WRITING HERE[1]

W.H. NEW

In 2003, for the BC Federation of Writers, Susan Musgrave assembled a collection of new fiction and poetry from some fifty-two BC writers, called *The FED Anthology*.[2] Included in this anthology is a story by Carol Matthews called "Living in ASCII," which begins with a woman recording her husband's annoyance at whatever he sees as stupidity (noisy traffic and inaccurate grammar, for instance, and the loss of his own words when his computer apparently swallows them). This woman then tells of going to a party, of the shifting (and sometimes divisive) relationships among all the women who were attending, and of the subjects they discussed. These included a rape trial, national survival, men, cliffs, courage, cormorant nests, and endangered species. After reflecting on the etymology of the word "egg" (and its connection with the word "edge"), she then declares her impatience with schisms and losses, and her wish to recover something whole. The story closes this way: "If I were to tell the true story, I would write it not in words but in symbols, [like an] ... ASCII printout. It would be very short and very true. It would go like this: moon, woman, woman; man, bird, sun; heart, heart, heart, heart, heart; rock, scissors, paper. The title would be *egg*. That would be the whole story."[3]

This egg is the prologue to my comments here. So is the list of disparate nouns – or only seemingly disparate, in that (by collecting them as she does) the narrator connects them into story. Her list introduces her

[1] This paper was delivered as a plenary address to the triennial meeting of the International Association of University Professors of English, in Vancouver, August 2004. Because it deals in part with differences, tensions, and dialogues between oral and written forms of discourse – in literature, memories, and cultural histories – I have deliberately retained in this written publication some of the conscious features of oral delivery.

[2] Susan Musgrave, ed., *The FED Anthology* (Vancouver: Anvil, 2003).

[3] Carol Matthews, "Living in ASCII," in Musgrave, *The FED Anthology*, 50.

subjects (woman, man, their contexts, and their quite different subjects of discussion), enacts the beating of the heart that brings them to life ("heart, heart, heart, heart, heart"), then alludes to the child's game that tells at once of competition and chance survival, and of the act of creation, from rock to paper, from subject to style. The *list*, I want to argue – the catalogue of names and symbols and events – is no escape from narrative *here* but the deliberate rhetoric of a cumulative identity, a resistance to the constraints of linearity, a claim upon the opportunity to reinterpret what has been and (in context) to begin again. And so I begin – in irony, for the "egg" that connects with "edge" is not (at least not *directly*) the egg of wholeness (OE *aeg*) but that of incitement, urgency (ON *eggja*), "egging on."

BEGINNINGS

When I was a little boy, alongside the house where I lived in South Vancouver (once upon a time a separate municipality from the city proper), the back lanes came alive in honey bees and darning needles, garter snakes and blackberry bushes, pebbles, puddles, and – just occasionally – traffic. The striped snakes and dragonflies had their own appeal. But the traffic – its reason for being there, the characters who drove it, even its regular irregularity – fascinated me. Daily, the milkman delivered glass bottles of whole milk. Seasonally, the coalman arrived with burlap sacks of bituminous black, diluted now and then with cheaper lignite. The woodman and the sawdust man (who sound to me now like figures out of fairytale, latent heroes or covert demons) sanguinely dumped their loads of cedar blocks and furnace-bound fir. There were others: the iceman, the Watkins man, the vegetable man. But for me the high point of any season was the day the man who collected treasure came by. The horse's *clop* and the bell-jangling racket of the old man's cart foretold unmistakably his slow approach, and all along the lane he gathered hinges, bolts, and rusted pipes, broken pots and old tin toys and other marvels of scrap and antiquated metal. I did not appreciate his social role at the time, nor the economic constraints of a world at war, but I knew something else. By the time I was four, I knew without question that when I grew up I wanted to be the man who collected treasure.

I say this to explain the structure of the comments that follow. For while earnest teachers wheedled me away from the back alley horsecart towards the industrial indoors – I contemplated many possibilities before at last admitting to academia – I subsequently learned that

treasure (or maybe junk) collecting goes by other names: bibliophilia, for example, or lexicography, or life writing. I came to understand that it's the collecting that matters, the making of lists, and therefore the continuous redefinition of the word "junk," so as to take it out of the category of use ("what use is it?" some people ask, whether of plastic souvenirs, or pearls, or poetry) and to reclaim it for creativity and value. "Junk": from Middle English *jonke*, my dictionary tells me, adding "origin uncertain." Exactly. And *creativity?* It's a way to ask, not so much "what do we make of something" but "what is it that we see, how do we tell this insight into words – how do we write who we are. How *do* we (as my title has it) write *here*?" Except of course that by asking these questions, I intend more. Hence the reflections that follow are cumulative: they're a kind of truckload of observations, collected over time and constrained by an idea of space. And they begin *here*.

WRITING HERE

The phrase "*writing* here" speaks of a body of work, and at once locates it, in space: and my first idea, thinking about this topic, is that it would be a straightforward thing to do. But where is "here"? I could survey "Vancouver writing," or that of the Lower Mainland or Coastal British Columbia, or contrast Coast and Interior, or chart Coast and Interior *in relation to* the Pacific Northwest, the rest of Canada, European and Native sources, Asian neighbours, or the borders that knit and cross and circumscribe. The topic instantly got complicated. "Here" turned from a simple matter of position into a way of siting a rhetoric of alternatives. Northrop Frye's famous anecdote of a southerner wandering in the Arctic with an Inuit guide came to mind. Without familiar reference points or route markers, the southerner despairs and cries out, "Lost, we are lost!" – to which the guide replies, "We are not lost: we are here."[4] Yes. A nice empirical truth. Or is it, perhaps, attitudinal? Frye's story does not go on to ask whether the guide's certainty satisfies the out-of-place wanderer. I suspect it does not, for paradoxically the wandering southerner appears to want an unambiguous rhetoric of definition, whereas the guide seems to affirm that any unambiguous claim upon security is the moment's apprehension only – that our claim upon place, on what we severally call the reality of position, is like an ice floe, always in motion, or potential motion, its fixity only ever illusory, its character

[4] Northrop Frye, "Haunted by Lack of Ghosts," in *Northrop Frye on Canada*, ed. Jean O'Grady and David Staines (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 472-92.

imagined by the range of alternatives that it already anticipates and embodies.

Yet to talk of "writing here" can still be to look at BC writers and writing, and I return to this seeming specificity – and particularly to some works that allude to Vancouver – as yet another way of framing (yet not containing) my moving subject. A chronological approach is manageable, partly because the modern history of BC writing is so short, though like other approaches it is shaped by its conventions, in this instance the behemoth *Sequence* and several often unexamined assumptions about *Progress* and *Cause-and-effect*. In brief, then, European exploration (by land and by sea) of what is now called British Columbia dates primarily from the late eighteenth century. (It was Queen Victoria, some years later, who gave the place its current and misleading name, "Columbia" – without the adjective – having at the time been already appropriated in the south by the revolutionary Americans.) Britain claimed Vancouver Island in 1786, established a colony there in 1849 and on the mainland in 1858; the colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia amalgamated in 1866; British Columbia became a province of Canada in 1871 – and then promptly threatened to secede. A little later, in 1886, Vancouver City was incorporated; in the same year it burned down, and a year after that it lost its charter because of rioting against Chinese immigration. Expansion, land sales, stock market crises, violent strikes, and the marketing of fish, gold, gas, trees, ginseng, borders, and precedence all followed, right up to the present. And so we are "here." Yet emblematically, this history (even in the truncated form in which I have just outlined it) speaks of erasure as much as construction – erasure of nature, the Aboriginal presence, neighbourhood, perhaps even of civility itself. And what does erasure tell us? Something about the relation between economics and cultural precedence; something about status; and certainly something about literary visibility. There were tale-tellers in the Native communities and among black and non-English-speaking immigrants, for example, but they were largely omitted from the official history of local "writing" until much later in the twentieth century. Conventional histories looked in a different direction: towards whatever they considered empirical rather than "fanciful," and towards the notions of cultural status that they preferred to cultivate. They record such works as the explorers' journals – those of David Thompson, Alexander Mackenzie, James Cook, George Vancouver – and the captivity narratives of John Jewitt, and then the letter writers, the document makers, the record keepers, the nature describers (as early as Gilbert Sproat and John Keast Lord,

as late as Roderick Haig-Brown and Wylie Blanchet) whose work (long accepted as "accurate" or "empirical" documentary) is now being reread for its politics and attitude.

Hence until recently a capsule history of British Columbia *writing* might have looked a little like this. Any recognition of local folksong, with its angled divergence from the genteel, its resistance to Yankee Doodle, its celebration of sheer size and raucousness, would have been balanced by passing reference to polite poetry and occasional verse: that of Audrey Alexandra Brown, for instance. Native writing would have been confined to the work of Pauline Johnson, invariably categorized as a "Mohawk princess," again genteeling the wilderness.[5] Attention would then have turned to those writers from elsewhere who paid attention to British Columbia – everyone from Lady Franklin to Rudyard Kipling – acknowledging their declared appreciation of sublime grandeur and stirring a little uncomfortably at their nice condescensions towards what passed for society in this setting. [6] The long civic desire to be "world class," as the media repeatedly phrase it, was born early on. Others from elsewhere (and so many "BC writers" have come from "elsewhere") included Ralph Connor, who depicted British Columbia as a land of industrial roughnecks in desperate need of Presbyterian reform; E.J. Pratt, who cast the province as a lady ripe for a morganatic marriage; Edward Hoagland, who saw what he looked for – a cleaner, purer, nineteenth-century version of a now-corrupt USA; Hugh MacLennan, who turned the river courses into magnificent waterways of progress and commerce; and Margaret Atwood, who found secondhand furniture here instead.[7] Even many who actually stayed and settled – the Englishman R.M. Patterson, the American Richmond P. Hobson, Jr. – shaped their representation of the place in accordance with the way they wanted to see it: as a wilderness that any Englishman could tame, as a territory that any enterprising Yankee could own. They were not the last to arrive with a project in view.

[5] Recent commentary has radically altered this perception. See Carole Gerson and Veronica Strong-Boag, *Paddling Her Own Canoe : The Times and Texts of E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake)* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

[6] Lady Franklin and Sophia Cracroft (Sir John Franklin's niece) travelled in the region between February and April 1861, and between April and July 1870; extracts from Cracroft's letters of the time were edited by Dorothy Blakey Smith as *Lady Franklin Visits the Pacific Northwest* (Victoria: Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1974). Kipling visited the west coast in 1907, the year he was awarded the Nobel Prize, and wrote about his travels in his *Letters of Travel, 1892-1913* (London: Macmillan, 1920).

[7] Relevant titles include Connor's *Black Rock: A Tale of the Selkirks*, Pratt's *Towards the Last Spike*, Hoagland's *Notes from the Century Before*, MacLennan's *Seven Rivers of Canada*, and Atwood's "Immigration: CPR," in *The Circle Game* (Toronto: Contact Press, 1966), 52-6.

Another phase of this hypothetical literary history would begin by acknowledging what has often been called the first BC novel, a book that is alive with details about the fledgling logging industry, Martin Allerdale Grainger's *Woodsmen of the West* (1908). These details, of work and logging-camp rivalry, might suggest that the book's vitality derives from its engagement with what might be called "ordinary" life; the irony of the book is that Grainger wrote it so as to make enough money to remove himself from the logging camps, to marry, and to enter comfortably into the social echelons of life in the city, in this instance Victoria.[8] There is a nexus of attitudes here that informs much of the writing to follow. Consider Emily Carr, the Victoria writer and painter. She was long acknowledged within Edwardian Victoria's elite James Bay society but kept at the fringe of it, looked upon as idiosyncratic; when her paintings of Native villages were considered for display in the provincial legislative buildings, they were rejected because her colours were not considered "accurate" – and while later she was praised for her innovative art, her prose sketches, and her defiant talks, she was still attacked as politically incorrect for writing about "Indians" at all. What this complex history of critical reception suggests is more a wandering desire to find an acceptable category within which to place her than a desire to read what she was doing. But over these years the dilemmas of her life and career also made her the subject of a literature of identity – in poems by Dorothy Livesay, Florence McNeil, Kate Braid, and others – and this fact suggests that a resonance of recognition lasts longer than the terms that describe (and derive from) a commodified system of class.

And it is less "class" than "classification" or "status" that affects social development, social unrest, and literature in British Columbia over at least the early and middle decades of the twentieth century. Writers such as Frederick Niven and Irene Baird provide ready examples (Niven with works such as *Wild Honey*, 1927, celebrating Western egalitarianism over dour demarcations of Methodist propriety; Baird with *Waste Heritage*, her 1939 novel about the mechanization of the urban wilderness and the depressive effects of economic power on urban workers). Other examples of socially conscious writing include the Marxist poetry of Dorothy Livesay, the Trotsky-inspired politics of much of Earle Birney's work, and (though it seems unlikely company) the fiction of Establishment

[8] When the book first appeared (London: Arnold, 1908), it tended to be read as autobiography, a judgment perhaps influenced by the dedication in the first edition: "To My Creditors Affectionately." Subsequent editions, such as the New Canadian Library full reprint, with an afterword by Caroline Adderson (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1996), have emphasized its literary constructedness, its fictionality.

figure Ethel Wilson, whose experience lay within economic privilege but whose observation extended to those without. Wilson's story "The Window"[9] furnishes an apposite image: of a wealthy man who prides himself on his picture window and its view but who does not connect this privilege with the deprivation of others. At the end of the story, the man looks out his window at the city's lights at night; superimposed on this view is a reflection of himself, behind which appears the figure of an intruder, outside, looking in. The narrative thus makes clear that the existence of the insider is related to (perhaps even contingent upon) the existence of the outsider. Yet Wilson's worldview, however affected by its recognition of an underclass, and however sympathetic to individual revolt, as here or as in *Swamp Angel* (1954), never aspired towards or tumbled into revolution; a version of what she saw as common sense always prevails, the largely plotless, character-centred prose (sentence by elegant sentence) acknowledging loss and violence and crudeness and despair but affirming decency as the final resort of those who would be committed to endure.

From the 1960s on, changing attitudes towards society and style disrupted whatever had come to be considered convention, although by the 1990s the writers engaged in these 1960s alternatives (accurately or not) had come (by younger writers still) to be considered conventional themselves. The leaders of the *Tish* Group, for example – George Bowering and Frank Davey, Lionel Kearns and Fred Wah – with their early commitment to an international Black Mountain poetics. Sheila Watson, with her Modernist take on murder in the Cariboo, *The Double Hook* (1959). Audrey Thomas, with her fragmented fictions of Here, Elsewhere, Africa, and women's lives. A list of another fifteen names is easy to come up with, from P.K. Page and Robert Harlow to Patrick Lane and Phyllis Webb, Gary Geddes and Rachel Wyatt to Marilyn Bowering and Sharon Thesen, but such a list would not exactly be fair. For these are also contemporary writers; they continue to thrive, to be read, to *grow* – it is more the critical frame of reference that changes during these years, seeking relevance from the topical issues they address rather than from their position in history as voices of generational change. Hence Jane Rule and David Watmough are read now in the context of queer theory and, therefore, in relation to such younger writers as Shani Mootoo and Andy Quan. Ron Smith and Rachel Wyatt are read (along with John Pass and Pat Lowther) as measured voices of the ironies in women's and men's lives; Gary Geddes

[9] In Ethel Wilson, *Mrs. Golightly and Other Stories* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1961).

(along with Keath Fraser, Jim Spilsbury, and Edith Iglauer) is read in the context of travel writing; bill bissett is read in relation to performance poetry; P.K. Page, Patrick Lane, Fred Wah, and David Zieroth are read within the newly validated genre of autobiography; Mildred Tremblay is read as a voice of aging and affirmation; Wade Davis, Don McKay, and Robert Bringhurst are read as literary ecologists; Harold Rhenisch, Brian Fawcett, Barry McKinnon, John Harris, and Peter Christensen are read as ideological voices of Northern, Island, and Interior alternatives. Audrey Thomas and Jan Zwicky have been read for their inquiries into such philosophical questions as choice and responsibility, Julie Cruikshank and Robin Ridington for their empathy with Native cultures (and therefore alongside Robert Bringhurst and Bill Reid), George Bowering beside the icons and implications of popular culture (and therefore in the same world as Lyn Crosbie and Zsuzsi Gartner, though each writer works in a different form). They are joined by other contemporary writers, not replaced by them.[10] The *critical lens* shapes what is being read, and repeatedly, not consistently, what is given value.

By 2004 such lenses were again redefining art, literary practice, marketable topics, and "sophistication." Some earlier writers had been reclaimed from the past – Harry Robinson, Hubert Evans, Howard O'Hagan – largely for how (by various means) they asserted the validity of Native experience. And local publishers began to emerge, frequently finding space for local writing: Talonbooks, Anvil, Raincoast, Harbour, Ronsdale, Oolichan, New Star, Press Gang, Douglas and McIntyre, Beach Holme, Caitlin, Theytus, Arsenal Pulp, and more. Emphasis began increasingly to fall on the urban[11] – the urban often *instead of* whatever might have once been taken as urbane. A new realism acquired

[10] As readers familiar with John Gould, Donald Fraser, Brian Payton, Esi Edugyan, Caroline Adderson, Tamas Dobozy, Linda Svendsen, Gail Anderson-Dargatz, Michael V. Smith, Stephen Guppy, Michael Kenyon, Elise Partridge, Patricia Young, Terence Young, Mark Cochrane, Stephen Collis, Lee Henderson, Theresa Kishkan, George Payerle, Bill Gaston, Aaron Bushkowsky, Philip Kevin Paul, Anosh Irani, Steven Galloway, Charles Montgomery, Gregory Scofield, Timothy Taylor, and a host of others will all recognize. I should add that the categories in this paragraph are arbitrary, as is illustrated by two powerful books published in 2004. Patrick Lane's *There Is a Season* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2004) is at once a life story, an inquiry into the nature of addiction, and an appreciation of the world of the garden – hence it is simultaneously autobiographical, socially analytical, and ecological. Relatedly, Charles Montgomery's *The Last Heathen* (Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre, 2004), an account of searching in the Solomon Islands for adventure, family history, and the implications of competing affiliation, can be read as autobiography, travel literature, and a history of religion. Both books, moreover, were marketed within a newly popular critical category, "creative nonfiction."

[11] As with Grant Buday's city novels, Calvin Wharton and Tom Wayman's anthology *East of Main* (Vancouver: Pulp Press, 1989), and Gregory Scofield's *Native Canadiana: Songs from the Urban Rez* (Vancouver: Polestar, 1996).

power, a different recognition of experience, a different definition of "here" – the acceptable setting, the necessary language. For example, while playfulness still surfaced in some poems for children by Robert Heidbreder and others, children's writers such as Sarah Ellis more characteristically turned to such topics as single parenthood and economic deprivation. Topics proved more "acceptable" to publishers and reviewers if they appeared contentious, although sometimes with more than expected consequences. Contentiousness itself even became a topic when a legal battle broke out over whether or not a book about a child with gay parents could be stocked in local schools. What came into focus at this time were *issues*: the Vancouver Industrial Writers' Union with its concern for the perspectives of labour (Tom Wayman and "work writing"); the *Raincoast Chronicles* and its experiential tales of logging and fishing (Peter Trower, Howard White); Zsuzsi Gartner's lifestyle essays; Bud Osborn's street-life poetry; George Fetherling's fiction, poetry, and eclectic journalism; Mona Fertig's Literary Storefront; and the BC Federation of Writers. Literary history reconfirmed the journalist as ecologist and nature writer (Terry Glavin, Stephen Hume) and the poet as linguist and historian (Robert Bringhurst being the chief exemplar here, along with Red Lillard and George Bowering). The Kootenay School of Writing offered one direction for writers, those fascinated by the poetics and politics of industry, class, and language poetry (Jeff Derksen, Robin Blaser, Lyn Crosbie, Lisa Robertson). Poetry slams (or poetry in extemporaneous performance) offered another. The most famous local writers, however, came to be those whose fantasies of uncertainty and violence and spirit grabbed international attention: the cyberpunk world of William Gibson, the X-generation slippages of Douglas Coupland, the baseball dreams of William Kinsella, the seriocomic visual collages of Nick Bantock. In addition, city critics celebrated Michael Turner's *The Pornographer's Poem* (1999), a revelation of how the porn industry relies on suburbia; they also praised Timothy Taylor's critique of the globalization of taste, *Stanley Park* (2001), and the gender politics of Daphne Marlatt, Nancy Lee, Denise Chong, Shani Mootoo, and another score of writers.[12] They savoured, too, the occasional books that were penned by popular newspaper, radio, and television figures such as Eric Nicol and Bill Richardson; but they also listened more carefully than before to the powerful voices of ethnic presence and street experience, linguistic

[12] Among them: Rita Wong, Annabel Lyon, Anne Fleming, Ivan E. Coyote, M.A.C. Farrant, Elizabeth Simpson, Eden Robinson, Jeannette Armstrong, Lorna Crozier, Linda Rogers, Anne Cameron, Lee Maracle, SKY Lee.

recasting and cross-cultural sensibilities: from Roy Miki and Joy Kogawa, Wayde Compton and Wayson Choy, to SKY Lee and Gregory Scofield, Philip Kevin Paul and Anosh Irani, whose work variously sought absent fathers, unknown mothers, and a disappeared past, or reclaimed history and tradition, or reinvoked memories of place, protested the status quo, and argued how-to-be, how to write a kind of calligraphy of being here and in-between.[13]

Because sometimes, for some writers, however attractive, compelling, or pleasant the place where they live might be, it somehow persists in feeling alien; in *their* writing, "here" is marked by a sense of longing for "heart," for an apparent solidarity with a place that is past or at least parental. This other sensibility of place could well (on the parents' part) be sentimentality – illusion disguised as history – but even if this is so, it will be none the less real and powerful in its impact. Danielle Lagah's "The Trees in That Country" is illustrative. The speaker in this poem acknowledges that she has learned in her father's tongue the numbers from one to ten, but she realizes that she cannot see "tree" – visualize the reality – the same way he does. She herself thinks in the cataloguing syllables of English: "green / brown, tuber, trunk, rind, stump / ... / I picture Okanagan apple orchards / Nanoose Arbutus ..." Her father struggles, "your mouth shifting to that / other language. Those soft *j*'s and hard *ee*'s / *n*'s that don't exist on the page / ..." But "In my head a Douglas Fir / grows in the centre of a Jalandhar field, its footing / in sugar cane soil. I am / tired of language, of my trapped tongue ..."[14]

[13] To these names could be added the following: Sing Lim, Lee Maracle, Jim Wong-Chu, Paul Yee, Carmen Rodriguez, Harold Rhenisch, Lucy Ng, Guillermo Verdecchia, Sadhu Binning, Surjeet Kalsey, Madeleine Thien, Karen X. Tulchinsky, Michael David Kwan, Roy Kiyooka, Eden Robinson, Helen Potrebenko, Hiro Boga, Anthony Chan, Jeannette Armstrong, Evelyn Lau – but such a list is misleading, for (to begin with) "ethnicity" is a highly charged term (applied primarily by those among the cultural majority, or "mainstream," to those whom they see as "different" from themselves). In any event (just like "mainstream" in this respect) the term "ethnic" is impossible to satisfactorily define and is therefore invalid as a means of *determining* difference. Moreover, while categorizing by ethnicity can be a means of giving voice to a previously marginalized sector of society (as with Wayde Compton's anthology of Black BC writers, *Bluesprint*, 2001), it can also (however inadvertently) continue to exclude such groups from "mainstream treatment" in a "mainstream" literary history. It is important to emphasize, therefore, that the *subject* of ethnicity is not confined to writers whom such histories categorize by the label "ethnic," nor do so-called "ethnic writers" *necessarily* take their own ethnicity as their prime subject. Roy Miki, for example, will write about Japanese Canadian political experience but also about George Bowering and bpNichol; Madeleine Thien will write about a Chinese Canadian family but also about tribulations that cross cultural divides; Harold Rhenisch will draw on a German heritage in one book but in another write poems that update Shakespeare's sonnets for the twenty-first century.

[14] Danielle Lagah, "The Trees in That Country," *Breaking the Surface* (Victoria: Sono Nis, 2000), 53.

Still other writers engage, as George McWhirter does, with the specificity of the local, whether replanting the European classics in the world he is learning to read (one of his books is titled *Ovid in Saskatchewan*) or rereading reality up close in the details of a natural world still within the reach of appreciation, as when (in *A Staircase for All Souls: The British Columbia Suite*, he turns away from his Ulster birthplace and writes: "*How long have I been walking / In these woods? / ... / A generation or more / ... / I am afraid / I have discovered heaven / On this needle-coated ground*"[15] – or in "Five Points North of Steveston" adds:

> Trees, trees;
> Shade, shade.
>
> I have been deep
> *In* counting their many darknesses.
>
> The light steps through on stilts –
>
> Like fishermen in those
> Odd lands –
>
> Leaning face-down
> To a small sargasso of salal.[16]

This twinned process of adapting and re-calling, re-membering, is the principle that Jack Hodgins' novel *Innocent Cities* deals with, especially in its opening section, where the local tongue washes onshore in the nineteenth century, fragmenting "elsewhere" (as well as whatever was already in situ) so as to *become* the new version of "local," to become *itself* – though for a time at least, during a period of uncertainty about self (however long that lasts), the identity of "here" remains susceptible to other people's empire, their desire for fixity and power. Hodgins' character Logan Sumner, wandering the Island's rocky coast, takes a closer look at the debris that has washed ashore, the barrel staves and broken boxes, the flotsam and jetsam that have followed the moon, and realizes what has also been happening. *Words* have "been flung up onto rocks and wedged between driftwood logs and tangled in the high-tide rows of twisted seaweed ... printed debris washing in like spawning smelt to leave, where smelt left eggs, a perplexing and untidy deposit of words from every corner of the world."[17]

[15] George McWhirter, *A Staircase for All Souls: The British Columbia Suite* (Lantzville: Oolichan, 1993), 7.
[16] Ibid., 69 (emphasis mine).
[17] Jack Hodgins, *Innocent Cities* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990), xvi.

The paradigm extends to Sumner's own actions, as in the comedy of the ensuing narrative: the *unlikely* comedy, in that the opening scenes deal with grief and gravestones. After his wife has died in a boating accident, that is, Sumner has adjacent headstones erected in Ross Bay cemetery, the one for her

> a simple record of her name, Julia Morrison Sumner, the dates of her birth and death (1853-1875), and the words LOVED FOREVER. Beside it, his own stone had originally been as simple as hers: HUSBAND OF JULIA, INCONSOLABLE. Though his purchase of the second stone was considered by some to be an eccentric and even morbid act, acquaintances were willing to understand this as the gesture of a young husband grief-stricken by the tragic ending of a happy marriage after less than a month, the pair of matching headstones an admission that he had not himself entirely survived that overturned rowboat.
>
> Within six months of the funeral he had discovered that the original words were inadequate. Still wild with grief, he ordered Schlegg (the stonemason) to inscribe a small comma after the INCONSOLABLE and to add, after it: CURSING GOD, AND UNABLE TO FIND ANY MEANING IN LIFE. He was a very young man then, willing to risk the anger of the churches which had divided this enormous new cemetery into little sectarian villages of the dead. Also, he could not have guessed that very shortly, when the town had entered a brief period of encouraging growth and his business had begun to prosper, his heart would occasionally find itself singing songs that were not entirely sad. Peter Schlegg's task the next time was to add in slightly smaller letters below the original inscription: BUT PREPARED, ALWAYS, TO GIVE THANKS FOR NEW HOPE. But hope, like building-booms, can come and go. A year later, he filled in the letters of ALWAYS with mortar and replaced the word with OFTEN, reflecting the less intemperate attitude Sumner had achieved as he approached his thirtieth year.[18]

What develops is a vocabulary of here as well as a syntax of voicing. The catalogue is the pertinent rhetorical form – of scissored difference and selective cumulation, assembly and constitutive change. Hodgins' *Innocent Cities* satirizes, in part, the interconnection between rhetoric and business, and it demonstrates how the voices of innovation are repeatedly supplanted, how (in real life in British Columbia) the earliest voices and the earliest place names are written over by those that history maps into convention, those that power relations wrestle into idiom and

[18] Ibid., 4-5 (upper case in original).

sometimes long preserve. In local parlance, words such as "Interior" and "Heartland," "Island" and "islands," "Outer Coast" and "Sunshine Coast" differentiate among narratives both recreational and political; and almost forgotten histories underlie such terms as "Lower Mainland," "Cedar Cottage," "Yaletown," "Kits," "Point Grey." Think also of how few women's names and how few Asian names grace the street maps of Vancouver city (though women's names are often attached to schools). Think of the thwarted plan that would have named a whole section of city streets in alphabetical order, adding a north-south sequential pattern to the east-west numerical grid. They suggest still other ways of reading here.

WRITING A VERSION OF HERE

Collecting names and trends and titles tells us something: something about how a chronology works to select and arrange as much as anything – and by privileging sequence and time, about how a linear chronology suggests some kind of uniformity, identity, or at least connectedness. "By *happening* here," the deductive reasoner concludes, the accumulated data *constitutes* "here" – perhaps *naming* this conclusion "tradition" – whereas the inductive reasoner might hypothesize an identity quite different, incrementally multiple, from the lexicon and its changing context ("sea of mountains" or "Gold Mountain": "colony," "province," "wilderness," "city"), and from the empirical *fact* of a changing place (sea and land both in motion, the geologic plates tectonically unstable), from the sun and the rain and the sockeye run and the changing people.[19]

In the version of history that I have outlined, I have mentioned social disparities, even suggested that BC literature might be characterized by the way it alludes to wealth and the polarization of classes as defined by wealth. But I have scarcely mentioned strikes, politics, and poverty, or the degree to which a perception of artistic value has historically been associated with adherence to majority-culture ethnicity and socially received conventions. Nor have I directly asked questions about ownership over the technologies of publication and communication, which (within limits) control access to audience, which

[19] Numerous works by Nancy J. Turner (Victoria: Royal B.C. Museum, 1975 ff.) examine the ethnobotany of the area and the plant technology of the Native peoples of British Columbia. Laurie Ricou's *The Arbutus / Madrone Files* (Edmonton: NeWest, 2001) demonstrates how the natural world enters Pacific Northwest literature as setting and subject, and also as a means for troping attitudes and assumptions about (for example) cycle and return, distance and instability, consequence, source, claimed right, and recognized privilege.

so profoundly shape priorities of information, which in consequence affect systems of judgment and influence the language of presumption. But to pose these questions is necessary. What, for instance, does the foregrounding, the selection that shapes the linearity of my capsule history, elide? Answer: the folk culture, for one, though Phil Thomas collected a multitude of local voices in *Songs of the Pacific Northwest* (1979), and Yvonne Klan collected pioneer newspaper poetry in *The Old Red Shirt* (2004); or anti-academic writings, such as those of Paul St. Pierre and Alan Fry; or the protest writings of labour and underclass spokespersons. The exploration narratives of the Spanish and Russian fleets for another, though Spanish and Russian names are recorded everywhere nearby: Baranof, Kupreanof, Malaspina, Flores, Quadra, Galiano, Blanca, Narvaez. The minority cultures, for a third, again until recently: the oral compositions of the Haida poets Skaay and Ghandl, for example, which Robert Bringhurst has translated, or the considerable literature in Punjabi that has not yet entered mainstream BC literary history. Moreover, though I have implied that there was racism in the social history of British Columbia, the quick literary history I have just drawn fails to mention the Asiatic Exclusion League and the popular diatribes of Hilda Glynn-Ward's 1920s fiction, which confirmed the league's adherents in their discriminatory tactics; or the *Komagata Maru* incident of 1908, which is Sadhu Binning's subject; or the 1940s relocation of Japanese Canadians (which underlies Muriel Kitagawa's quiet protests, Roy Miki's activism, Joy Kogawa's "What Do I Remember of the Evacuation"[20] and *Obasan*). Or the eco-activities of Greenpeace, which originated in Kitsilano, or of David Suzuki, who lives there. Or the APEC riots, or the Terry Fox runs, or free injection sites, Humanities 101, Diwali, the Dragon Dance, or protests for peace. This is another list, one that accumulates alternatives.

Still other questions remain, affecting not only literary works but also the process of production and dissemination and the politics of interpretation. Consider the roles of editors and journals. Earle Birney's attempts in the 1940s to alter the stature of *Canadian Poetry*, Alan Crawley's to direct *Contemporary Verse*; or George Woodcock's role in the 1960s in shaping *Canadian Literature*, Jan de Bruyn's in shaping *Prism*; or Alan Twigg's and Alma Lee's a couple of decades later in designing *BC Bookworld*[21] and the Vancouver Writers' and Readers'

[20] In *A Choice of Dreams* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974).

[21] For biographical and bibliographical information on more than 5,000 BC writers, see the database constantly being updated by *BC Bookworld* at <www.abcbookworld.com>.

Festivals, respectively; or the emergence of the *Reviews* (*Malahat, Capilano, West Coast, Event*) when the BC college system expanded; or Jeannette Armstrong's role at the En'owkin Centre in Penticton, encouraging Native writers and bringing their works to widespread attention: all these efforts are reasonably well known. Only slightly less so, perhaps, are the protest writings and alternative perspectives of contemporary journals such as Mark White's *Adbusters* and Stephen Osborne's *Geist*. But one could concoct a list of questions that might well modify even further how readers evaluate literary taste, or might alter the criteria they use to connect literary with social history. For example: To what extent did a little known academic coterie in the 1920s called the English Bay Bathhouse Group have any influence on literary taste? What social connections should be drawn between the rum-running smuggling stories of Bertrand Sinclair and the amassing of Establishment wealth and power in the 1920s and 1930s? What has been the role of the Vancouver-based CBC-Radio Schools Broadcasts in affecting theatre history, and how key is the connection between stage performance and film (Morris Panych, Guillermo Verdecchia, John MacLachlan Gray), or between television drama (*Da Vinci's Inquest,* say) and contemporary urban politics? Why is serious critical humour much less popular than farce, familiar plotline easier to sell than narrative, linearity more readily acceptable than fragmentation and interruption? Is it a matter of formal education (or education in form)? Or is it the promise of security that a resolution implies, the confirmation of present order, the illusion of satisfaction, the illusion of serious thought? Do contemporary critics, readers, writers, publishers attach value to works simply because of their apparent subject, regardless of the manner of expression? And for that matter, if so, do they do this any differently or any better than their predecessors might have done? Indeed, how do categories of market-driven publicity militate *against* readers' understanding even while they appear to be fostering it, or categories of critical analysis (think of such terms as "ethnic writing," "magic realism," "diasporic writing," maybe even "life writing"): do they exclude, by determining edges of definition, even while they expand the terms of critical inclusiveness?

WRITING *"HERE"*

I have shifted ground, moving from a record of what has been *happening* "here" to a contemplation of the way in which the strategies of *reading* a set of literary works constructs an implicitly politicized *version* of "here," whether to acknowledge or dismiss, affirm or ignore, perceive as "other" or claim in recognition. Northrop Frye's anecdote of the southerner on the ice remains apropos: where *is* "here"? But so (less obviously perhaps) is the American writer Robert Pirsig's resolutely 1970s quest for the meaning of life, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, especially when his narrator talks about the ego of expectation and tries to distinguish between what he calls the ego-climber and the selfless climber. Both, he writes, might appear to act the same, one foot following another; both breathe in and out. But the ego-climber is never at home on the trail. Always he "looks up the trail trying to see what's ahead even when he knows what's ahead because he just looked a second before. He goes too fast or too slow for the conditions and when he talks his talk is forever about somewhere else, something else. He's here but he's not here. He rejects the here, is unhappy with it, wants to be farther up the trail but when he gets there will be just as unhappy because then *it* will be 'here.'"[22] As long as the goal remains external, says the narrator, it remains distant. What the ego-climber wants could be all around him, as it is for the selfless, but until he looks around to see it he will never know.

And yet, and yet, and yet ... whatever else it implies, this version of selflessness does not mean uninvolvement in the face of social unfairness or lassitude in the presence of bigotry – which may help explain why the writings that I have outlined, though they construct a "received" and pretty conventional middle-class version of social and literary history in British Columbia, *nevertheless do reverberate with the sound of resistance and reform*. They do this, moreover, at the same time as they articulate "here," the site in which living happens – "living" more than "life" in the abstract, I think – living as a process of active engagement with place and relationship, living as the act of piecing together the fabric of relationships and values that comes to be accepted as home. And what is "home"? Not merely a notion of source or nostalgia for a lost world or a description of streetscape and landscape and sunshine and once-upon-a-time, but a kind of ideogram of the politics of the acceptable. Or at least of the acclimatized. People *in place* seek out meaning in the

[22] Robert Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (Toronto: Bantam, 1975), 206.

world they want to value; they attach relevance to what they see and give priority to: the things, persons, actions, images that appear to give their lives stability. Those whom this version of place excludes or marginalizes (and we are all in some way excluded and marginalized from something) reassess this version of relevance, recognize alternatives, realign priorities – their fresh perception of relevance redesigning in time another here. "Writing here," in this context, turns from a study of literature-in-location to a study of the workings of a discourse.

WRITING HERENESS

I have been thinking about *writing* in this place, here; then about writing *here*, affirming the specificity of place as a context of speech; then about "writing here," the art of imagining, constructing, creating, enacting home. Now I want to try to articulate what "hereness" implies, to consider the state (perhaps even the politics) of locating self within surrounds. Here, perspective might well be everything, the "I" of observation the determiner of both detail and value. Familiarity is again at the heart of the matter. For what is "hereness" except the politics of status and region? Unfamiliarity might well be a draw to the imagination, but as a host of adventure narratives contrive to illustrate (think of the conventional Wilds of the Canadian North or the assorted Tropical Jungles of Manly Derring-Do), the details and formal tropes of *un*familiarity can be drawn within the context, and against the paradigms, of the commonly accepted, the already "known." What often happens when a literary work actually *does* embody the concrete details and the local language of an unfamiliar place, and a set of conventions and relationships different from that upon which a critic/reader perhaps unconsciously depends, and an alternative political perspective (this combination can surface in anything from fiction and poetry to reference books and anthologies) is that the unadventurous critic-reader will dismiss on the grounds of quality whatever he or she does not identify with in systems of priority or organizational approach.

Experience, training, personal interest: clearly all these affect such behaviour. They also help explain why BC writers are so often dismissed as "merely regional," utopian exaggerators, magical realists, in places where literary eminence is demarcated by codes of category and coterie. *And* vice versa. Affirmation and dismissal even happen within locales, region and status coalescing in assorted critical dances with the unfamiliar. Consider the way in which Major J.S. Matthews, the one-

time archivist of the City of Vancouver, selected materials to preserve from the early twentieth century. Political history, military matters, geographic expansion, building construction: to these aspects of life (and the lives primarily of white pioneers) he gave priority. Literature, and to a very great degree other cultural activities as well: these might almost not have happened during the years in which he collected data. I value, of course, the fact that he collected any data at all: no one else at the time had a comparable vision of the importance of preserving the tangible artifacts of daily history. He imagined widely enough to realize that the perspectives of the Native peoples were important, too, and his little-known typescript compilation *Conversations with Khahtsahlano, 1932–54* (donated to the Public Archives in 1955) records tales and memoirs from the Squamish leader, illustrates them with maps and with August Jack Khahtsahlano's drawings and paintings, invaluably adding to the store of local knowledge. But in his prefatory letter to W. Kaye Lamb, then the Dominion archivist, Major Matthews observes as follows:

> August does not read nor write, but can draw in line or paint in colour, and has done some quite good work in oils. He is the most reliable historian of Indian life in these parts, before the whiteman came, whom we have. He has been very observant, does not exaggerate; a strong supporter of the Catholic Church; can make an impressive speech, and, upon occasion, can entertain with dancing, etc. He is an entirely different character to those Indian entertainers who are "show men"; who are said to make up Indian tradition and lore to suit their audience, and as they rattle along. August is dependable.
>
> Commencing about 1932 we had frequent conversations. Invariably I put down what he said in his own words the day he said it, and frequently read back to him what I had typed, and he corrected or added. His recollections go back to about 1881, about five years before Vancouver was named, and when the only habitations on its site were a few whitewashed dwellings facing a crescent beach about 100 yards long. At that time potlachs [sic], attended by as many as 2,000 Indians, were sometimes held in Stanley Park. As a boy he listened to his elders relate of warfare with bow and arrow. Today he is frequently a guest at formal dinners, and sometimes speaks, where dinner dress is worn by the other guests. Therefore he is a living link from what I call the "stone age" to what he calls the "Relief Age" (Unemployment and Relief).
>
> Therefore I thought it proper to record the spoken words of an Indian who had witnessed, and participated in, the transition in these

> parts from the dug-out canoe to the electric trolley bus, and place one copy in Victoria and one in Ottawa.[23]

The series of contrasts that this passage reveals, and the assumptions that underlie it – about social order, social propriety, wealth, and the *naturalness* of these assumptions – is openly apparent to a reader in the twenty-first century. Among other things, although the texts and maps that Major Matthews attributes to August Jack declare the Squamish place names that have now been written over (Ulksen, now Point Grey; Homulcheson, now Capilano River;[24] Whoi-Whoi, now Stanley Park), it is his own familiar "modern" vocabulary that Matthews uses to organize his archive. Relatedly, so do his unquestioned assumptions about progress and truth shape the responses he brings to listening and interpretation. In a revelatory passage recorded on 20 December 1932, August Jack tells of how one feature of the physical landscape came to be:

> "When the gods were fixing the geography of the earth they threw this stone at the top of Mount Garibaldi, that is Chy-kai. Chy-kai is the mountain. Che-kai is the creek. The stone missed the mountain and landed at Chulks, and is there yet for you to see."
>
> "Do you believe it?" I asked, smiling, and expecting that he would return the smile, but, to my surprise and regret at having smiled, he replied most earnestly and vigorously:
>
> "Of course I believe it. I tell you it's true ... Squamish Indians were very powerful once – could do anything."[25]

This statement was followed by Matthews' editorial comment:

> It was very strange to hear August Kitsilano, a splendid manly Indian full of worldly wisdom, energy and integrity in ordinary affairs, credited with sound judgment by those who know him, and well able to and does manage the difficulties of his logging business ... Yet here he sat and solemnly told me that he believed the above story, and even related it with such earnestness that it was almost convincing to the listener. Respect for his sincerity forbade further questioning.[26]

[23] Major J.S. Matthews, *Conversations with Khahtsahlano* (Vancouver: privately printed, 1955), 3-4.

[24] Though in using "Capilano" instead of "Homulcheson," Major Matthews is in fact using another Squamish name, after Chief Kiapilano.

[25] Matthews typescript, section 17, 25, University of British Columbia Library Special Collections Division; the change in the spelling of August Jack's name is in the original.

[26] Matthews typescript, section 18, 26.

For Matthews, business acumen, the Catholic Church, the formal dinner dress, and customs of *writing* take "manly" precedence over the tropes of *orality*. The irony that the city, early on, was marked by "whitewashed" buildings appears to have gone unnoticed.

Two versions of "here" come up against each other in this text; the "hereness" of Matthews-the-writer assumes editorial authority over that of Khahtsahlano-the-teller. But the story*teller* shapes the tale that is there to be listened to, if the listener is willing to hear – making the I of a place the voice of a place as well.

"I." *I* have fastened here on eggs and origins, back lanes and boundaries, the politics of protest and the paradox invented by the arrival of the railway on the West Coast: the town that was early called Gastown, later Granville, later still Vancouver came also, early on, to be known as "Terminal City." It had edges; it would be written upon. The ironies of a term such as "City Limits" perhaps still wait to be heard.

WRITING MY HERE

To what degree is Writing Here an enactment of personal memory, then, an act of auto-ethnicity, representing the particularity of *an* experience. Take "Vancouver" for instance (a city assembled over time from the amalgamation of smaller municipalities, and in its "Greater" form embracing territories and populations far larger than its own). Is the place specific? Yes. Is it a single phenomenon? By no means. It has shown up in literature as Margaret Laurence's simmering respectable Dunbar (in *The Fire-Dwellers*, 1973) and as Alice Munro's plural set of "unimaginable Vancouvers" ("*Two Vancouvers tied in snot! / Two pickled arseholes tied in a knot! / ...* [Rose] saw them in her mind shaped rather like octopuses, twitching in the pan. The tumble of reason; the spark and spit of craziness").[27] Other depictions include Malcolm Lowry's "Enochvilleport" (the city of the son of Cain), Ethel Wilson's affluent West End, George Bowering's hippie Fourth Avenue and elegized Kerrisdale; Michael Turner's fleshy backyard seedbeds of deliberate victimization; Daryl Hine's eroticized Point Grey, Wayson Choy's lost Chinatown, George Woodcock's discovered Cherry Street, SKY Lee's disappearing cafe. And (inevitably) it shows up in my own cartload of tags and tunes, assembled like a kind of litany out of one life in one

[27] Alice Munro, "Royal Beatings," *Who Do You Think You Are? (*Toronto: Macmillan, 1978), 12; *The Beggar Maid* (London: Allen Lane, 1980), 14.

neighbourhood called South Hill, that others have not yet written into the history of Vancouver writing.[28]

So I start another catalogue, a personal one: beginning with the steep hill itself, from home base down to the river, the log booms and mills; a one-speed CCM, the bridge across the Fraser on the way to the blueberry bogs, Scotch pine, and peat; the Chinese market gardens, bush, barns, *Just Mary,* and Mike, Mark, and Jack, the Rhythm Pals. To begin to sense the flavour of that time, add in a few commercial jingles ("a little dab'll do ya"); those immortal songlines "How Much Is that Doggie in the Window"; and some persistent fragments of schoolyard banter and cruel and borrowed slur – the "Foureyes" taunts and "Fatty" rhymes – and the stereotypes of difference, the divisiveness of wartime jokes, comic strips and radio, *Terry and the Pirates*, the Dragon Lady, Lothar, Kato, *"The Shadow Knows."* In those years, as in any decade, we could be hurt by words and could hurt others, and we could accept a lot of words as though they were neutral. I can claim I grew up in a multiethnic environment, but I cannot claim childhood to be free from the discriminations that my society had already learned – though if they are given the chance, most neighbourhood children *will* learn in time to run right through such adult barriers. *I* think of the family with a German surname, who in 1944 pointedly let it be known that they were actually Russian – as perhaps they were. I remember my fascination with the Norwegian kids who came to Vancouver as refugees in 1946 (DPs, they were called at the time: displaced persons, a bureaucratic terminology that soon turned into yet another slur). I recall my impatience that they didn't know how to play baseball: and then my greater impatience that they quickly learned to play it better than I. I remember the signs that went up in the windows of the German bakeries that opened on Fraser Street about 1950, signs that said "Hier wird Englisch gesprochen," and the slow shift of public language from political opposition to domestic embrace: "them" to "some of my best friends," to "family." "Us." I would say "simply us," but families are never simple. Complexly us. Given the option on the 2001 census, of claiming "Canadian" as their "ethnicity," 23 percent of the Canadian population did so, up from 3 percent only in 1991, when the word had to be written in on the census form, and up to 39 percent in 2001 if one includes the category "Canadian and Other" – though "Other" is left bureaucratically vague. "We" is many, in Other words: multiple, here.

[28] There are signs of change. Grant Buday's *White Lung* (Vancouver: Anvil, 1999) is set in the approximate area, though in a later, more urbanized, more industrial decade.

Clearly I am talking memory. But I am also *siting* language through memory, *placing* it. The language I use when *I* "write here" evokes in part a neighbourhood of and in transition: the largely first-generation immigrant households that constituted a district called "South Hill," where kids named Froese, MacDonald, Dhaliwal, Polle, Schultz, Oyer, Chow, Piaggio – and New – grew up together. We lived in place – and *imaginatively* live in the stories that place tells.

I can draw up another list, of specific images this time, to give concrete shape to this particular world: a clapboard house, painted cream, and a super-high hedge of scarlet runner beans; Hilton's Dairy, and the wooden false front of Bob the Barber's shop; the five-and-dime's high counters and oiled floor; the damp cement of the school basement; "the beginning of the long dash" on Sunday morning's CBC; war saving stamps and ration books; and the puzzling and unexplained decree, posted beside St. Mary's Church door, which enumerated all the women that a man may not marry. I remember a single stunted maple tree, a gravel soccer pitch, a sawdust hopper, and the back alley metal collector. Everyone can make such lists: they are the stuff of poetry, the personal narratives that each of us tells ourselves as we grow older and old, those that Thomas King, in the 2003 Massey Lectures, alluded to as one of the "truths about stories."[29] In other words, they declare the hereness that underlies each of our lives. I did not say these lists must be beautiful. In fact I think my list speaks, as most lists do, of the power of metonymy: the clusters of images that stand in for a time and place and state of mind at which the memory flails, reaching only partially, aware at once of proscription and possibility, affirmation and denial, the fixity of perception – the stillness of those stony back lanes – and the instability that resonates as change.

Margaret Avison, in her poetry collection *Concrete and Wild Carrot*, reflects in "Lament for Byways" on how modern cities are "harrowed" (in both its senses) by whatever passes for development; she writes of how the "handsome new highrises / help us to overlook" noise and slime and grit – they tidy it up, hide old "eyesores" from view – "but, my city [she's musing about Toronto, aurally, artfully], it's still in your lanes and mews / that your heart beats."[30]

I have revisited my boyhood home. The cream-coloured house has been painted blue, the rockery garden left to weeds; the stunted maple tree on which I learned to climb has long since been removed – though

[29] Thomas King, *The Truth about Stories* (Toronto: Anansi, 2003).
[30] Margaret Avison, *Concrete and Wild Carrot* (London: Brick, 2002), 54-5.

Japanese cherries take its place, and *are* beautiful each spring. The road on which as children we played pickup games before curfew and no-see-ums drove us indoors now shakes with traffic, and some of the local street signs are cast in Punjabi as well as in English. These changes neither desolate nor cheer. For I know that others walked this land before I did, that others walk it after. Know that the land that I walked on, riddled by ravines I was supposed to avoid and by rapid creeks I knew I had to cross, has acquired culverts, the gaps filled in and duly paved over. But know, too, that a new generation already grows up in the neighbourhood, finding its own tongue as it will, in alleyways of place I do not experience, shaping a *here* perhaps that as of yet I do not even see.

I am reminded of a passage in *Elle*, Douglas Glover's prize-winning novel, set on the St. Lawrence in Cartier's day and Rabelais's, where the narrator writes of love and the power of the imagination, and of fear – "that the soul of another person is a wilderness, a New World, where the lover must learn to speak a foreign language, where he loses all certainty and finds himself transformed."[31] This is, of course, to shift ground again, to turn from writing "Here" to writing "There," assembling another collection – an Other-collection – of symbols and schisms, places and names, engaging with the contradictions they represent, and telling a different story. The edges of "There" are where I stop, and where I – where each of us – must learn to begin again.

[31] Douglas Glover, *Elle* (Fredericton: Goose Lane, 2003), 193.