

LAURA GOODMAN SALVERSON

Her Father's "own true son"

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LAURA GOODMAN SALVERSON has been known primarily as a minor, ethnic, regional writer admired for her portrait of Icelandic immigrants in her novel *The Viking Heart* and for her autobiographical revelations of life in Winnipeg at the turn of the century in *Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter*. But her writings are more than regional accounts of immigrant experience; they mask great depths of feeling, often recounting in metaphoric language hurts too deep to name. Her *Confessions*, according to Kristjana Gunnars, speaks of a "wounded self," a divided self that strives unsuccessfully to unite the author into a coherent individual.¹ Gunnars explains that Salverson's wounds were two: she was different for reasons of both gender and ethnicity. The first of these was a greater barrier to becoming a confident writer. She could succeed as a writing Icelander, for she believed that writing came naturally to such an intellectual race. Once she learned English, then, she wrote to justify her Icelandic people to the North American public. She had more difficulty, however, as a writing woman. She never did learn an authentic woman's tongue to tell her own story. She believed in women's ability and accomplishment, but also seemed to think that only men could write books. Salverson's goal in writing was to write like a man; to be her cultured literate father's "own true son."²

She was always proud of her Icelandic heritage. She grew up hearing her parents read and recite folktales, sagas, and verse in Icelandic; her father was a well-known writer for North-American Icelandic-language publications. After she discovered the public library in Duluth, Minnesota, however, her driving ambition was to emulate her father, but to do so by writing in English, a language she did not learn until the age of ten. This goal proved difficult for her, restricted as she was by poverty and the limiting expectations of others; no one in her family even attended her high school graduation, and few expected her to write. Against the background of hard domestic work and constant wandering, even once she married, Salverson struggled to express in literature the nobility of her Norse ancestors

and fellow immigrants, whom she defended against the prejudice of other Canadians.

The result was some fame in North America and Europe. She won the Governor-General's Award twice, and was awarded a gold medal for literary merit from the Paris Institute of Arts and Sciences. But this fame could not redress the wrongs suffered by her family, so reduced financially and socially in the New World, and it came at the price of the scorn of her fellow Icelandic immigrants. Gunnars explains: "The tragedy of Salverson's life as an Icelander is made up of one misery and failure after another, culminating in severe disapproval by her own people of what she has written" (151). Her people disapproved because she wavered from realism into romance — to Salverson the only mode possible for expressing her lofty sentiments about her Icelandic ancestry.

She struggled even more with the notion of gender than that of ethnicity in what she called "book-making." Choosing to write forced her into what she saw as men's linguistic world of artistic creation. She used her talents in this world not only to defend her fellow Icelanders, but also to champion the cause of women and rail against their domestic enslavement. Her comments on her ethnic background indicate only her pride in her noble Norse heritage;³ her comments on her gender suggest that it, on the other hand, was a hindrance. She could easily see the value of her ethnic "otherness" as she identified strongly with all that was admirable about Icelanders, but there was little to admire in the situations of many women. Because she "was raised in a domestic atmosphere of erudition and culture"⁴ Salverson relied more on the conventions of her Icelandic forebears than on the evocation of womanly experience, even when writing about women. She often writes of feminine experience, then, with a masculine language. This presumes, of course, that men and women use language differently, and poses the question of just what the differences between men's and women's language are.

In recent decades psychologists and linguists have begun to assemble some answers. Carol Gilligan opened one aspect of the discussion, postulating "a different voice" for women. She writes:

The failure to see the different reality of women's lives and to hear the differences in their voices stems in part from the assumption that there is a single mode of social experience and interpretation. By positing instead two different modes, we arrive at a more complex rendition of human experience which sees the truth of separation and attachment in the lives of women and men and recognizes how these truths are carried by different modes of language and thought.⁵

Jennifer Coates transfers the discussion to the realm of linguistics in *Women, Men and Language*, in which she assumes measurable linguistic differences between the sexes. These differences are not only in syntax, morphology, and pronunciation, but also in what Coates calls their "communicative competence," or each gender's "sense of what is *appropriate* for them as speakers."⁶ Girls learn to

use language differently than do boys, she says; in fact, "children are socialised into culturally approved sex roles largely through language. Learning to be male or female in our society means among other things learning to use sex-appropriate language" (133). Women therefore understand such behaviours as turn-taking in conversation differently, with men organizing their talk competitively, women theirs cooperatively (Coates 154).

Primary among the differences, however, is the function each gender sees in language. Anthropologist Ruth Borker explains: "Because women and men do different things in different places with different people, their talk differs. Women's talk is about people and takes place in small groups in private settings. Men's talk is less personal, more public, and often takes on the character of a performance."⁷ Men have also long been seen as "serious talkers," while women have been seen as idle, frivolous gossipers. Another way of viewing this difference, however, is to say, as Coates does, that "men pursue a style of interaction based on *power*, while women pursue a style based on *solidarity* and *support*" (115). Women's voices, linguists have repeatedly demonstrated, are muted voices, those less likely to be heard or read.

WHAT IMPLICATIONS DO THESE notions about the relationship between language and gender have on the career of a woman writer? How does an individual woman writer enter into the public literary domain? Salverson's writings exemplify some of the compromises a woman writer makes. She had hoped for success on a man's terms, and rejected the female mode of domestic discourse, exemplified by the gossiping conversations of her mother, in favour of the masculine, intellectual world of written ideas inhabited by her father, who wrote whenever he could out of spiritual duty and delight.

As a child Salverson had ample opportunity to listen to the intimate social exchange of gossip, or the personal, domestic language of all-women groups.⁸ Salverson characterizes her mother's gossip as thrilling to hear, but not intellectually serious. She writes in her *Confessions*: "Someone was always popping in from the country, or near-by villages, with tales strange and varied."⁹ Instead of using the women's talk she overheard to define herself as part of the women's social group, Salverson considered the gossip as a source for the novels she wrote. She loved to hear stories of the neighbours, "It made me prick up my ears more avidly than before when some gossip dropped in for a cheering cup" (*Confessions* 157), because in the stories she overheard she discovered not her role as a woman, but her role of the recorder of the demons in the human heart. In her novels she used the gossip and stories her mother and aunts told, but always placed them in the intellectual, idealistic framework assumed by her father in his writings.

Despite her relishing of many women's gossiping tales, she admires much more women who avoid the talk of women about private lives. Her aunt Haldora, for example, ran a private maternity hospital in Duluth. There she cared for and delivered the babies of women from all sorts of circumstances, including the most sordid and degraded. Salverson equates Haldora's linguistic control with the presumed "insignificance" of the details of the women's plights: "For gossip and small talk she had no taste, and this indifference to insignificant details was extended to all those unimportant matters that clutter up most people's lives" (*Confessions* 77). Salverson, too, hoped to be above recording the personal and, especially the sexual details of life. She continually decries frank writing about sexual passion and activity in modern popular fiction: "I am even more aware and deeply concerned by that awariness [*sic*] that very few of our people seem to care that the greatest of our human arts is being daily degraded to the level of peep-shows — curious prying into the decadent minds of decedant [*sic*] creatures."¹⁰ She, like many nineteenth-century American women writers, represses the importance of these sexual feelings, choosing not to comment on what may be of the greatest personal importance.¹¹

Although she does use some of the stories she heard at Aunt Haldora's hospital, she tells them more as cautionary tales of women seduced and abandoned. She explains that her decision not to use sexual material does not stem from ignorance: "Any single week in my aunt's hospital would have supplied me with material for six turgid novels" (*Confessions* 402). Instead she seems to see gossip as harmful, for when the mother of one of her friends gave birth to a deformed baby who later died, she reports ironically on the sinister gossip and its function in the women's group: "Buzz, buzz, buzz, wherever two or three gathered" (*Confessions* 291).

While Salverson herself derides gossiping women, she does put some words of defense for traditional women's language in the mouth of wise old Illiana Petrovna, the matriarch of her novel *The Dark Weaver*. Illiana Petrovna speaks to her granddaughter Greta, telling her the family stories: "This is not gossip. . . . Human history, little rabbit, that's what it is. In such few, ineffectual words may be told the long histories of suffering women; of their years of heartbreak, and those rivers of tears that once it seemed nothing could dry. No, it is not gossip to pause and remember for a little beside one's dead."¹² The "stories" of which Illiana Petrovna speaks (she doesn't call them *gossip*, for the word has pejorative connotations for her) tell of the dark side of life, to which she feels practical women are far closer than idealistic men. Women's stories, far from affirming life, are of "heartbreak," her "dead"; later in the passage she speaks of people who have been "wronged," and "the sad weaving of human woe and misery." She tells of these sadnesses with pride, knowing their value in the histories of women. This dark side of life is that suffered by immigrants; it is the side which Gunnars says dominated in Salverson's account of her own life as an ethnic "other." The difficulties are all on the grand scale, the

sad stories Salverson contains and continues are of the sufferings of a race, of a generation.

Although Salverson writes often of human woe and misery in the stories of her characters, she is especially reticent in her writing about her own sad story, the very stuff of most women's gossip. Since she is, as Gunnars suggests, trying through writing "to unify a divided self," she strives to give a picture of confident wholeness to her high-minded ideal reader. Instead of confessing, even in her *Confessions*, she feigns an assumption that the reader would not be interested in hearing about her life of the heart. About her birth and childhood she writes "none of these things seem of the slightest importance" ("Sketch" 69). The account of her own courtship and marriage is given equally abrupt treatment: "I had decided on a much more ordinary career. I had met a breezy young man from Montana, who thought he could put up with me for better and for worse . . . In June 1913 I married George Salverson in the old Lutheran manse in Winnipeg" (*Confessions* 374). So is the birth of her only child, about which she says only: "There is nothing to say of my baby, except that the prospect bored me" (*Confessions* 375).

Salverson refuses to gossip with the reader about herself, denying the power of the story of her private life. Her reticence is ironic, because she says in her speech "What may We Expect from Literature" that literature comes from the heart, and speaks to the heart (5). She writes freely about her characters' hearts, but rarely her own. She is sister to other strong women writers who suffer a common dilemma, believing that a recipient of literary success must be a failure in her personal life. Ostriker explains: "That she [a strong woman writer] should succeed in both art and love might well seem to her, and to us, unthinkable" (81). Gunnars suggests that in avoiding the story of her personal life in such a brusque manner Salverson "ends up having displayed a wound [she] sought to hide" (150). The wound is the consequence of her womanly identity that would, she felt, prevent her from succeeding as a writer and a voice of her people.

THE OBVIOUS FRUIT OF a womanly identity and the unspoken sexuality is childbirth, but whenever Salverson goes beyond her tactful silence and mentions birth or babies anywhere in her writing, including her fiction, she soon mentions pain, suffering, and the burdens of motherhood. She often writes with anger about women's enslavement to sex, birth, and the consequent housework: "I thought of the millions of women committed to this sort of thing, world without end. To drudgery, and pinching, and those niggardly economies that stifle the spirit and stay all hope" (*Confessions* 291). She uses the subject matter of women's gossip, stories about marriage and childbirth, but with a kind of distaste and horror for the sorrows and dangers of motherhood. Childbirth in

her writings brings terrible unacknowledged pain to women, such as that suffered by Borga, heroine of *The Viking Heart*: “Borga lay across the bed tortured with pain that only women suffer. . . . This was to be a battle where the valor displayed might have honored any military field. A battle such as the pioneering mothers of our country faced again and again without hope of either laurels or praise.”¹³ Salverson does call birth a *miracle* once, but only after the child has died: “It was as if the maddened mother thought that by the warmth and love of her own heart’s blood she could give heat and life to the little inert form. But, not even to a mother does God grant this miracle more than once” (*Viking Heart* 134). In *The Dark Weaver* a male character reflects with masculine disgust on motherhood: “Queer wasn’t it, that civilized women should produce their progeny in gastric fits and tears” (48). The key word here is *civilized*, for Salverson saw the civilizing effects of culture, particularly literary culture to be far removed from the unhappiness of motherhood and housework.

Salverson rarely records delight in a new life, but only “misery,” as she suggests in her account of the comments of a woman who had just given birth: “‘Declare there’s no end to misery,’ she greeted me, freeing one hand from the infant she was guiding to her breast, to indicate a rocker near by. ‘It kills you to have them and it kills you to feed them. Declare, it’s misery all round’” (*Confessions* 131). Her own mother bore and buried several children, but nowhere in her writings does Salverson list or name all of her siblings. She remembers with pride her mother’s ability to tell traditional stories and folktales, feeling “horror,” on the other hand, for her mother’s role as the source of life in this reflective passage from her *Confessions* regarding her mother’s pregnancy:

Someone was always having a baby, or burying a baby. . . . It set up a kind of quivering horror in my whole being to have suddenly plumbed the alarming possibilities of the female body; to have forced upon me, unsought, the staggering knowledge that all the while that mamma sat quietly knitting and spinning a tale from *The Thousand and One Nights* for our cheer and amusement, her woman’s body, like a creature apart, was pursuing its own creative mysteries. (206)

Salverson refuses to identify with the “creative mystery” her mother’s body is pursuing, preferring to see her mother as “a creature apart,” relishing the story but not the prospect of the new baby.

Salverson throughout her life valued the creation of a story over the fruits of a mother’s role. Even as a child she preferred her father’s freedom of literary creativity to the limits of a mother’s care. She later records that once when a new baby arrived, she was required to wheel her baby (brother? sister? — she doesn’t say) around in a carriage. She writes, “Because babies bored me I fell to talking to my grey cat”; the cat heard all sorts of stories while the baby howled and protested the lack of attention (“Sketch” 71).

Whether talking to the cat or writing stories, Salverson felt that language and literature were her escape from the drudgery of everyday female life. When she was a small child, Salverson's father brought her a fairy tale book to teach her how to read: "It was not only my key to dreams, but a passport into a kingdom of understanding that has to do with charities to which the Marthas of this world remain forever blind" (*Confessions* 107). Despite her love of reading, despite her dreams, Salverson as a woman was still tied to the same domestic toil of other Marthas. She found her artistic voice when she wrote her first poem "The Creation of the Birds" as "the bacon frizzled in the pan," and accepted the Canadian Club prize from Lady Byng for her first short story wearing a "newly dyed hat" (*Confessions* 404). As a writer, Salverson yearned for the man's world free from the restrictions of worry over money and domestic concerns.

Salverson places her ambitions in her female characters, many of whom also yearn for some kind of artistic expression. Greta in *The Dark Weaver* has more practical career goals; she wants to become a nurse. Her sweetheart Manfred jokes with her about the new language she is learning, saying that she "sounds like a medical journal" when she says that "we already have ten patients in the tubercular ward and five . . . assorted diseases and two prospective mothers" (222). Implicit in his jesting comment is a man's judgement of a woman who strays too far, who wants to learn a new technical language, and a suggestion of just how hard woman must try to find a new language of professional accomplishment, even one tied to familiar female roles involving birth, babies, misery and death.

When her women characters in *The Viking Heart* find artistic expression impossible, they transfer their ambitions to their sons. Borga's hopes for her son Thor are representative:

For this was her son. About him from day to day she built her dreams. She had dreamed them once for herself, and she had learned how hard is the road of progress for a woman. She had often felt that had she been a man her opportunity might have been greater, or at least she might have realized more easily some of the ambitions she had had. . . . The world was made for men and only men could get on in it. (62)

The mad, muted Anna Hafstein couldn't get on in the world either, despite her talent. Her song, silenced in marriage, continues in the talents of her son, a gifted violinist. Hers was, Salverson writes, "talent broken on the wheel of life, a glory entirely wasted unless a wise providence had passed it on to the lame boy [her son Balder] with his weird bird notes and his love for harmony" (124). Both Thor and Balder become successes in the world, due in part to the love and support of their mothers. The bird song that so entrances Anna and her son Balder confirms her sense of entrapment. She sings along with the birds, but can't make her own song, trapped as she is in earthly concerns. Only the sons can soar.

SALVERSON'S FAVOURITE AUTHORS were Hugo, Tolstoy, Hardy and Shakespeare, whom she reads, she writes, "Not because it was smart, or elevating, but because I had begun to hunger for ideas expressed with power, wit, and beauty; to read for the sake of reading, which is nothing rare in an Icelander" (*Confessions* 349). Reading literature opened her mind to eternal spiritual values, to truth and beauty. She considered women writers such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Fanny Hurst, Willia Cather, and Edna Ferber "splendid storytellers," but criticized what she termed their hysterical, sentimental, and melodramatic lack of restraint. Salverson admired these writers to a point, but didn't consider their writing to have sufficient detachment to be enduring literature ("What may we Expect" 5). Her loyalties lay not with other women writers but with Icelanders; she felt that her attitude toward literature stemmed in part of the "ancient concepts peculiar to [her] race." To her, literature's intent is that of all of "man's cultural pursuits . . . the [creation] of a living and immortal voice" ("What may we Expect" 1-2).

It is probably not surprising that her favourite possessors of that lasting voice were male, and that she said of them "they were great artists but they were also great men."¹⁴ To her, only men had the leisure of time and mind to create great works of art. Salverson's father, even when the family was mired in poverty, would dress up in his Prince Albert and freshly polished shoes on a Sunday afternoon and write essays. Salverson admired her father enormously, despite his financial failures. She saw in him a kindred spirit, explaining approvingly that he "was a scholar at heart, passionately devoted to the sagas, and well-grounded in the antiquities. He was always a romanticist, demanding something more than dull, realistic details of obvious faults and incidents in poetry and prose. . . . He was devoted to letters and the language, and whatever he wrote was carefully and conscientiously composed" (*Confessions* 60-1). He is much like Ephemias's father in *When Sparrows Fall*, who selfishly retains a room in their cramped house for his writing, while his daughter Ephemias must sacrifice her education and take in boarders so that the family will have some income.¹⁵

Salverson, in turning from the burden of womanhood, identified herself with her father, since she shared his dreamy temperament and his love for writing. When she was a child he called her his "own true son," and Salverson responded by emulating him: "As early as this [her childhood] she "hated the restrictions of [her] sex and foolishly thought to evade them" ("Sketch" 69). He revered what he called "bookmakers," casting them, as Salverson herself would, in the masculine mold: "Again and again, lifting his tired eyes from some yellowed page, he had paused in his passionate reading to remark with worshipping envy that only a maker of books had the power to immortalize his age" (*Confessions* 237). Ephemias, the young protagonist in *When Sparrows Fall*, is modelled on Salverson's younger

self, and she speaks "peevisly" about becoming a woman, "betraying the peculiar distaste, bordering on contempt, which she entertained for her sex" (21). Salverson contrasts Ephemelia's mother's and father's life-visions, a contrast she felt in her own vastly different parents: her father's idealistic dreams show Ephemelia "a world all rosy red and sweet," but Ephemelia soon realizes that her lot is inevitably cast with her mother, whose life consists of "dull, dead years stretching behind her like a desert trail" (54).

Salverson wanted more than a woman's life of silenced songs and endless dullness; she wanted her father's, or any male writer's, same intense devotion to "letters and the language." She strove for a language of power and authority, which she felt resided more in her role as an Icelander than in her role as a woman. This desire is most apparent in her choice of words. She constantly shows her drive to justify her Icelandic ancestry in her writing; the lexis of value surrounds her every mention of Icelanders. In a passage at the end of *Confessions* she writes about her ancestors and her own drive to write: "The Icelander rakes up the ancestral fires in search of some glowing ember of integrity and merit whereby to light his own spirit and quicken his heart with courage against the dark future. The ancestors were a sort of spiritual scourge" (*Confessions* 403). She associates the Icelanders with the qualities *integrity, merit, spirit, heart, and courage*. Writing well enough for her ancestors, who were a sort of "spiritual scourge" required, as she states later in the same passage, "courageous effort."

Her preface to the historical prose romance *Lord of the Silver Dragon* shows how strongly Salverson felt about these ancestors. The book was written to establish the noble Vikings as the first Europeans in North America; Salverson characterizes them as "staunch friends, generous sires, loyal husbands, and liberal masters."¹⁶ She calls the heroes of another romance, *Immortal Rock*, "the first white martyrs of America"¹⁷; the plot of the book assumes the authenticity of the inscription on the Kensington Stone, which Salverson regards as their memorial. Their mission in the New World, Salverson feels, was a noble one; their fate at the hands of the bloodthirsty Indians inevitable. One character, Gisli, reflects on the impossibility of communicating the true nature of their lives in ordinary language: "What tongue had the skill to interpret the peculiar sorrows which lay in wait for them in the coming dawn? How could one find words to impart the paralyzing effect of the experience to come? It was easy to state bald facts, but the subtle impressions which reach down into the very depths of consciousness defy common speech" (158-9).

SALVERSON CONSISTENTLY DEFIED common speech in her writing, as though any form of realism could not begin to portray her deep emotion. *Lord of the Silver Dragon*, especially, is written in a romantically exaggerated

manner, marked by stylistic extremes. She magnifies the heroic qualities of the Vikings, as in this heightened description of Leif Ericson, who "might, indeed, have been some vagrant god wandering the hills of home and momentarily come to halt beneath these old grey walls. The pale spring sunlight turned his flowing hair to gold, rippled down his armor, and flashed upon his jeweled sword. Lazily he leaned against a stone pillar, a smile upon his handsome lips, but the chill of arctic peaks in those remarkable steel-blue eyes of his" (30). The characters also speak in a pseudo-archaic fashion:

"So thou wouldst make of me a skald for the maids of Greenland? Truth, it were more agreeable to be my lady Thorgunna's boatswain!"

"Thou shalt be my thrall this day, never fear! 'Tis a heavy sea to the isles. But know, my merry wit, that there is a prudence in my mind. As thou mayest comprehend, the time draws near for gathering the eiderdown. In making this early visit I shall know the better how many maids to send to the picking." (63)

Salverson felt compelled to defend her choice of a strained and obsolete linguistic style in the book's preface, saying "it is not to be supposed that I have chosen the formal manner of speech because of any wish to endow the makers of Normandy and Norman England with an effete manner . . . A conscientious study of Norse mythology, and more especially of the marvelous laws of this virile people, reveals a deep and enduring love for dignity and honor" (9). She hopes to cast the *effete* aside, linking her ancestors' love for *dignity* and *honor* with their *virility*, perhaps unwittingly excluding her female ancestors. Her style considers of the ordinary in terms of the mythic, with the mythic usually ascribed to the masculine experience.

Salverson did write one small volume of lyric poetry, a common vehicle for women writers wishing to record personal, feminine experience. In her poetry mothers still suffer in childbirth; men are "Heedless of pain which ushered in their day."¹⁸ But Salverson acknowledges in the same poem that from her mother she drew "strength and life," and she writes in other poems about sweetly sleeping babies. Still, all is not sweetness and light in her poetry. Even the sleeping baby dreams of ravens, and lies as still as though he were dead ("Baby's Dream" 56-7). Love and sexuality have a dark and exploitative side too. In the poem "In the Mist" a "gleaming mansion" attracts "Maids adorned as flowers" and "Men as moths that flutter, / Near the candle light: / Or as hunters stalking." On the men's arrival, faith and love flee, "Saddened, shocked and grieving" (41). She casts in allusion and personification the same difference between exploitative sexuality and the ideals of faith and love she saw in life and plotted in her novels.

Many of Salverson's poems contain bird song, suggesting the poems were written in her own "singing" voice. Like Salverson herself, the birds often sing among images of opposites, usually in the natural world, such as mountains and valleys:

If I might stand upon the mountain top,
 And see the valley lying green below,
 Nor miss the song of thrush and liltling brook,
 Nor gold of daisy where the rushes blow — (“Fantasy” 50)

As a poet she strives to embrace both extremes, just as she tried to embrace both sides of her divided self. Sometimes she succeeds, and the impossible differences are reconciled: in “Garden of My Heart” she writes of a garden “High ’mid blue hills” where “Joy and Grief / Have knelt in common prayer” (35). Her poems say in metaphor what her writings often mask: Salverson felt herself at the mercy of a vast division, longing for glories far removed from earthly human life and its degrading prejudices and divisions.

Salverson felt that a writer could heal these divisions through the ennobling power of the word wielded by the “maker of books.” Her career as a writer was shaped primarily by her identification with her father’s ideals and literary traditions; she in fact credits his influence on *Lord of the Silver Dragon*, saying that his “knowledge and sincere love of ancient Norse literature has imbued in me a like if lesser fervour” (12). Her mother’s example was not negligible in her education, since she did show Salverson the value of reading and loved to tell folktales to children. However, her mother gave her no sense of how to speak or gossip intimately about her own woman’s life. Salverson remembers that her mother “was always helplessly inarticulate where her innermost sensibilities were concerned. . . . [S]he must have suffered mental agonies for which she found no words, and pride drove deeper and deeper into her heart” (*Confessions* 69). Salverson, too, appears deep and reticent to us. She seems to feel keenly her difference in both gender and ethnicity from writers she admired. Her response was to defend the value of her Icelandic heritage, but sometimes at the expense of her feminine one. Stine, the community gossip in *Confessions* speaks for Salverson and her ambition when she says of a woman who suffered monthly hemorrhages, “The devil knows it’s bad enough to be a woman when your insides work the right way round!” (186). Salverson, I think, decided to bypass the workings of the insides altogether to concentrate on what she saw as the higher realm of ideals: extremes of bravery, honor, dignity, and devotion.

NOTES

- ¹ Kristjana Gunnars, “Laura Goodman Salverson’s confessions of a divided self” in Shirley Neuman and Smaro Kamboureli, eds., *A Mazing Space: Writing Canadian Women Writing* (Edmonton: Longspoon/Newest, 1986).
- ² Laura Goodman Salverson, “An Autobiographical Sketch” *Ontario Library Review* 14 (1930): 69.
- ³ Gunnars notes that “Everything pertaining to Icelandic culture, language, behavior, thought and expectations, is the material that makes life difficult” (151), but I feel that despite the unhappiness of her family’s adjustment to North American life, Salverson saw more of value than of shame in her ethnic heritage.

- ⁴ Terrence L. Craig, "The Confessional Revisited: Laura Salverson's Canadian Work" in *Studies in Canadian Literature* 10: 1, (1985): 82.
- ⁵ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1982): 173-4.
- ⁶ Jennifer Coates, *Women, Men and Language* (London: Longman, 1986): 97.
- ⁷ Ruth Borker, "Anthropology: Social and Cultural Perspectives" in *Women and Language in Literature and Society*, eds. Sally McConnell-Ginet, Ruth Borker and Nelly Furman (New York: Praeger, 1980): 33.
- ⁸ See Coates 114-18 for a brief discussion of gossip as a non-pejorative term for the personal talk among women, and Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Gossip* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). Spacks explains the value of gossip for women who are excluded from mainstream discourse: "If gossip in its positive aspects indeed reflects moral assumptions different from those of the dominant culture, that fact suggests . . . its special usefulness for subordinated classes. It embodies an alternative discourse to that of public life, and a discourse potentially challenging to public assumptions; it provides language for an alternative culture" (46).
- ⁹ Laura Goodman Salverson, *Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter* (1939; rpt. Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1981): 118-19. All subsequent references will be to this edition.
- ¹⁰ Laura Goodman Salverson, "What may we Expect From Literature?," unpublished speech. Laura Goodman Salverson papers, National Library of Canada, Box 7 f. 36, p. 2.
- ¹¹ See Alicia Suskin Ostriker, *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America* (London: The Women's Press, 1986), for a history of women not writing what was on their minds. Ostriker traces the history of women's duplicitous writing in poetry, even giving one chapter the title "Divided Selves," writing about many women writers' divided loyalties as Gunnars has done specifically about Salverson's divided self.
- ¹² Laura Goodman Salverson, *The Dark Weaver* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1939), 219. All subsequent references will be to this edition.
- ¹³ Laura Goodman Salverson, *The Viking Heart* (1923; rpt. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1947): 53-54. All subsequent references will be to this edition.
- ¹⁴ "On Making Books," unpublished speech. Laura Goodman Salverson papers, National Library of Canada, Box 7 f. 21, p. 4.
- ¹⁵ Laura Goodman Salverson, *When Sparrows Fall* (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1925). All subsequent references will be to this edition.
- ¹⁶ Laura Goodman Salverson, *Lord of the Silver Dragon* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1927): 9. All subsequent references will be to this edition. Note that the ancestors fill only masculine roles. This masculine bias inhered in the language of the time, and represents unconscious sexism that is often avoided today. It may also represent Salverson's own sexist belief that only men are capable of action.
- ¹⁷ Laura Goodman Salverson, *Immortal Rock* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1954): vii.
- ¹⁸ Laura Goodman Salverson, "Mother" in *Wayside Gleams* (McClelland & Stewart, 1925): 36. All subsequent references will be to this edition.