Over a period of generations, and under various governments, too many of these men, women, children and their families were deeply harmed and continue to bear the scars and the consequences of this time. Their humanity was undermined; they were separated from their families and robbed of their potential, their comfort, their safety and their dignity.

At Huronia, some of these residents were forcibly restrained left in unbearable seclusion, exploited for their labour and crowded into unsanitary conditions. And while the model of care carried out by this institution is now acknowledged to have been deeply flawed, there were also cases of unchecked physical and emotional abuse by some staff and residents. Huronia was closed in 2009 when Ontario closed the doors to its last remaining provincial institutions for people with developmental disabilities. Today, Mr. Speaker, we no longer see people with developmental disabilities as something "other." They are boys and girls, men and women, with hopes and dreams like everyone else. In Ontario, all individuals deserve our support, our respect and our care. We must look out for one another, take care of one another, challenge ourselves to be led by our sense of moral purpose before all else. Today, we strive to support people with developmental disabilities so they can live as independently as possible and be more fully included in all aspects of their community. As a society, we seek to learn from the mistakes of the past. And that process continues. I know, Mr. Speaker that we have more to do. And so we will protect the memory of all those who have suffered, help tell their stories and ensure that the lessons of this time are not lost. We are so sorry. Thank you.



On 9 December, 2013 Premier Kathleen Wynne of Ontario delivered *Ontario's Apology to Former Residents of Regional Centres For People with Developmental Disabilities* at the provincial legislature. The apology was delivered a week after the *Huronias Class Action Lawsuit* was settled for 35\$ million.

my first encounter with erasure was through the *Erased de Kooning* drawing by Robert Rauschenberg, 1953. it is a work that for me, persists in memory likely as it relies on removal rather than accumulation – as drawing often does. as Nation states might.

the erasure is incomplete

State accountability is incomplete – palimpsests of words provide a context for absence for the historical and continuing erasure of labelled persons from the Nation state.

the apology is not always willing

the breaks in the ground of language become a space where imagination gathers collecting the fragments of language found on the grounds of the Huronia Regional Centre - letters crayoned on walls - impossible to erase

something

escapes