

# TO BE (AND NOT TO BE) CONTINUED

## *Closure and Consolation in Gallant's "Linnet Muir Sequence"*

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MAVIS GALLANT'S 'LINNET MUIR' sequence in the *Home Truths* collection is an anomaly in many ways. First, the stories are consistently set in Canada and, based on setting, have been labelled "the Montreal stories"; they have also been described as Gallant's most autobiographical work, using what is in any of her fiction the voice closest to her own.<sup>1</sup> These two aspects of the sequence are the most obvious marks of difference, and the focus on these textual elements has dominated criticism of the stories.<sup>2</sup> Gallant's use of the sequential form, however, is an anomaly in itself, and deserving of attention.

Each of the Linnet stories has been published individually, but it is the story sequence, at once both structurally continuous and structurally broken, that is unusual in the Gallant *oeuvre*. Other linked stories do exist in the author's canon: there are three groups of intra-connected stories in *Overhead in a Balloon*, for instance, and Gallant has written two novels and three novellas which also consist of self-contained sequential parts (*Green Water, Green Sky* was published as four separate short stories, and *Its Image on the Mirror* consists of seven numbered sections). But the linked Linnet stories are unique in that a single consciousness is presented in detail at various levels of time, thereby producing a multi-layered single text in a form that Barbara Godard has recently labelled "modular fiction."<sup>3</sup>

By linking the Linnet stories in this way Gallant surprises her readers; what is not surprising, however, is that the story sequence is unconventional and discontinuous, constructed from fragments. As Virginia Woolf says of Mary Carmichael in *A Room of One's Own*, she is "tampering with the expected sequence. First she broke the sentence; now she has broken the sequence. Very well," writes Woolf, "she has every right to do both these things if she does them not for the sake of breaking, but for the sake of creating" (78). Gallant, I suggest, establishes the literary sequence only to break it by experimenting with the genre, for the "sake of creating" — and of re-creating.

There are reasons for this sequential experiment. Gallant states that she wanted to restore “in some underground river of the mind a lost Montreal”;<sup>4</sup> but at the story-level itself, the Linnet sequence seems to be, among other recognizable forms, an exercise in elegy.<sup>5</sup> The focus on the almost silent father, often absent even while alive (285), is one aspect of this elegy in its consideration of what the text calls the “principle of the absent, endangered male” (227). The absent father is a strong shaping principle in Canadian fiction<sup>6</sup> and is central to elegy in general, since (according to Peter Sacks) the patriarchal figure traditionally upholds the social and familial structures.<sup>7</sup> Linnet herself is aware of this conventional structure, though clearly she undercuts and rejects it with ironic commentary: “It was the father’s Father, never met, never heard, who made Heaven and earth and Eve and Adam” (269).

Nonetheless, Linnet’s father haunts both the text proper *and* the text-within-the-text, the one she writes in order to confront her loss and be consoled.<sup>8</sup> Because of the covert nature of this intra-textual elegy, Gallant’s sequence might be read as a subversion, even as ‘anti-elegy.’ It is anti-elegiac for other reasons as well. For instance, the conventional pastoral contrast between the (ideal) rural and the (negative) urban settings is reversed. Similarly the traditional longing for a Golden Age or paradisaical childhood<sup>9</sup> is inverted: Linnet’s childhood was marked by “a feeling of loss, of helpless sadness” (311) and by “a long spell of grief” (223), and she thinks of her youth as “the prison of childhood” (225). The ironic nature of this reversal emphasizes a ‘home truth’ about Linnet’s past: if a home truth consists of “the contradiction between what *is* and what *should be*,”<sup>10</sup> then it is ‘true’ that her upbringing was not as it should have been. Consequently, it is also ‘true’ that after the loss of her father, she is not consoled by what ‘should’ comfort her; recollecting the past is not a useful method of mourning, nor is writing about it.

The event of her father’s death is described in abstract terms:

Peacetime casualties . . . are lightning bolts out of a sunny sky that strike only one house. All around the ashy ruin lilacs blossom, leaves gleam. Speculation in public about the disaster would be indecent. Nothing remains but a silent, recurring puzzlement to the survivors: Why here and not there? Why this and not that? (235)

By using the connected short story genre, Gallant appears to be instituting an orderly narrative sequence designed not only to answer these questions, but perhaps also to console on the structural level of the aesthetic. The sequence form may have the opposite effect, however; as Melissa Fran Zeiger writes, “the modern sequence reflects the tendency of modern elegy to create uncanniness by undoing narrativity, chronology, personality.” (17)

Clearly Gallant’s sequence is less linear or chronological than that of a traditional elegy, and though it offers a formally coherent narrative structure, it also paradoxically ‘undoes’ chronology. The story structure that seems smooth on the surface

is, as Frank Kermode would argue, an “illusion of narrative sequence” that must be in conflict with narrative “secrets” that are kept from the reader (“Secrets and Narrative Sequence,” 81). For example, the mystery of Angus Muir (who had “nothing but” secrets himself [230]) surfaces only long enough to offer what Kermode would call “evidence of [an] insubordinate text” (83), the text which constitutes an elegy for Linnet’s father.

Linnet’s elegiac story sequence calls into question both the idea of “narrative sequence” and the potential of aesthetic consolation. As elegy, it is fundamentally self-reflexive, drawing attention to its narrativity and artifice. What is at stake in Gallant’s use of the elegiac genre is the possible convergence of the aesthetic and the epistemological, as well as the aesthetic and the historical, in terms of the possible recuperative power of such unions.<sup>11</sup> The breaking of the sequential form is accomplished with digressions on other familial relationships and parent/child politics,<sup>12</sup> and also by the movement back and forth in time, and the intermittent focus on the self as an artist figure.

This ‘breaking’ has a double function: first, it literalizes a Kermodean-like theory of sequence and secrets, thereby drawing attention to the problem of accurately narrating the “insubordinate texts” of history; and second, the existence of a broken sequence is often one diagnostic test of the genre of elegy — it draws attention to the condition of the narrative as a drama of the mind, an internalization that works against narrative and what Jonathan Culler calls “its accompaniments: [chronological] sequentiality, causality, time, teleological meaning” (“Apostrophe” 66). Culler goes on to suggest that this type of narrative posits a “temporality of discourse,” and that the “clearest example of this structure is of course the elegy which replaces an irreversible temporal disjunction, the move from life to death, with a dialectical alternation between attitudes of mourning and consolation, evocations of absence and presence” (67).

**T**HIS WRITTEN REPETITION of her past makes Linnet a historiographer, if we characterize historically as Ricoeur does: “in terms of the emphasis placed on the weight of the past and, even more, in terms of the power of recovering the ‘extension’ between birth and death in the work of ‘repetition’ ” (167). The “concern for the past” is what generates history, Ricoeur writes (177); in Linnet’s case it generates a particular history — her/story — and Gallant, through Linnet, explores different modes of memory and writing, as well as their relationship to history and truth.

The broken sequence form itself enacts an aesthetic that recovers life, that “extension between birth and death” of which Ricoeur speaks. Linnet writes to attempt a recovery from the loss, as well as to recover or regain the lost, only to

*re-cover* it again by distancing herself from her father. In the first story, she recalls a time when she had yet to recover in any of these senses of the word. She is vulnerable, thinking "I had survived, but perhaps I had failed to grow some outer skin it was now too late to acquire" (232). On the actual return to her birthplace (Montreal), she carries her birth certificate and an object that synecdochically links her to her father: an Edwardian picnic hamper. She makes the connection between the hamper, his death and her life (which seems to be 'mourning in motion') by describing her luggage: "[it was] a preposterous piece of baggage my father had brought from England some 20 years before; it had been with me since childhood, when his death turned my life into a helpless migration" (219). Though she is 'hampered' by memories of him, she chooses to remain attached to the inherited object that once belonged to him in *his* travels despite her claim that she "did not believe in inherited property" (232).

Linnet not only inherits her father's identity as traveller, but resembles her father physically, as well: "I was so like him in some ways that a man once stopped me in front of the Bell Telephone building on Beaver Hall Hill and said, 'Could you possibly be Angus Muir's sister?' " (249). Linnet is bound so closely to the identity of her dead father, in fact, that three people in the story say on different occasions that they had heard *she* had died (224, 229, 249). Through the conventionally elegiac ritual of writing in response to loss, she fills the basket with her own marks of life, her poems and journals. The stories in the hamper migrate with Linnet, and the fictional elegy that they eventually compose moves in a 'migratory' narrative pattern as well.

Gallant plays with the genre of elegy and emphasizes the psycholinguistic components of the mourning *process* over a potential literary monument, which is the conventional product of elegy. Janice Kulyk Keefer suggests that Gallant's sequence achieves "continuousness" and "avoids programmatic closure" (Keefer 75), which are precisely the narrative strategies appropriate to elegiac fiction. The paradoxical *discontinuity* of the broken sequence prevents the programmatic closure often found in elegy. The consolation in Gallant's fiction is found in the lack or disruption of closure, in the process of merging epistemology with the aesthetic, and *not* in a structurally closed (and internally continuous) monumental piece of art.

Closure is also avoided by the inclusion of the autobiographical mode.<sup>13</sup> While the first story in the sequence opens with the words "My father died" (218), and two of the three segments in the narrative begin with the phrases "my father's death" and "I know a woman whose father died," most of this story (like the five others in the sequence) consists of Linnet's overtly autobiographical anecdotes; taken in sum, they emphasize her will to live and her roles as 'survivor' and 'story-teller,' both of which are crucial to the work of mourning. She believes that "having come down on the side of life [whereas her father chose death] . . . writing now had to occupy an enormous space" (249).

Gallant uses Linnet's 'life-writing' (autobiography being the counter-mode of elegy<sup>14</sup>) to fill the space of Linnet's mourning and to resist traditional elegiac consolation in closure. The autobiography often has a confessional tone, which also draws the reader into the immediacy and openness of the text; we are told things that Linnet never wanted "anyone to know" (226), things that she "never mentioned" to anyone (219). This mixture of genres and modes within the elegy emphasizes the fact that a crisis of *representation* parallels the crisis of loss experienced by the writer. The metafictional text thematizes an aspect of the elegist's mourning: the need to write. By emphasizing sequence in Linnet's autobiography, Gallant is fusing three types of fiction: the *Künstlerroman*, the autobiographical, and the elegiac. This combination of modes points to both of Linnet's crises, which themselves are linked: how to deal with her past, as well as how to write, and thereby recover from, absence.

By exploring the relationship between the past and the ability of the mind not only to remember, but also to *record* or *represent* history, Gallant embeds an aesthetic of elegy in the stories. The use of repetition throughout the sequence is a significant component of this aesthetic. Different versions of events in Linnet's life are told in narrative variants (stories about her relationships with Uncle Raoul Chauchard, Olivia, Georgie, and fiancés, for example) and they become what Barbara Hernstein Smith would call "modified retellings of a particular prior narrative text" (211). Subsequently, the reader is forced to face the unreliability of any one memory *and* of the act of writing down that memory. There is, after all, no single 'truth': only multiple (often painful) 'home truths,' as the repetition-with-a-difference of certain stories about her former home life indicate.

Anecdotal wanderings or repetitions in and about the past are endemic to elegy. The subsequent temporal doubling-back in Linnet's writing is indicated by phrases such "that is how it *was*," and "I *was now* eighteen" (219; emphasis mine), phrases which fragment the temporality of the story and suggest that a voice does exist in the *present* as well. Repetition both within each story and between stories in the sequence allows her to enact certain verbal rites that eventually complete the work of mourning. But the story sequence enables Gallant to literalize not only the psychological need of the grieving mind for repetition of memories; it also provides a form whereby she can literalize the primary characteristic of memory itself: fragmentation.

The status of Linnet's writing is autobiographical, but the temporality of the fiction does not refer to the historical past; the digressions, narrative gaps, and non-linear story sequence *within* the stories work against chronology, and install their own temporality of discourse. Gallant seems, however, to combine these two temporal modes (the referential and the discursive): the writing mimics the movement of Linnet's mourning mind, putting it on public display. The outer event — Linnet's story — and the inner event — Linnet's belated work of mourning<sup>15</sup> —

become so closely aligned that the dramatic discourse is, in its relationship to the present mental drama, highly referential.

LINNET'S PUBLIC STORY IS clearly a staged one, in which she speaks from a dramatic perspective.<sup>16</sup> Her techniques are the "staging devices" of an elegist (Sacks 19), and though her experience is private, her writings (on the surface at least) are not. Linnet mildly rebels against the "shamed silences" of people who refuse to display what they feel (227), a practice that she considers "murder in everyday life" (228). But she guards her own emotions despite this judgement, and despite the writing of her elegy. Though she does address the reader directly at times, thus establishing a sense of intimacy, the content of the 'public' address is often secretive, a mysterious piece of private information about her father and her past. For example, Linnet writes that "How I happen to know the revolver was loaded and how I learned never to point a gun even in play is *another story*. *I can tell you* that I never again looked in a drawer that didn't belong to me" (234; emphasis mine). Though the address is direct, the meaning is held back, the implication being that there is always "another story": either other versions of memory, or secret narratives embedded in the overt sequence, or both.

The public form of the elegy announces an attempt to assert a state of control over the emotions that underlie it, to make "*public* life tolerable" (228). Control is something Linnet admires about people in a crisis situation, as she comments early in the sequence. Linnet's writing style is blunt, factual, even clinical, and while these features *could* derive from Linnet's experience as a journalist, they seem, more importantly, to suggest and endorse the emotional detachment of the elegist which produces necessary control at certain stages of grief. Linnet becomes detached from *herself* as well. She simultaneously becomes both character and implied author of the text, and this doubling puts her at a remove from the life-story she writes, despite the fact that it is her own.<sup>17</sup> She refers to herself in the past as "the smaller Linnet" (225), which also distances her self in the 'now' of the text from her self 'then' *within* her own writing, and implies a splitting of the subject-past from the subject-present. The voice of the grieving self is, in this way, controlled and silent.

Linnet suspects that "death and silence can be one" (228) and encodes this suspicion in her elegy for Angus, who is figuratively represented in the white spaces on the page and between the stories in the sequence. We may be hearing him at one point, when Linnet breaks off a childhood anecdote about tulips, addressing the reader with the words "no, let another voice finish it; the only authentic voices I have belong to the dead" and then quoting one such dead person as if he (or she) could speak: "'then she *ate* them'" (283). The dead parent is seemingly her

father, since the next line begins with “It was my father’s custom” and since the story is at least nominally about his relationship with another woman. The title of the story is “Voices Lost in Snow,” a title that would be suitable for the entire sequence.

That Angus is “lost” to Linnet is obvious. How she finds him in memory and in writing is less clear. Linnet’s stories are *not* an attempt to capture her father in words. She collects three different versions (or “men’s woolly stories”) about her father’s death, and then has to assimilate them, to compose a story that lets her live with the death, the manner of the death, and the memory of the emblematic gun she found in a drawer. But she refuses to attempt to extract the ‘true story’ from real events since she realizes that the impulse to give narrative shape to events always results in a form of fiction, in what Hayden White calls “an aspect of narrativity” (4). That is, Linnet has learned to distrust the ability of story to capture truth, and by creating a vague story that encompasses most variants under the rubric of “homesickness” (235)—a story as plausible as any other—she is able to “sett[le] his fate in her mind” (235).

Linnet’s version of the truth, then, is as dubious as those of her father’s friends. (Her unnamed acquaintance, who tells different invented versions of *her* father’s death at dinner parties, is a parodic parallel to Linnet in this respect.) In “Truth with a Capital ‘T’” Gallant explicitly plays with the idea of writing ‘truth,’ and Linnet, from the vantage point of her “critical nostalgia”<sup>18</sup> where she can “hear the past” (329), knows that the narrated past is fiction. A voice, such as that of her godmother Georgie, is closer to truth than a written anecdote, since memory is unreliable: “Her voice, and her particular Montreal accent, were like the unexpected signatures that underwrite the past: If this much is true, you will tell yourself, then so is all the rest I have remembered” (325). Only the ideal of ‘pure’ recall, “not reconstructed or approximate,”—and therefore not written (since writing is necessarily a reconstruction of thought)—is true (229); but since memory is not pure but selective and inaccurate, and since to Linnet’s mind “nothing but the present [can] live” (280), then even pure recall is impossible.<sup>19</sup>

Despite Linnet’s thinking that “one’s impulse was always to write to the dead” (281), the traditional apostrophe to or invocation of the dead is absent in this elegy. The elegy is usually addressed to an absent audience, but Linnet’s address is a silent one. Her refusal to write directly to the dead, to resurrect the dead with words, is her ‘refusal to mourn’ in the conventional sense. In other words, she recognizes the remembered past as a fiction, since in the present “she recognized nearly nothing and had to start from scratch” (235)—that is, to start remembering in the present, and to create new fictions *based* on the past. Linnet detaches herself from Angus, turing away from a type of “object-fixation” on the dead and lost to an intellectual acceptance of their unrecoverability. She has committed an “act of troping” (Sacks 5) by putting distance between herself and the dead father and her

past — by turning from object to sign, from father to story. Gallant portrays Linnet's performative grieving in this focus on her use of language, which paradoxically both fills in and maintains the space left by the death of Angus.

The resulting detachment takes the form of actively putting the past behind her, of "shedding past time" (222). "If I was to live my own life I had to let go," she writes, deciding that the "whole story [of her father's death] somehow became none of my business" (235). A verbal portrait of him would be the equivalent of "impersonations," like those "wash drawings of Canadian war graves" which her father's "painter-chum" sold to "heartbroken women" who "had them framed — the only picture in the house" (231). As Linnet implies in "The Doctor," it is not reminders that console, but synecdochic or metonymic "true fragments" (301)—like the books of poetry the doctor-friend had written himself, secretly, or paintings her father had done, paintings which are now as lost as his voice.

Gallant seems to be advocating a Hegelian-like aesthetic wherein to write is to forget. In the act of writing down thoughts and memories, we allow ourselves to forget them.<sup>20</sup> But Linnet's writing process (the embedded elegy) appeals to what Derrida calls the "living, knowing memory" or *mnēmē*. She avoids the construction of inventories and chronicles, which constitute "not memory itself . . . only monuments" that are *hypomnēmatic* (Derrida 107). Though Linnet does memorialize *place* through the work of memory, her memories of her father reproduce a presence, and paradoxically by *not* writing about his life in her version of the elegy, she does *not* forget him.<sup>21</sup> Whereas traditional consolation occurs in the conflation of art and history, in the creation of a lasting, closed verbal monument for the dead, Linnet's consolation occurs when writing and history are bridged but remain divided. Her writing remains 'open' in the sense that it does not attempt to capture the past in words.

This division of the aesthetic and the historic, or art and reality, is a sign of what de Man calls "true mourning": "the most *it* can do is to allow for non-comprehension and enumerate non-anthropomorphic, non-elegiac, non-celebratory, non-lyrical, non-poetic, that is to say, prosaic, or better, *historical* modes of language power" (de Man 262).<sup>22</sup> The aesthetic (i.e., narrative art) is considered to be false consolation in this poetics for the very reasons that Gallant distrusts memory and cannot claim truth for written versions of any single memory. This is another inversion of elegiac convention where in the art/reality dichotomy (which is similar to the rural/urban contrast), artifice is the preferred realm of existence.

Linnet's declaration that "mostly when people say 'I know exactly how I felt' it can't be true" (260) indicates a distrust of memory similar to Gallant's, and while what de Man calls the historical mode of language is, ideally, true referentiality, the best a writer such as Linnet (or Gallant) can do is to merge the epistemological — memory — with the aesthetic, in order to arrive at a version of history, and at linguistic consolation. The convergence of these two is accomplished through



a near-historical mode of language which provides the bridge or passage from the aesthetic to the historical, such as that employed by Linnet in her clinical, unconventional elegy.

**I**N WHAT WE MIGHT CALL an “untrue mourning,” Linnet attempts to merge history and aesthetics as her monument to place, producing a “*faithful record* [of a historical Montreal]” written by “a true survivor” (223; emphasis mine).<sup>23</sup> It is rebuilt from memory, like those “cities we build over the past to cover seams and cracks we cannot account for” (313), and it consists of “a superior civilization” where “the vision of a house upon that street was so painful that [Linnet] was obliged to banish it from the memorial.” The *city* is memorialized, written down and forgotten as a “dream past” (228), but her father is not subjected to this somewhat ironic “faithful record”; in Linnet’s textual performance he is mourned indirectly, non-anthropomorphically and non-celebratorily — silently, in fact, since “true mourning” cannot be written.

This relationship of memory to writing and of writing to history is problematic for Linnet because of her vocation as a writer. She thinks of her father’s artistic failure on several occasions (253, 257), wondering if she “had inherited a poisoned gene from him, a vocation without a gift” (249). This issue of poetic inheritance is an elegiac convention, and Gallant treats it ironically by making Angus a failed artist. Though he was not a writer, and despite the fact that her *mother* “rewrites” people’s lives, “providing them with suitable and harmonious endings” (287), Gallant suggests that Linnet’s artistic inclination and perceptiveness came from her father.<sup>24</sup> Her evasion of closure is a rejection of her mother’s aesthetic, and an acknowledgement of the falsity of truth claims.

This acknowledgement leaves Linnet on shaky ground, “between zero and one,” to quote the title of another story in the sequence. The interrogatives that end this story leave the reader with the same uneasy feeling, asking with Linnet “What will happen?” In Gallant’s story, Linnet replaces the uncertainty by turning the unknowable into fiction (261), which here is a state of artistic uncertainty and openness. She ends each story by beginning again with another — hence the sequence of stories, however broken. Mnemonic repetition — vacillation between zero (amnesia) and one (the knowledge of ‘whole truth’) — becomes the only writable consolation for Linnet.

As Paul Ricoeur asks, “is not repetition itself a kind of resurrection of the dead . . . ?” (186). Gallant’s stories speak silently of Linnet’s dead father in a sequence that seems to be without beginning or end, a sequence that “only terminates and never concludes” (White 23). The sequence that can be aesthetically “comforting”

can also be unsettling, as Frank Kermode notes (81). Linnet overcomes this discomfort and achieves an eventual consolation by first understanding the relationship between memory, language and history, and then responding to the past by being free to invent it over and over again. The need to start over, to repeat in language, is not only an elegiac method of achieving continuity, control and ceremony (Sacks 23); it also suggests an inherent failure in the ability of memory and language to provide aesthetic consolation in the form of a single written historical 'truth.' Gallant's series of elegiac stories paradoxically emphasizes beginnings,<sup>25</sup> and reinforces Linnet's resistance to closure, as is suggested in her affirmative yet oxymoronic motto: "Unless you die, you are bound to escape."

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> In an interview with Geoff Hancock, Gallant assures us, however, that these stories are *not* "straight autobiography," which "would be boring. It would bore the reader. The stories are a kind of reality *necessarily* transformed. The people are completely other, and some characters two or three different persons all at the same time." See Hancock, 28.
- <sup>2</sup> See Ronald Hatch, "The Three Stages of Mavis Gallant's Short Fiction," *Canadian Fiction Magazine* 28 (1978): 92-114. Hatch states that "in the series of Montreal stories," readers learn "something about Gallant's own early life in Montreal" (107). George Woodcock also discusses the Montreal setting and similarities between Linnet's life and Gallant's, though he does stress that "everything has been reshaped and transmuted in the imagination so that what emerges is a work of fiction on several levels." (Woodcock, 88).
- <sup>3</sup> Godard discusses Laurence's *A Bird in the House*, a story sequence that is structurally similar to the Linnet series.
- <sup>4</sup> "An Introduction," *Home Truths*, xxii.
- <sup>5</sup> The term *Künstlerroman* could also be used to describe this sequence of stories. The relationship of this form to the prose elegy is significant since the elegist is self-consciously an artist-figure, and makes use of the autobiographical as well.
- <sup>6</sup> Laurence, Munro and Atwood have all written similarly elegiac works mourning the loss of a father. In an interview with Geoff Hancock, Gallant notes the thematic importance of fathers in Canadian fiction. (Hancock, 25).
- <sup>7</sup> See Sacks, 15 for a Freudian reading of this aspect of elegy; see also Celeste M. Schenck, 1986 for an interesting perspective on elegy, patriarchy and poetic inheritance.
- <sup>8</sup> Kenneth Reinhard and Julia Lupton write of a "mournful hermeneutics in which texts are imagined boxed up or *eingekastelt* in each other." This self-reflexive narrative structure of the text-within-the-text is, I think, common in elegiac prose — modern examples include *Heart of Darkness*, *The Good Soldier* and *The Waves*, for example. The phrase "mournful hermeneutics" seems useful in the interpretation of such texts.
- <sup>9</sup> On this elegiac convention see Edward Honig, 163. Linnet *does* long for one aspect of childhood, though: intuitive knowledge: "everyone under the age of ten knows everything . . . It is part of the clairvoyant immunity to hypocrisy we are born with and that vanishes just before puberty" (304).

- <sup>10</sup> See Malcolm Ross, 83-89.
- <sup>11</sup> de Man discusses these issues at length in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*. See especially "Autobiography as Defacement" (67-82), and "Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric," (239-262). I am equating aesthetics with writing and the epistemological with memory in the formulation of my theory of elegy.
- <sup>12</sup> "Varieties of Exile" is a story-length digression that is like an allegory of the sequential elegy. In the story Frank Cairns takes on both roles of Linnet *and* her father — he is depressed and homesick like Angus, but he also suffered a "childhood of secret grieving" as did Linnet (269).
- <sup>13</sup> The terms 'mode' and 'genre' are often confused in the discussion of both elegy and autobiography. While Reinhard and Lupton argue that "autobiography is not one genre among others but rather a mode in which texts participate when performing the literary work of mourning" (63-4), in my argument I take the position that the autobiographical *mode* is incorporated into the *genre* of elegy.
- <sup>14</sup> Here I paraphrase Claudio Guillén in *Literature as System* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971) where he discusses the idea of "genre" and "counter-genre."
- <sup>15</sup> Angus' death had been kept from Linnet for years. Her elegy is not written until several more years have passed, after she learns of the manner of his death.
- <sup>16</sup> Eric Smith in *By Mourning Tongues* suggests that elegy is basically a dramatic form (15).
- <sup>17</sup> On one level Gallant's use of Linnet as a first-person narrator constitutes a primary narratological distancing technique (separating the implied author from the elegiac content of the story), but it also provides an inherent resistance to the efforts of some critics to read the Linnet stories as *Gallant's* autobiography. As Michelle Gadpaille writes, "it is to these stories that readers and critics look for the autobiographical material that Gallant so continually denies her public" (52). For example Lorna Irvine, in "Starting from the Beginning Every Time," discusses the autobiography of "a woman writer" with alternating references to Linnet and Gallant (252-255). On the other hand, Neil Besner clearly differentiates between author-proper and author-character in *The Light of Imagination* (131).
- <sup>18</sup> For a definition of the term "critical nostalgia," see Michael Squires, *The Pastoral Novel* (14). Squires suggests that the "critical nostalgia" employed by authors such as Faulkner involves the interplay between the past and the present, noting that this perspective is available "only when the fantasy of returning home is surrendered." Linnet has definitely surrendered this fantasy, if indeed she had ever entertained it.
- <sup>19</sup> de Man discusses the assimilation of truth to trope in "Anthropomorphism and Trope in Lyric" (239-243).
- <sup>20</sup> See Derrida on the *pharmakon* in *Dissemination*; see also Paul de Man's "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's *Aesthetics*."
- <sup>21</sup> This again is a reversal of the tendency in much elegiac literature to write about the past in order to release oneself from its grip. See Kenneth Bruffee, "Elegiac Romance," for a discussion of this convention.
- <sup>22</sup> Linnet is aware of the anthropomorphic potential in her own thinking and writing and is usually careful to reject the tendency: "The house he came to remained for a long time enormous in memory, though the few like it still standing — 'still living,' I *nearly* say — are narrow, with thin, steep staircases and close, high-ceilinged rooms" (302; emphasis mine).

- <sup>23</sup> Neil Besner notes that Linnet writes in a "historical framework" after recognizing that memory "makes necessary fictions." (133).
- <sup>24</sup> On inheritance of the poetic vocation in pastoral elegy, see Celeste M. Schenck, *Mourning and Panegyric*.
- <sup>25</sup> See Lorna Irvine (252).

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## THE QUILT-MAKER'S DREAM

*Margaret Blackwood*

It is the time of snow. January. A spindrift.  
Last year's leaves cross the ice; reeds,  
cat-tails and rushes sweep the perimeters.

The Quilt-Maker dreams. Dreams of his figure  
returning through the snow. A useful shape  
he used to skim the cat-tails from the pond.

A dubbin-coloured moon, three-quarters  
turned away, lies on its back, could rock  
itself to sleep, embryonic, yet wise.

Fence posts smattered with tar lean  
along the headland, take their direction  
from the trees. A cabin squats in the cold.