

Sameness and Difference: Border Crossings in *The Stone Diaries* and *Larry's Party*

In *When Words Deny the World*, Stephen Henighan characterizes Carol Shields' *The Stone Diaries*, winner of the Governor General's Award and the Pulitzer Prize, as "the flagship novel of Free Trade Fiction" (184). Henighan argues that this border-crossing text "preach[es] an untroubled, ahistorical North Americanism in which Canadians placidly assimilate into continental (i.e., US) norms," and that "it can hardly be a coincidence that this book was one of the most popular works of fiction in both Canada and the US, particularly among wealthy professionals, during the months in which NAFTA was implemented" (184). Examining the significance of border crossings in both *The Stone Diaries* (1993) and *Larry's Party* (1997), I argue rather that Shields interrogates the circulation of cultural power across the Canada-US border, addressing relations of sameness and difference and hospitality and hostility. Both novels feature border-crossing protagonists who are positioned variously as hosts and guests at different times in different countries. These texts also question the difference the border makes, invoking stereotypically American images of Canada only to undercut them, exposing the imbalance of power on which they are based.

Although I diverge from Henighan's view that *The Stone Diaries* endorses Canadian assimilation into US norms, his invocation of North Americanism and trade, particularly as they provoke debates about continental sameness, is valuable. These novels puncture this posited sameness and demonstrate the discrepancy in cultural and economic power between these two nation-states. Further, *Larry's Party* gestures towards issues of trade through Larry's cross-border relocations according to professional opportunity. Set in the

two decades between 1977 and 1997, *Larry's Party* takes place during intense discussion and implementation of trade agreements in North America. Although the novel does not explicitly mention these agreements, it repeatedly invokes the "postmodern world order transformation" (Deibert 111) in which global economics and communications combine to alter structures of political authority. *Larry's Party* traces the relation between production and consumption, creating a narrative undercurrent in line with some concerns about these agreements and locating Canada within global economics. Although the postmodern world order transformation implies a weakening nation-state authority, *Larry's Party* subtly reinserts the nation-state within the transforming world order as it continues *The Stone Diaries'* project of exposing imbalances of national power.

Borders, as Gloria Anzaldúa observes, are designed "to distinguish *us* from *them*" (25). Anzaldúa's focus is the US-Mexico border, "where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (25), demonstrating a brutal juxtaposition of economic prosperity and deprivation operating alongside the generally perceived linguistic and ethnic divide. In contrast, the Canada-US border, traditionally celebrated as the world's longest undefended border, apparently makes less difference. But as Eli Mandel asserts, "the border between America and Canada is of enormous importance in the imaginative life of any Canadian" (105). This significance extends to the nation's identity: "the border is central to Canada's self-awareness, because it is a part of Canada's own image as well of the image that America reflects back to Canada" (Brown 12). The border's distinguishing "us" from "them" implicates the US in constructions of Canadianness. That the reflected image projects "the fundamental likeness of both countries" (Sadowski-Smith 8) frustrates the process of distinction.

Russell Brown notes that statements of Canadian difference from the United States underpin assertions of Canadian identity, and that "because America has so long provided a useful defining contrast, . . . Canadians can say a border defines them" (4). *The Stone Diaries* and *Larry's Party* interrogate the slippage between sameness and difference and the significance of the border. They depart from other Canadian novels, such as Mordecai Richler's *St. Urbain's Horseman*, Robert Kroetsch's *Gone Indian*, Janette Turner Hospital's *Borderline*, and Jane Urquhart's *The Whirlpool*, which, as Brown notes, present Canada-US border-crossing "as literally, as well as psychologically, difficult" (10). Clark Blaise describes this crossing more darkly, claiming, "Each Canadian emigrant must come to America prepared

to die a subtle, psychic death" (4). Writing of *The Stone Diaries*, Gordon E. Slethaug emphasizes "the various dislocations [Daisy] endured in moving from place to place in Canada and the United States" (72-73), but in fact, the experience of dislocation goes unrepresented. Just as Daisy and her father are poised to cross the border, leaving Winnipeg following Cuyler's job offer from the Indiana Limestone Company, the narrative jumps ahead eleven years to the chapter, "Marriage, 1927." The narrative ellipsis comprises the rest of Daisy's childhood, her adolescence, and her college education. Daisy's impending marriage to Harold Hoad is presented to the reader through newspaper clippings that identify her as "Miss Daisy Goodwill of Bloomington" (79), suggesting a realignment of her origins.

Coral Ann Howells argues that "the border doesn't mean much" (81) to Shields' border-crossing protagonists, but I suggest that the representation of apparently easy transitions from Canada to the United States unravels on further investigation. Shields subtly but consistently exposes the circulation of cultural power within representations of Canada from an American perspective. In *The Stone Diaries*, the narrative voice¹ undercuts the amnesia implied by the Americanized view of Daisy and her father: "You should know that when Cuyler Goodwill speaks . . . about 'living in a progressive country' or 'being a citizen of a proud, free nation,' he is referring to the United States of America and not to the Dominion of Canada, where he was born and where he grew to manhood" (93). This description of Cuyler's new national affiliation elides both the psychological experience of migration and the legal process of becoming an American citizen. Cuyler has adopted a stereotypical, and stereotypically American, view of his nation of origin. The text's earlier, precise descriptions of Canadian locations, such as those emphasizing Winnipeg's development of "[a] series of wide, new boulevards" and "an immense new legislative building in the neo-classical style" (68), give way to "forests and lakes and large airy spaces . . . [lying] now on the other side of the moon" (93) once Cuyler identifies himself as an American citizen.

The narrative voice fluctuates between aligning itself with these generalized images and puncturing them, sometimes through corrections consonant with Cuyler's perspective:

There are educated Bloomingtonians—he meets them every day—who have never heard of the province of Manitoba, or if they have, they're unable to spell it correctly or locate it on a map. They think Ottawa is a town in south-central Illinois, and that Toronto lies somewhere in the northern counties of Ohio. It's as

though a huge eraser has come down from the heavens and wiped out the top of the continent. (93)

The gap between Canadians' and Americans' knowledge about each others' countries has implications for relations of hospitality and hostility, relations that inform the representation of both Canada for its own sake and an American version of Canada. Marshall McLuhan argues that "[t]he majority of Canadians are very grateful for the free use of American news and entertainment on the air and for the princely hospitality and neighbourly dialogue on the ground" (247). But how do we characterize, and where do we locate, this hospitality? The acceptance of US culture might be considered hospitable on the part of Canadian culture; but this hospitality is twinned with hostility, as the economic advantage of American cultural endeavours often overwhelms Canadian cultural production, and American cultural presence in Canada is not reciprocated. Shields' image of an erased country questions national hospitality: can one nation be hospitable to another nation's culture if it does not acknowledge its presence, or indeed, its difference?

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick employs the image of a weather map—minus the top of North America—to illustrate how the US does not define itself in relation to Canada, whereas Canada includes the US in its self-location. Sedgwick compares American newspaper weather maps to their Canadian counterparts, pointing out that "the 'same' experience at the Toronto airport turns out to be completely different" (149) from the American experience. Whereas American "weather maps . . . bounded by the precise, familiar outlines of the forty-eight contiguous United States," appear to "naturaliz[e] the exclusion of Canada" and suggest "that the North American continent drops off into the sea across the top of the United States," in contrast, "every . . . Canadian newspaper [Sedgwick] has seen . . . runs a weather map that extends southward at least as far as the Mason-Dixon line in the United States" (149), acknowledging the geographical and meteorological integrity of the two countries.

The idea of "sameness" turning out to be "different" underpins an examination of the Canada-US border. As Lorraine Code explains, a Canadian can "pass, almost always as a native speaker" (82) in the United States, her Canadianness indistinguishable from Americanness—"as long," Code admits, "as [she doesn't] say 'out' or 'about'" (82). Her difference becomes marked by one vowel sound; sameness turns out to be different. As Code acknowledges, differences between Canada and the US range from "mere variations in cultural *timbre*, inflection, intonation" to evidence of "deep

divisions in the histories that have made each of these two nations what they are, both locally and globally” (82). Erasure of difference implies no *need* for hospitality, that the Canada-US border is “both arbitrary and nondifferentiating” (Staines 2).

The question of what differences are noted, and by whom, configures cultural power and hospitality. Cuyler has adopted the United States as his nation, not just his site of habitation; no longer a guest, he has conformed to the cultural and national identity of the American host. Canada resurfaces intermittently in Cuyler’s narrative. Reintroducing Canada, the narrative voice states that Cuyler “has not spent one minute grieving for his lost country,” then qualifies this assertion:

That country, of course, is not lost at all, though news of the realm only occasionally reaches the Chicago and Indianapolis dailies. The newspaper-reading public of America, so preoccupied with its own vital and combustible ethos, can scarcely be expected to take an interest in the snail-like growth of its polite northerly neighbor, however immense, with its crotchety old king . . . and the relatively low-temperature of its melting pot. Canada is a country where nothing seems ever to happen. A country always dressed in its Sunday go-to-meeting clothes. A country you wouldn’t ask to dance a second waltz. (93)

Indianapolis and Chicago’s “occasional” Canadian news contrasts sharply with McLuhan’s characterization of Canadians’ gratitude for “the free use of American news and entertainment.” If “nothing seems ever to happen” in Canada, is this inactivity mere perception? Canada is feminized by the image of being asked to dance, waiting for another’s invitation, echoing Margaret Atwood’s assessment of Canada’s having “to play the female lead” (389) in its relation with the United States. Further, this description replicates stereotypical associations of Canada with dullness and passivity, combining them with exotic references: “realm” makes the nation sound fantastical, scarcely imaginable—perhaps because it has been erased from the continent?

The novel’s setting shifts back to Canada after Daisy’s brief, disastrous first marriage. Daisy does not intend a permanent return to Canada; rather, she has simply been “thinking of going on a trip” (131). She is tentative about her claim to Canada: “‘I feel as though I’m on my way home,’ she wrote in her travel diary, then stroked the sentiment out, substituting: ‘I feel something might happen to me in Canada’” (132). Anticipating her visit, Barker Flett “can picture Daisy darting about Bloomington, well dressed, nicely shod, prettily gloved, a healthy, hearty American girl” (154). Daisy herself has adopted some generalizations about Canada:

A cool clean place, is how she thinks of it, with a king and queen and Mounties wearing red jackets and people drinking tea and speaking to one another in polite tones, never mind that these images do not accord in any way with her real memories of the hurly-burly of the Winnipeg schoolyard and the dust and horse turds of Simcoe Street. (133)

Daisy's acquired stereotypes position her as an outsider. She plans her "modest, touristy" itinerary with the help of "a pile of train schedules and travel booklets" (132). Daisy occupies the role of guest in her native country, her expectations shaped by promotional brochures: at Niagara Falls, "she [is] not 'seized with rapture' as the travel booklet ha[s] promised" (133).

Despite Daisy's renunciation of her claim to Canada as home, the narrative events lead to her renewed Canadian residence, as the chapter concludes with the rushed wedding of Daisy and Barker. Daisy's status as a tourist, an unmarried (or widowed) woman, an "American," and even her name all change from one chapter to the next: after an eleven-year narrative ellipsis, Daisy is now "Mrs. Flett," at home in her home in Ottawa, no longer positioned as guest. The narrative announces, "People the wide world over like to think of Canada as a land of ice and snow. That's the image they prefer to hang on to, even when they know better. But the fact is, Ottawa in the month of July can be hot as Hades" (157). Daisy might have formerly been included among those who imagine Canada to exist in perpetual winter, "even when they know better." At this point, however, as Mrs. Flett, she has apparently shifted her nation and habitation once again. Having resurfaced in the narrative, Daisy is already realigned with the Canadian host and appears to have easily reassimilated. On the surface, this smooth transition implies an interchangeability of Canadianness and Americanness, yet the novel undermines this notion by demonstrating that the articulation and judgements of sameness and difference between these two nation-states depends upon an imbalance of cultural power and the luxury and blindness of a self-contained identity.

Larry's Party, a "bookend" (Nelson 8) or "male sequel" (Schechner 21) to *The Stone Diaries*, also comments on self-contained national identity, but by positing a larger, continental affiliation. Whereas *The Stone Diaries* spans almost the entire twentieth century, *Larry's Party* is set between 1977 and 1997, in a time of sped-up globalizing communication and economics. *The Stone Diaries* does not completely miss out on the developments that constitute the postmodern world order transformation: as Ronald J. Deibert writes, "The 'pre-history' of hypermedia . . . dates back to the middle of the

nineteenth century” and the development of “ways to improve long-distance communications” (115). These innovations include photography, telegraphy, the typewriter, and the telephone (115), all of which are present in *The Stone Diaries*’ narrative, as are the twentieth-century inventions of radio and television. But *The Stone Diaries* does not feature the glut of virtually instant communication found in *Larry’s Party*. For example, whereas *Larry’s Party*’s conclusion is almost entirely composed of messages in a variety of media, including a written note, voicemail, email, and a fax, *The Stone Diaries*’ “Work, 1955-1964” chapter is comprised of letters written to Daisy. Although Daisy dies in the 1990s, the earlier novel is less concerned with the global implications of later twentieth-century technologies. Further, the two decades of *Larry’s Party*’s setting are particularly characterized by postmodern world order transformation and the perception of globalization weakening the nation-state. Many key aspects of global financial and communication networks were developed or enhanced during this period, such as “the burgeoning home computer market beginning in the late 1970s” (Deibert 122), the “more widespread” presence of transnational banking in the 1960s and 1970s (149), and the deregulation under Reagan and Thatcher that “swept through all sectors of the advanced economies, whipping into a frenzy the speculative flows of capital across borders” (150).

In this context, *Larry’s Party* initially appears to eschew the nation in favour of larger affiliations, namely the continent. Shields frequently invokes North America in the chapters set in Canada. Winnipeg, for example, appears to be equally North American and Canadian: it is “[t]he windiest city in the country, in North America” (13); and Larry’s father works “for a custom coach company in south Winnipeg, the largest of its kind in North America” (53). But whereas the Canadian sections’ gesturing towards the continent implies that Canada’s self-perception includes and inserts itself within an idea of North America, and that Canada cannot forget continental relations and their imbalances of power, the near absence of references to North America in the novel’s American sections indicates an exclusive national self-perception, or perhaps a conflation of American and North American. The postmodern world order transformation, in which developments in communications and economics alter “the architecture of *world order*” (Deibert 10), does not affect different nation-states in the same way. Shields’ attribution of North America to the novel’s Canadian sections recalls the distinction between Canadian and US weather maps and its implications for public engagement with the continent.

Despite contextualizing Canadian identity within a continental identity, *Larry's Party* does introduce national difference; but again, its articulations differ depending upon the country from which they are spoken. The Chicago maze commission effects a change in Larry's profession—he “quit[s] his job as manager of a Flowercity outlet” (124) to become a full-time maze designer—and a change in Larry's national location. Invocations of national difference emerge as afterthoughts. When Larry's mother identifies Chicago as “a long, long way from home, and it's another country even” (125), distance supersedes national difference, but nation adds to the perception of distance: though Chicago is “a thousand miles away [from] Winnipeg” (188), Larry might have moved such a distance within Canada. Similarly, when Larry characterizes himself as having “lived in two cities, Winnipeg and Chicago. Make that two countries” (169), national difference occurs to him belatedly.

But the nation as afterthought and the implied North American inclusiveness pertain only to Canadian perspectives. In contrast, descriptions of Larry in Chicago, which suggest an American perspective, foreground assessments of national difference, further troubling what initially appears as “a ‘North American’ identity as [Larry] moves easily across the Canada/United States border” (Howells 92). These assessments reveal an imbalance of power, identifying those who can afford ignorance:

His voice . . . radiates an impression of calm, seasoned good will. Low tones predominate and respectful pauses, and these are generally, and generously, attributed to Larry's Canadian Background, since it's well known among his and Beth's good friends that he was born and brought up in the Canadian city of Winnipeg. Just where this city is located is less well known: somewhere up there, somewhere northerly, a representative piece of that polite, white, silent kingdom with its aging, jowly Queen and snowy mountain ranges and people sugaring off and drinking tea and casting for trout and nodding amicably—much as Larry nods at his neighbor across a backyard patio in Oak Park and sips his glass of California Chablis, and casts his glance fixedly up at the arch of maple boughs when asked for his views about the intentions of George Bush or about the exorbitant cost of National Public Radio. As for the politics of a universal health care plan, Larry is noticeably silent. (206)

Using strategies similar to those in *The Stone Diaries*, this passage invokes the different political histories of Canada and the United States, emphasizing Canada's place within the Commonwealth through reference to the queen and presenting this position as an exotic but outdated affiliation, as the fairytale connotation of “kingdom” suggests. Further, “snowy mountain

ranges” provide generalizations about Canada through expansive natural features while the vagueness about Canadian locations—“somewhere *up there*”—betrays an ignorance about Canadian geography. Associating Larry’s silence on political matters with maple boughs might allude to his Canadian origins, but perhaps this link questions the simplistic perception of Larry’s American friends, who mark him as different.

Larry’s sense of affiliation with the United States develops gradually. Shortly after his cross-border move, “Winnipeg [is] still his here and now . . . even though he now [stands] in a living room in suburban Chicago” (154). Such references as “Larry was back in Winnipeg just a month ago” (159) emphasize Larry’s emigration from Canada, implying a return to a point of origin, both geographical and temporal. Later, Larry is described as “formerly of Winnipeg, Canada” (210), the larger context of Canada, rather than Manitoba, invoking an American perspective. Further, the statement of Larry’s having “a twelve-year-old son up in Canada” (164) both erases Larry’s emigration, positioning him as an American, and indicates only the vast country north of the United States.

In a 1981 address to the Harvard Consortium in Inter-American Relations, Margaret Atwood used the US-Mexico relationship as a comparative illustration of Canadian-American relations: “Americans and Canadians are not the same; they are the products of two very different histories, two very different situations. Put simply, south of you you have Mexico and south of us we have you” (392). Atwood invokes the continent to demonstrate the differences between its component countries. *Larry’s Party’s* Canadian chapters, in contrast, imagine North America through what Canada and the United States have in common. This focus on sameness occurs at the expense of differences within North America: not just between Canada and the United States, but also between Canada, the United States, and Mexico. Just as the image of North America without Canada suggests the top of the continent has gone missing, so the invocation of North America without Mexico suggests the bottom of the continent has either vanished or was never included. Indeed, Canadians have “appeared to deny Mexico its place in North America, so absorbed have they been with their own development and the power and influence of their immediate neighbour” (Ogelsby 1).

Larry’s Party gestures towards the gaps in its conception of North America by invoking trade agreements that affect the continent as a whole. As Deibert writes, “Nearly all states now find themselves enmeshed in an ever-widening network of . . . international institutions, regimes, organizations,

and regional trading blocs that have arisen in reaction to the trans-nationalization of production and finance” (157). *Larry’s Party* takes place during negotiations of the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement (1989), NAFTA (1994), and the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas. That these agreements do not equally benefit the nation-states involved, namely that they “appea[r] to have increased the power asymmetry between the hegemon . . . and its neighbours” (Clarkson 42), compromises the notion of hospitality and partnership through trade.

Larry’s Party repeatedly invokes shifting economics and locates Larry within a global economic framework. Larry has been working “at Flowerfolks for twelve years” when “[a]ll twelve Flowerfolks stores [are] swallowed up by Flowercity, the California-based multinational” (61). This takeover occurs in 1981, eight years before the ratification of the FTA, but the American origin of the multinational, coupled with the apparent powerlessness of the chain being “swallowed up,” suggests Canadian fears of US economic invasion. Flowercity is not the chain’s last incarnation: five years later, it is “taken over by Flower Village, a Japanese conglomerate” (126). This shift from California multinational to Japanese conglomerate not only increases the scale of international economics but also invokes the discourse of globalization through the name “Flower Village,” gesturing towards McLuhan’s global village. The “city” of Flowercity ostensibly becomes more intimate, as “village” implies, yet the global economics that have effected the change in name compromise this suggestion.

Larry’s florist work highlights the relation between production and consumption, foregrounding a global circulation of goods through “[t]he gingers [that] get shipped to Manitoba from South Africa, freesia from Holland, and carnations from California” (74). The tracing of these flowers back to their origins demonstrates a globalized network of trade within which Larry locates himself and his access to the rest of the world: he is “plugged into the planet. He’s part of the action, part of the world’s work, a cog in the great turning wheel of desire and intention” (77). As the description of the alstroemeria’s growth suggests, this global consciousness is largely articulated through awareness of Canada’s hemispheric location, itself owing significantly to the development of NAFTA and discussions of the FTAA, which provides a gateway for Larry’s globalized outlook:

This flower, an herb really, started out as a seed way down in South America in Colombia. Some Spanish-speaking guy, as Larry imagines him, harvested the seeds of this flower and someone else put it back into the earth, carefully, using

his hands probably, to push the soil in place. They earned their daily bread doing that, fed their families, kept themselves alert. It's South American rain that drenches the Colombian earth and foreign sunshine that falls on the first green shoots, and it all happens, it all works. (76)

This passage uses Shields' technique of locating Canada in vague, generalized terms to indicate US ignorance. Here, however, a Canadian struggles with details about Colombia: whereas Canada is "up there" in relation to the United States, South America, for Larry, is "way down" from Canada.

Larry expands the alstroemeria narrative, supplementing his initial, romanticized image of a Spanish-speaking man and acknowledging his own ignorance. As such, Larry bears out Carlos Fuentes' claim that "[e]very North American, before this century is over, will find that he or she has a personal frontier with Latin America" (8). Although this frontier "can be starved by suspicion, ghost stories, arrogance, ignorance, scorn and violence" (8), Larry attempts to imagine beyond his ignorance about Colombia and reflects on his relationship to the "Spanish-speaking laborers equipped with hoes arriv[ing] to beat back the weeds, but are they men or women who do this work? Maybe both, and maybe children, too, in that part of the world" (76). Larry recognizes the disjunction between the locations of production and consumption, wondering whether the Colombian labourers,

when they perform this tedious and backbreaking work . . . have any idea . . . that [the flowers] will be transported across international frontiers, sorted, sold, inspected, sold again, and that . . . they will come to rest in the hands of a young Canadian male in an ordinary mid-continental florist establishment, bringing with them a spot of organic color in a white and frozen country. (76)

Despite its vague assumptions, Larry's alstroemeria narrative both strives toward some specificity and the implications of global capitalism and tears open the false seamlessness of capitalist production and consumption; that Larry wonders at all about production breaks the illusion of no labour. Further, it demonstrates Canada's relationship not only with the United States, but also with South American countries, more easily marked as "different" from Canada in climate, language, and economic privilege. As the global economy largely regards the South as a "low-wage, low-skilled labor market" (Deibert 147), "global interconnectedness" does not counteract "the persistence of North-South divisions" and "the asymmetry of power relations" (Slater 194). Thus, Shields depicts the first-world location of Canada as another point against which the third world "grates and bleeds," if not at a physical border, then within Larry's consciousness.

If “North America” signifies differently in Canada than in the US, the novel also problematizes dominant Canadian conceptions of this continent that includes Mexico. The alstroemeria narrative posits an opposition between North and South America, based on Larry’s imagining linguistic and economic differences that displace “Spanish-speaking labourers” out of North America. Larry’s consideration of the alstroemeria, coupled with the novel’s concern with global economics, punctures the exclusive view of North America while including Canada within a larger context of the Americas. As such, the novel both invokes exclusive constructions of North America and subtly argues in favour of “making” the continent three countries, not two.

Despite its representation of an increasingly globalizing economy, and the implications for the nation-state’s authority that accompany this economy, *Larry’s Party* both explores the networks of a globalizing planet and reasserts the nation-state’s presence. On the one hand, *Larry’s Party* resonates with many of Frank Davey’s contentions in *Post-National Arguments*, sharing with the novels studied the “various discourses of intimacy, home, and neighbourhood, together with others of global distance and multinational community” (258). The reintroductions of Larry at the beginning of each chapter increase the focus on his local communities, particularly Winnipeg. Gradual addition of detail fills in the particulars of his house, friends, family, and neighbourhood even as his florist work exposes him to globalization. Further, the “voyages, air flights, and international hotels” (259) that Davey notes in recent “post-national” Anglophone-Canadian literature surface in Larry’s mobility, afforded him by the Guggenheim fellowship (through which he travels to Ireland, Britain, continental Europe, Japan, and Australia) and his transatlantic marriage to Beth.

Whereas Davey finds the “post-national” novels lacking in “constructions of region, province, and nation” and “any social geography that can be called ‘Canada’” (259), *Larry’s Party* reinserts the nation between the local and the global. Larry’s work both depends upon local specificity—the McCord maze in Toronto, for instance, requires “five-leaf aralia (tolerates polluted air well)” and “ninebark, which bears up against wind and cold” (289)—and can transcend the local in terms of his administrative base: “He could do his maze design work and consulting from any major city in North America. Electronic outreach, instant communication; this was the nineties” (259). But if Larry can live anywhere in North America, “he finally chooses to settle in Toronto and be a Canadian” (Colville 90). Granted, this move

accommodates the McCord commission, repeating his earlier professionally driven relocation to Chicago; further, he seeks out “the warmth of blood connection” (259) provided by his sister Midge’s prior move to Toronto. But Larry’s move is also articulated in national terms: “‘That’s up there in Canada, isn’t it?’ said Larry Liddle. ‘Yes,’ Larry Weller said, and then added apologetically, ‘That’s where I come from originally’” (255). The text never indicates whether Larry has ever been to Toronto, but Toronto nevertheless invokes his “origins”; the national frame of reference persists. Although Davey observes that in “[t]he Prairie pattern of meaning . . . Toronto signifies exploitive business practices” (21), *Larry’s Party* does not present Toronto as contentious for its Winnipeg-born and bred protagonist. National identification and articulations of national character override regional rivalry: “This is Canada, that cold crested country with its changeable weather and staunch heart” (290).

Considerations of hospitality following Larry’s move to Toronto further consolidate the reinscription of the nation. Larry’s renewed host status in Canada, his “at-home-ness,” carries practical implications, as illustrated by his hospital stay during his coma. The text implicitly reintroduces the nationally circumscribed medicare debate—to which Larry does not contribute in Chicago—by making Larry the recipient of medicare delivered in Toronto, administered in Ontario, part of a policy, entrenched in the Canada Health Act, that distinguishes the Canadian from the American nation-state. Although Shields provides minute details of Larry’s hospital stay—“Hundreds of hands had touched him during the twenty-two-day period of his unconsciousness” (283)—she tellingly stays silent about the cost of this “meticulous care and almost constant surveillance” (282); “the TV that Midge had rented” (272) constitutes the only aspect of Larry’s hospitalization with a cost attached to it at the point of delivery. In contrast, we are told in *The Stone Diaries* during Daisy’s hospitalization in Florida, for an emergency double bypass and a cancerous kidney removal, that “Blue Cross covers almost everything” (316).

Hospitality shares etymological links with *hospital*, and Larry’s host status upon his move to Toronto effects his reinitiation into Canada’s universal medicare. Larry’s recovery also intertwines national identification and healing through the televised coverage of the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, which he watches from his hospital bed. The Olympics coverage provides another way in which Larry is “plugged into the planet,” and indeed, “[t]he fluidity and increasing porousness of borders” (Deibert 217) operates in

conjunction with communications developments. But despite the argument that television, “[u]nlike a newspaper or a book, . . . was never a respecter of borders. It always belonged to another paradigm, one that was and is intrinsically destabilizing to the nation-state” (Williams, *Imaged Nations* 62), the role the Olympics coverage plays in Larry’s recovery both rests on and reinforces his interpellation as Canadian. Although Larry has woken from his coma and is “seduced . . . back to life” (273) by his hospital meals, kept informed by the “the TV screen” and “[t]he newspapers . . . overflowing with thrilling surprises” (273), he does not fully rejoin the world until “the Olympic Games, finally, beamed from Atlanta, Georgia . . . sav[e] him” (273). A “carnival of muscle and precision” brings Larry “back to his own body,” but more precisely it is “[w]atching Donovan Bailey run the hundred meter dash and take the gold medal” (274) that effects Larry’s recovery, as indicated by his celebration with Bill Herschel:

[T]hey filled the room with little yips of joy. Bill whipped off his T-shirt, waving it like a flag over his head, and performed a mad hopping dance at the foot of the bed, two hundred pounds of gesticulating male flesh, and Larry, still connected to his tubes and wires, felt the bright juice of euphoria surge through his deadened tissues. Breath, beginnings. He was on the mend. . . . The moment overflowed with itself, its massed perfection. The air in front of his eyes became tender. He was alive again in the housing of his skin and blood, and for the moment that was enough. (274)

Whereas Larry’s hospitalization emphasizes the state’s role, implicitly arguing both that “[s]tates sill perform essential functions” (Deibert 213) and that health care delivery remains an essential function despite “the attack by market-identified forces on the social protective power of the nation-state” (Angus 20), Bailey’s victory arouses Larry’s national affiliation, appealing to and reinforcing his emotional attachment to the nation. Shields never mentions Bailey’s Canadianness, but she does not need to for Canadian readers, who surely supply the national implications of Larry and Bill’s celebration and read national significance into the simile of the flag.

Larry’s community, as constituted by the guests of his party at the end of the novel, comprises several different nationalities (Canadian, American, Spanish), many of the guests having relocated or intending to relocate across provincial and national borders, according to their professions and roles within the global economy’s demands. Yet Larry plays host when he is the host in national terms, when his residence matches his nation of origin. Despite his access to goods that circumnavigate the globe, the champagne

Larry serves, as the Spanish Samuel Alvero notes, “is made in Canada” (309), its precise location overwritten with the national distinction. Canada functions somewhat as the “home-base of the protagonist” (Davey 259), but significantly, if nation occurs to Larry as an afterthought, Canada is nevertheless a base he actively chooses to rejoin.

A dual American and Canadian citizen, Shields described herself as having “a foot on either side of the border” (qtd. in Gussow C18). Contrary to Henighan’s suggestion, however, her texts neither present a straightforward interchangeability of Canada and the United States nor argue for Canada’s assimilation. *The Stone Diaries* and *Larry’s Party* demonstrate that to be a Canadian citizen is to be keenly, and constantly, aware of US norms. As Atwood suggests, “Americans don’t usually *have* to think about Canadian-American relations. . . . Why think about something which you believe affects you so little? We, on the other hand, have to think about you, whether we like it or not” (379). This imbalance, as Shields’ novels indicate, is founded upon discrepancies in cultural, political, and economic power that infuse everyday observations and interactions with a fraught, cross-border hospitality. In demonstrating the changing architecture of world order largely through their North American focus, these novels expose the continent’s power imbalances. Despite the development of global modes of communication, *Larry’s Party* demonstrates that little has changed at the end of the twentieth century from earlier representations of US knowledge of Canada as shown in *The Stone Diaries*. While *The Stone Diaries* and *Larry’s Party* may illustrate the fragility of the Canada-US border, “the border that allows our existence in North America” (Angus 127), they do not endorse its erasure. Rather, they navigate through Canada’s continental and global contexts, acknowledging how these come to bear on the nation-state in its own relationships to power in economics, politics, and culture.

NOTES

- 1 Many critics have examined *The Stone Diaries*’ use of voice, particularly the slippages between first- and third-person narration. Among their conclusions are that “the anonymous ‘I’-narrator” (Mellor 99) is distinct from Daisy and that the “‘I’ who writes of ‘her’ is dramatically split into two persons as a seemingly new narrator intervenes between the first and us to speak in an impersonal third person” (Williams, “Re-imagining” 132). I use the term “narrative voice,” recognizing that this voice is sometimes consonant with Daisy’s perspective, sometimes consonant with other characters’; at other points, the voice adopts an omniscient perspective.

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