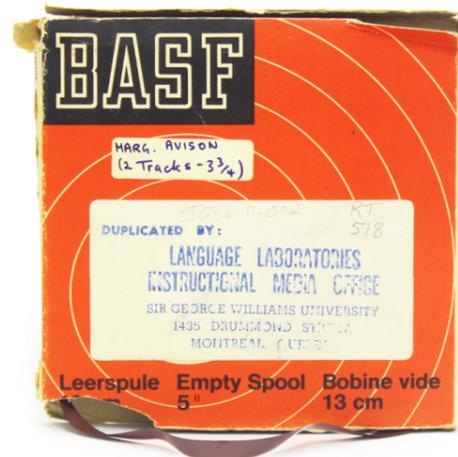


# Margaret Avison reading “Thaw” – Sir George Williams University, January 27, 1967

Katherine McLeod      March 30, 2020

Audio of the week, ShortCuts, SPOKENWEBLOG | 1976, Katherine McLeod,  
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This Audio of the Week features Margaret Avison reading “Thaw” on Friday January 27, 1967, at Sir George Williams University (now Concordia). “Thaw” is a poem that feels right for this spring day – when patches of snow are melting beside tulip buds sprouting up from the ground. But, this year, the arrival of spring feels bittersweet. At the time when we are usually released from the solitude of winter, we have been forced into self-isolation by the spread of the virus COVID-19. For now, we stay at home and stay apart. It is a sense of detachment that also permeates Avison’s poems, written so often from the perspective of a removed observer. From *The Winter Sun* (1960), Avison’s poem “Thaw” depicts empty streets where “a few / Sparrows gather, a dog barks out / Under the dogless pale pale blue”; but, despite its depiction of such emptiness, the poem is full: sticky with sound and sense: “Lime-water and liquorice light / Wander the tumbled streets [...] Move your tongue along a slat / Of a raspberry box from last year’s crate.” Taste and touch are present but rooted in nostalgia, which the poem extends to specific moments in history, referring to how “the Black Death made men dance...” Hearing those words, I paused and stopped listening. Here was a reference to the plague in the midst of a recording that I was drawn to because of its representation of the transitional time of spring. Even though the reference is so far removed temporally, I did not want to hear it because it felt too close and too much. But I chose to replay this poem, listen to it again, and engage with it as a whole as one way of trying to perceive, fully, what our reality is, at least in this instant. The now that is changing.

Listen to the full recording of Margaret Avison’s 1967 reading [here](#).

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## Katherine McLeod

Katherine McLeod researches and teaches Canadian literature through sound, performance, and archives. Her recent publications include a chapters in the books *Public Poetics: Critical Issues in Canadian Poetry and Poetics*, *Moving Archives* (Wilfrid Laurier UP), and *CanLit Across Media: Unarchiving the Literary Event* (MQUP), which she also co-edited with Jason Camlot. Currently, she is an Affiliate Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Concordia University, where she researches CBC Radio recordings and where she is organizing SpokenWeb’s Ghost Reading Series.

Follow the site she curates for Montreal readings at [WherePoetsRead.ca](http://WherePoetsRead.ca) and [@poetsread](https://www.instagram.com/poetsread).

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