

# *Canadian Literature*

A Quarterly of Criticism and Review

Spring 1995

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Native  
Individual  
State

# A.J.M. SMITH: *Canadian Metaphysical*

ANNE COMPTON

Courageous poet, tireless critic, and leading anthologist of his time, A.J.M. Smith was one of the most influential and vital forces in Canadian literature. Anne Compton charts and evaluates the development of Smith's work and provides fresh insights into his writing. Smith's ultimate affinity with the Metaphysicals receives particular attention.

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## Canadian Literature / Littérature canadienne

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# On the Border

**B**efore I knew about the absurdity of American gun laws and inadequate health care, I knew about the border. It cut a wide swath through the bush, between Tsawwassen on the Canadian side and Point Roberts on the American, and we could reach the western end of it by walking south along an agate-strewn beach. A boundary marker declared the power of division here (the Peace Arch, by contrast, at the Douglas-Blaine crossing a few miles further to the east, intoned an odd insistence on dependency: “Children of a Common Mother”—a stone engraving that led readily to infantile ribaldry). If we climbed up the cliff beside the beach and strolled along the right-of-way, we would come out between the two customs houses. “How long have you been away?” the guard would ask (an entertaining, enigmatic question). Had we in fact ever been “away,” wandering back and forth across a shrubby numbered parallel, or had we just been pushing a little at an almost unseen, only half-appreciated edge?



Consider the clichés: *Threshold of Opportunity*, *Key to the Future*, *Window on the World*, *Gateway to* (fill in the blank). Nice notions. But where are the sidelines to the frontier, the exits from loss, the keyholes to the outposts of civilization? Conventions make us think along *worn paths*, *easy routes*, *well-travelled thoroughfares*; and even *the other path in the woods* and *the road not taken* have come to seem like *bromides* and *old saws*. If there’s a window on the world, who’s looking back? If there’s a gateway

opening in one direction, why does it so often close against those who travel the other way? Inside these conventional paradigms, ego seems to construct the world. Those who seek aggrandizement, the extension of their own power boundaries, *claim* alternatives as their right, the prerogative of self, and at the same time they will not *permit* alternatives (by whose authority, these verbs?) to others. “I” may declare “myself” separate from “you,” say the pompous, presumptuous, and power-preoccupied, but “they” (now in “my” command) may never separate themselves from “me.” This world of planned perimeters shows the danger of the unexamined platitude, the toothy smugness of the Barnum smile. And yet we seek—even need, depend on—borders. Are they the same as boundaries? Perhaps borders line the edges of possibility, and boundaries the edges of permission. Perhaps borders declare a guarantee of shared values, the codes of community—and boundaries assert the limits of a self-declared centrality of rule, the codes of hierarchy and authoritarianism.



Before I knew about neighbourhood, I knew about the house next door. The old woman who lived there uttered crusty imprecations at the universe, grouching daily about other people’s children and generations of impending change. Once, when the group of us were playing softball on the street, she even took an axe and chopped away the bridge that crossed the ditch in front of her own home, to keep us from using it as first base. Perhaps each of us put a different face on this act, this occasion. I saw it contradictorily as threatening and comic, vindictive and absurd; I remember it now as sad. She cut herself off, blaming others for a self-inflicted wound. Maybe she even construed what she did as *saving her own skin*; certainly, living in a shell, she kept mistaking the way out for a way in. *Refusal, rejection, denial*: she saw contact as a danger, touch as an attack, connection too uncertain to endure.



Grey areas: the slippage zone between cup and lip, the flank that got left behind (and then left out of the history books), the blur between adjoining rooms, activities upon the pale but not quite yet beyond it, the difference between listening and hearing, looking and seeing, can and could. Could still.



Before I knew about the Ottawa River, I knew about the muddy Fraser, and the untrustworthiness of surfaces and seafoes. If at all, we swam there warily, conscious (we told ourselves) of the movement of the unattended booms, our apprentice skill (we said) at birling the giant Douglas fir logs, and the dour tales (our parents told us) of entrapment and death by drowning. Undertow. We are not always prepared for the way the current rips, however, nor for the ambiguities of what looks at first like choice. Desire connects more complicatedly with daring that we sometimes admit. Decisions are fixed inside the slanted limits of available (or is it *made-accessible*) information. What distinguishes the regional, then, from the parochial? familial relationship from enforced apart-hood? interactive understanding from overactive authoritarianism? Identity is real, or real enough positively to affect people's lives. Yet the parochial *categories* of identity are mirages, illusions concocted by the politics of rule, in the name of purity and in the shape of slogans. They, too, can alter people's lives, but seldom in the cause of freedom. The free flow of communication is far more often dammed, distorted, caulked, contained, curtailed, restricted, tied. The bars of ostensible purity are often overt, and coded for praise; yet the barriers to freedom they carry with them are often hidden.



Indeterminacy. The round earth's imagined corners yield surprises, not the least the ones that juxtapose experience and myth. We live inside perimeters of trust and faith, distrust and fear. It is ignorance, not stupidity, that separates us. The problem is that faith can be as ignorant as fear, distrust as thick as trust, the brink disguised as centre, with centres already dispersing.



Before I knew about the meniscus (early chemistry class confirming yet again the unlikelihood of physical behaviour), I knew how to reach a milk-glass brim, and knew that it divided the cautionary *about to spill* from the active (and reactive) *already spilling*. We know this space between, in other words. For we often live there. Naming it is just a way of reminding ourselves we can resist the easy binaries of boundary lines and the temptations of a so-called "perfect" separateness. There is no such thing as perfect separateness. There is only contiguity, which keeps changing, placid and confrontative, equable and arranged. "At this juncture," we say, constituting

each moment as the site of consequence. “From here on in.” “Never before and never again.” We speak memorized lines, playing on the verge of absurdity, giving credence both to brain and membrane. As in film.



*Both/and* (instead of/in addition to) *either/or*. It is the difficult, ambiguous rhetoric of living with and without borders. Repeatedly we need a sense of circumference to secure that which we share, recognizing always that we usually share more than we think we do, and that the margins move. And still, still, repeatedly we need to walk close enough to the borders to recognize where they lie, sometimes to cross them if we can, if only to know that they can be crossed, to affirm that, while the world is not picture-perfect, we also know we do not constrict the world we already accept by the way we (and others) draw the frame. W.N.





## it ain't exactly heaven

bein  
mistaken  
for some kind  
of creole man that night not  
really knowing what to make of the scene  
and followin me home like that chicken was boilin  
on top of the stove getting it all really fully seasoned  
and pretty good spilling the cayenne spice and stuff  
into the mixture kind of heated it up a bit  
and caused all that smoke over the pot

but i once heard some one talkin about this  
creolized language and how subordinates took over the major  
language or something like that sounds like some kind of a weird mutiny  
going on down in the kitchen all right and maybe that's what this  
is all about but really this ain't no insurrection goin on  
here for christ sake and this ain't even louisiana or any  
of those other bayou places with alligators floatin  
around this is just my way of cookin up a bit  
of a storm before the winter sets in  
but what do you expect i guess  
she can imagine whatever might be different  
late on a sunday evening when you don't have to bother  
goin home anymore and hang around someone that seems to be  
a little far out on what everyone wants to call the far side  
or dark side or other side of what appears to be  
your normal everyday  
other side

anyways  
i ain't no cajun  
and i ain't no creole  
and i sure as hell ain't no  
louisiana back water slug lickin  
a wooden spoon clean in some boilin down town  
back street restaurant off the main in new orleans

so pay attention missy and the next  
time you get invited in try not to stay longer  
than three days and try to remember  
that this is just a soup pot  
cook out and really  
doesn't have  
anything  
to do with native ancestry or anything like  
what goes along with all that cross  
cultural crap they're always lyin  
to you about down at queenspark  
or any place else  
uptown  
for all that matter

## *The Book of Jessica:* The Healing Circle of a Woman's Autobiography

I have been drawn to write about *The Book of Jessica*—against the advice of all my friends and relations'—because it crosses a number of significant boundaries: between life and art, between context and text in autobiographical genres, between ceremonies of religion and of theatre, between oral and written narratives, and between two women, one Métis and one white. Absorbed at a very personal level by the ways in which we make sense of ourselves, I have been reading and listening here to a multi-storied “poetics of differences” (Neuman, 213-30), and I wonder whether it is not what I understand as a native aesthetic (which certainly inspires and guides this text despite the final editorial control of the white co-author) that challenges all these boundaries as boundaries, transforming the conflictual binaries of the original situation into a continuous and, I will suggest, a healing circle.

Because this text depends on elements of Canadian history, including colonial appropriation of land and power and the possibility of an imperialist feminist appropriation in this case of the Métis voice, it is ironic that I, as a white academic, with an appropriately British (read imperialist) education, should pronounce on it in any fashion. I am reminded of Leonore Keeshig-Tobias' scathing point (173-77) that university professors have stepped into the shoes of the missionaries and the Indian agents. So I enter the dialogue (attentively) from this limited and specific position because the complexities of the text raise important questions—for women's writing and its efforts to identify women's experience, for cross-cultural reading and its

problems for interpretation, and for theories of autobiography which struggle continuously with the relation of life to text and of genre to life-writing.

*Jessica* is a play. It grew out of a collaborative process that began in the Theatre Passe Muraille in the fall of 1976. This mobile “guerrilla theatre” without walls made docudrama its trademark during the early seventies, focussing on local communities and alternative histories (see Wasserman, 16ff). Brian Arnott stresses the “conscientious effort” of the Passe Muraille “to give theatrical validity to sounds, rhythms and myths that were distinctively Canadian” (107). Maria Campbell, who had already published *Halfbreed* in 1973, approached Paul Thompson of Theatre Passe Muraille because she had been convinced by Clarke Roger’s production of *Almighty Voice* and then by Thompson’s production of *The West Show* that this kind of theatre could empower the Métis community. “My weird world appeared normal to him,” she says in *The Book of Jessica*, “so I talked and talked” (16).

At this point, in 1976, they agreed to an exchange; Campbell would learn from taking part in “the process,” and in return she would “give [her] bag of goodness knows what.” (This “exchange” between Maria Campbell of the Métis community and the Theatre Passe Muraille provides a cross-cultural subtext to my discussion of “appropriative autobiography.”) “The play,” she explains, “would be about being a woman and the struggle of trying to understand what that meant.” “Goodness knows what” was based on *Halfbreed* but took on a life of its own when Thompson called in Linda Griffiths, the white actor/improvisor, to “study” Campbell and to play the role of a young Métis woman from her experience of Campbell’s life. Painfully between them, the two women evolved a third; *Jessica*’s name comes from a Waylon Jennings song they heard on the car radio as they travelled through the interior of Saskatchewan together.

*The Book of Jessica*, which ends with the final text of what was, over long process, an improvised play, dramatises their “struggle of trying to understand.” The struggle, of course, is not simply that of understanding what “a woman” means but also of understanding how women across barriers of race, culture, privilege, and age, interpret “a woman” for themselves and for each other. “Eighteen years separated us,” Griffiths says, “as well as race, class, culture, social work, political work, and, in its own category, what Maria called ‘the street’—almost every boundary I knew, and lots I didn’t know” (21). Griffiths persisted with revisions to the play despite Campbell’s

anger and withdrawal and the final text carries her name as first author. It was Campbell, however, who suggested both that they talk through their difficulties with each other and that the edited transcripts from these talks contextualise the published form of the play. Interestingly, Campbell withdrew from the final editing of the transcripts in order to run for political office. Griffiths took final responsibility for the editing and for the narrative thread that ties the transcripts together.

Appropriation in this context probably begins with Clarke Rogers' production of *Almighty Voice* which had the Native community, as Campbell puts it, "in an uproar. It was a play about Native people done by whites; it also delved into a spiritual world that we felt should be interpreted by Natives themselves. I went to denounce it, and ended up defending it" (16). Campbell became complicit with her acceptance of Linda Griffiths for performance and with her introduction of Griffiths into the Native community and into their spiritual practices. Most immediately, she met opposition from Hannah, her friend and teacher, who was "absolutely against it" (25). She exposed herself both to Griffiths' possible desecration of these experiences and to the possible outrage of the Native Elders when the play opened in Saskatoon in 1982.

Griffiths' appropriation is obvious and has come under very recent fire (see Hoy). "I was white," she writes, "Really white" (15). Yet she first read, then enacted, and then wrote the life of a Métis woman who was old enough to be her mother, and did so, furthermore, in terms of Native spirituality. (I suppose her transgressions somewhat modify my own.) Without downplaying the questionable nature of all these decisions, I would like to focus here on the possibility that the text we now have actually reasserts a Native voice in a situation we might commonly describe as appropriative. (At the simplest level, for instance, Campbell stops Griffiths in her description of the sacred ceremonies at the farmhouse. "[Y]ou were invited into that circle," she says, "to help you understand, not to write a book about it" (27). Repeatedly, through this brief argument, Campbell corrects Griffiths' assumptions about her role and challenges her to use experience, not interpretation, as her artistic medium.) I think the empire speaks back throughout this text in unexpected ways that inform the final product beyond anything Griffiths could have controlled if she had wanted to, and in ways that should seriously affect our thinking about gender, genre, and voice.



In “Mimesis: The Dramatic Lineage of Auto/Biography,” Evelyn Hinz has argued thoroughly and convincingly, on historical and theoretical grounds, for the close relationship of drama and autobiography in the western literary tradition (195-212). In this case, I would like to suggest that Campbell’s choice and use of drama develop out of ancient and ongoing Métis and First Nations traditions. Clearly, the methods of the Theatre Passe Muraille, which were of specifically European origin, are relevant to this discussion, not least because they were reacting to the perceived elitism of traditional theatre. Our focus here, however, is less on the play than on the extended dialogue that constitutes the main body of the book and on the ways in which Campbell seems to control that production of her life story as process. Her recognition of drama as a power tool for community work, her guidance of Griffiths through experiences that were foreign to her and that activated all the white woman’s anxieties, and the building of both play and contextualising text out of oral exchanges—this sequence describes a distinct aesthetic that depends on oral traditions, recognises the spiritual as central to daily life, the individual as centred in the community, and art as closely related to political value.

Campbell also assumes the need consciously to negotiate thresholds between experience and the representation of experience. Just as she breaks into Griffiths’ “description” of the native ceremony and insists she play back her own experience of it, so the rape scene and the creation of Wolverine become powerful as Griffiths reacts to Campbell’s experience from the previously unidentified sources of her own. The rape, for example, in which Griffiths becomes the 12-year-old Jessica first “down on the ground . . . screaming and biting” and then sobbing, and finally singing herself a lullaby, reduces Campbell to tears. Dialogue between the two women is prefaced in the text as it would be in a play text by the first name of the speaker. “Afraid to face [Maria],” Linda says “I don’t know if I sang the song you maybe sang, or if you sang anything, but . . .”

MARIA “You really did sing the song.”

LINDA “My mother sang that song.”

MARIA “My mother too.”

“As we held each other,” Griffiths concludes, “it was as if I’d unleashed my own memories. Not a story, or even acting, but something else” (46).

Such negotiation between experience and its artistic re-presentation is

continuous through *The Book of Jessica*. The formal construction of such drama grows out of/spills into the whole process of exploratory dialogue that is both dangerous and explosive but that contains its own tropes for recovery. This repetition and replay, furthermore, deconstructs conventional binaries that privilege one and disadvantage the other. The relationship between the two women in the text refuses the oppositional and works instead toward a mutual recognition.

Finally, the circular drama of text and context, of life and art, and of cross-cultural reading is self-reflexive so it resists both final appropriation and closure. Barbara Godard has described the Trickster workshops that understand the word (as in the oral context that enables progressive and emergent meaning) as “a process of knowing, provisional and partial, rather than as revealed knowledge itself, and [as aiming] to produce texts in performance that would create truth as interpretation rather than those in the Western mimetic tradition that reveal truth as pre-established knowledge” (184). Godard’s Western, mimetic tradition, of course, is the literate tradition that privileges the eye over the other senses and allows us to assume that meaning and truth become available instantly and can be firmly established. When Jessica recognises and names herself at the end of the book, she has accepted the Old Way of the spirit world of her grandmothers and has been granted her powersong, but her reintegration is only the beginning of the healing process that Campbell wants for the Métis people. Her self-naming power is also part of an ongoing process in which such healing may be inter-personal and cross-cultural like the long dialogue between these two women that leads up to it.

**A**rnold Krupat describes Native autobiography as a post-contact phenomenon largely dependent on the interventive ethnographer. Narratives by and about Native people have changed in style and structure from academic analysis of the reified “primitive” to unreflective romanticism about the indigene, to the current self-consciousness that acknowledges not only that the ethnographer is inevitably biased but also, as Robin Ridington puts it in his introduction to *The Trail to Heaven*, that the modern ethnographer is involved in mutual, interactive interpretation, that the object of study is also a subject ethnographer. (Involvement and response of the subject, whether this Métis woman or the local farming community in southern Ontario, etc., seem to be central to the work of the Theatre Passe Muraille.)

*The Book of Jessica* posits Griffiths, as it were, in the role of the white ethnographer and replays variations of white/Native relations. Campbell takes Griffiths home to study the Native community but reverses the situation that Penny van Toorn describes as typical in which the autobiographer is demoted to “native informant” under the aegis of the “patron discourse”; “the dominant culture,” as she puts it, “issues minority writers with their licenses to speak (which is also, of course, the site where mechanisms of exclusion and suppression operate)” (103).<sup>2</sup> At the personal level, Griffiths experiences the desires and anxieties that are commonplace in white Canadian interpretation of the Native. What she does not encounter is what Spivak has called “the Imperialist’s self-consolidating Other” (quoted in Fee, 176). She, and not Campbell, is Other. She needs to “brown up,” and Campbell applies makeup; this is enabling (“like wearing an invisible cloak” [45]), and frightening when it turns streaky, refuses to work. She is ashamed and walks, as she had read in *Halfbreed* of the Métis walking when among white people, “with [her] head down around Native people. I felt ashamed,” she says. “I felt them watching my skin” (50). (Penny van Toorn has drawn my attention to Joan Crate’s poem (in Petrone, 161), from *Pale as Real Ladies*, to which Griffiths’ situation seems to be responding; here, little half-Native girls

. . . curl [their] hair and dust talcum powder  
over cheeks and eyelids,  
turn pale as real ladies.)

Griffiths tells how Tantoo Cardinal taught her to chant on the banks of the South Saskatchewan River. “She never made me feel stupid, no matter what kind of sounds came out. Still, I had an image of myself on stage in brown greasepaint and borrowed feathers, singing a power song, with the elders going, ‘You’ve got to be kidding’” (52). At the farmhouse ceremony, Griffiths had felt the need to chant: “If I had been able to chant, if I hadn’t been afraid of my uncertain voice mixed in with the strange nasal call of the people around me, then it might have been easier. But I felt myself to be still a watcher, as if the comforts of the ceremony were not for me” (29). (Her sense of exclusion and her rendering of Jessica’s powersong are both important for this discussion.)

Although Griffiths attempts to efface herself, believing her role is that of medium, she is no better able than the ethnographer to be a truly blank receptor. For Campbell, this “blank receptor” is not blank at all but comes,

indeed, culturally endowed with abject guilt, with loss of history, and with the limitations of a rational straitjacket. At this continuously negotiated threshold between life and art, Griffiths' "professional" silence obstructs the transformative process. "Why is it okay to lay my guts all over the table," Campbell asks, "but you can only take some of yours, and by the way, madam, let's make sure they're the pretty ones. I've had a hard time with this the last few years, you being so virginal. Don't ask me to do something that you're not prepared to do, and if you're not prepared to do it, then understand why I'm nervous about working with you" (88) Only as Griffiths learns to stop smiling like the Virgin Mary and acknowledge her own self-hatred, shame, and emptiness can "exchange" reanimate the process. It's a late development in which Campbell says:

[Y]ou're letting me see you, you're talking to me. You're letting me see you as an equal with things inside.

When I say I saw the Virgin Mary, pure and empty, that's all I could see because you didn't give me anything else. . . . I'd come home after talking to you for hours and not feel you at all. . . . Do you have any idea what you did for me when you told me you'd been a booster? I just about fell off my chair. You're freaking out now because someone might read this. Hey, she's real, she's been in conflict, she farts in the toilet too. Talk about not being able to feel me, because I was 'dignified,' well, you sure had me fooled (87).

Because this Métis woman, furthermore, is very much alive in the present tense, and very much in the process of working within and for her own culture, conventional Eurocentric responses of nostalgia, romance, or guilt are all appropriative/inappropriate responses to her which Campbell energetically corrects. Griffiths, for example, contrasts "the awkwardly modern people who had eaten lunch" with the (surprisingly) same people during the farmhouse ceremony who "were now what I imagined 'Native' to be" (27). Her imagination, of course, is based in western literary traditions and assumptions. In dialogue, Linda has been "inspired and touched" by photographs of another ceremony. "Those guys that snuck in and painted pictures and tape-recorded and begged people to tell them things, were recording something that was dying." But Maria challenges her angrily: "[W]ho told you it was dead or dying? Those men who snuck in? Do you want to learn by sneaking around? That attitude of 'dead or dying' is what's killing us" (28). Griffiths' conventional responses create hierarchical binarisms that enable only limited, one-way, and linear movement from white to Native. Campbell rejects such binaries, associating the Church, for exam-

ple, in *Halfbreed*, with cast-off clothes. Native communities do not provide handouts but redistribute wealth from their store of what is most valuable so that exchange is generous and social and bonding.

Campbell deflects Griffiths' liberal guilt about Native people by sending her back to her own history and culture and to her own sense of oppression. She sends her to books not about the Native but about the Celt and about the goddess traditions. "Passe Muraille was known to be a political theatre," she says. "[H]ow could you be political without knowing your own stories? And they were no different from the stories of *Halfbreed* or Indian people" (36). Driven back again on herself, Linda acknowledges her first-hand experience of being "semiotically controlled": "How could I speak about my own pain?" she asks. "All my life I'd been told I had it good—white, two parents, a nice home, only two kids in the family, two cars, . . . a decent education, no trouble about food, no beatings, no overt violence. . . . Everything repressed under the dining room table. . . . I grew up desperate for the stories that would fit my nightmares" (75-76). "I know I'm from the underneath," she acknowledges, "because of the way I feel, because of the anger I feel. I feel like I'm shaking my fist at someone on top of me, and I look . . . I'm from the Canadian middle classes, who the hell am I shaking my fist at? . . . You say that if we understood our history, everything would be stronger. But it doesn't feel like that to me" (97). Historically, or from sense-memory in the Stanislavski tradition, Griffiths needs to learn the traditional Native principle of circularity that Tomson Highway has described as "the way the Cree look at life. A continuous cycle. A self-rejuvenating force. By comparison," he says, "Christian theology is a straight line. Birth, suffering, and then apocalypse" (quoted in Johnston, 255). Guilt, says Daniel David Moses in "Preface: Two Voices," sounds like the opposite thing to healing. "'It seems that you don't want to heal, you want to keep the wound'" (xvii). (This dialogue-for-preface shares several topics with the Griffiths-Campbell dialogue.) Campbell's responsibility for the healing circle includes Griffiths in its protective embrace.

As the ethnographer is transformed into two interactive subjects, so is the autobiographer. Her subject is not unified or autonomous but plural and contested. Hinz has already challenged the received distinction between the European as individual and the Native North American as a member-of-community in her brief analysis of the role of autobiography in self-interpretations: "Perhaps . . . the reason auto/biographical documents are rare in



primitive societies has to do with the fact that ritual performs a self-exorcising role for their members; and perhaps the reason auto/biographical documents are so abundant in the Western tradition has to do with the extent to which they provide a sense of the communal that we lack” (Hinz, 208).<sup>3</sup> In her introduction to *Life Lived Like a Story*, Julie Cruikshank contrasts the assumptions about autobiography in Native and European traditions and shows how these affect narrative technique. Whereas she wanted to know about the impact of change and development on the lives of three Yukon Elders, they understood their lives in terms of kinship and landscape and shaped their narratives to include mythological tales, songs, and long lists of personal and place names. Ong has suggested that the self is only visible in an oral culture through the eyes of others, that we depend on the technology of writing and print to split the subject for self-reflection (152). Cruikshank’s questions, in other words, and the answers she receives demonstrate very distinct modes of understanding and vividly reflect their re-contextualised cultures of origin.

The years of dialogue that make up *The Book of Jessica* replay uninformed assumptions, renegotiate misunderstandings, play back to each other what each has heard. The ostensible purpose of those earlier conversations that were not recorded during which Griffiths was learning to be Campbell was to enable Griffiths to “sybil” Campbell. That is a strange verb. It suggests the mystery of interpretation with the power of the actress to body forth another’s life. Her sybiling powers must have been extraordinary because Campbell recognises herself again and again with anger and pain. But this interpretive role is not one-sided. As with the circularity of exchange, while Griffiths sybils Campbell, so Campbell works as Griffiths’ mother/shaman to induct and protect her in this shared and dangerous enterprise within the Native spiritual traditions. The Métis, she points out, have always been guides and interpreters (as, in another reversal, Griffiths is too). They have linked the Native and the white in cultural/textual *métissage*, emphasising a transcultural rethinking of identity, what Lionnet describes as “relational patterns over autonomous ones, interconnectedness over independence . . . opacity over transparency” (245).<sup>4</sup>

Just as the ethnographer’s reading of the Native translated, historically, into autobiography for white consumption and needs now to be regrounded in the Native experience and in appropriate media for expression of that experience so, too, written literature affects what originates in

an oral tradition. For Native people the danger is at least twofold. Firstly, art is sometimes more privileged and therefore more powerful than ethnography (reaching a wider audience) and may involve more significant damages of appropriation. Secondly, written literature fixes in permanent form precisely that which needs to be mobile, altering in the process what is said, how it is said, and how it is read and understood. “That’s why I hate working with the English language,” Campbell says at one point, “and why I have a hard time working with white people, because everything means something else” (17).

In part, language and translation are the issues. Looking for her Métis grandmother, Christine Welsh in the NFB film, “Women in the Shadows,” feels silenced, for example, by her lack of language and is told she looks as if she ought to speak Cree, that she would understand her own emotions in Cree. Original languages, of course, connect with ancient cultures. Campbell includes Cree words in her texts for children to ensure that the Métis adults of the future acknowledge and take pride in their past. One positive feature of English (in this case) as a dominant language is that, as Beth Cuthand puts it “we could communicate with each other. I fully believe,” she continues, “that we can use English words to Indian advantage and that as Indian writers it’s our responsibility to do so” (53).

But the issue is not simply one of language. Added to the alien language is the problem of authoritative voice. “I started writing by accident,” Jeannette Armstrong says. “[A]ctually, I started answering back. I would start by saying ‘That’s not true! Indian people don’t see things that way; we see it this way’” (55). But at university she learned “that there is a certain elite way of writing that is acceptable, and if you write within that framework you can be heard by the public at large.” Nowhere has this distinction between how Native people see things and how they are heard in the colonizer’s idiom been more dramatically made than in Chief Justice Allan McEachern’s decision on 8 March 1991 on the Gitksan and Wet’suwet’en land claims. Campbell may urge Griffiths to reconnect with her own history, saying magic and power and history are inextricably related, but McEachern dismisses Gitksan history because it is all oral. *The Vancouver Sun* of 9 March 1991 quotes him as saying: “I am unable to accept . . . oral histories as reliable bases for detailed history, but they could confirm findings based on other admissible evidence.” If oral histories are neither reliable bases for western understanding of “detailed history” nor admissible

evidence in a non-Native court of law, we may well ask ourselves just how the First Nations can translate from one form of authority to another and how one Métis woman can reinterpret and renegotiate the painful relations of Native and white.

To return to Beth Cuthand: “We come from an oral tradition where our values, our world views, and our system of beliefs are transmitted orally. In this process, there is something more than information being transmitted: there’s energy, there’s strength being transmitted from the storyteller to the listener and that is what’s important in teaching young people about their identity. What we’re doing as Indian writers is taking that tradition and putting it physically onto paper and getting a broader distribution of those stories, because it’s really important for us, in terms of our continuing existence, that we transmit our identity and strength from one generation to another” (54). This consciousness of loaded cultural value, this foregrounding of addressivity, and this responsibility of the individual storyteller to the community and to the future seem to derive from Native traditions and to include Campbell’s “bag of goodness knows what.” Certainly *The Book of Jessica* challenges the hierarchies of discourse that block exchange or reciprocity. Use of first-person dialogue, as Janet Silman noted in her *Globe and Mail* review of 4 November 1989, “was absolutely right for this book, because the spoken word has an immediacy and dynamism which, even when recorded on paper, still can connect as third-person prose seldom does.” Immediacy perhaps equates with Ong’s sense of urgency at the heart of oral cultures and dynamism with the effect of language on listener/s both within and without the text.

**F**or discussion of genre, we need to hold in place here Bakhtin’s understanding (95) that the addressee assumed in each speech genre defines the genre. These genre boundaries too become permeable or mobile as Griffiths and Campbell address each other, address live audiences (very specifically the Native Elders and white critics) through performance, and address us as readers and, indeed, theorists, through the printed text.

Printed text, however, poses the danger of a potentially final idiom that privileges one audience above another. “[I]t does work better when we talk,” Campbell tells Griffiths. “‘Because when it’s written, it just sounds too . . . it sounds written’” (67). Print represents one conclusion of negotiated meaning and connects in this text with the written contract by which

Campbell felt so hideously betrayed, and, quite explicitly, with land claims and with the continuous displacement of the Métis by white settlers. (In *Halfbreed*, Campbell positions her own life in the context of Métis beginnings, the history of white settlements, the Riel Rebellion, the Battle of Batoche, and the migrant destitution of the Road Allowance people.) The theatre contract is like so many other white/Native treaties; the white authority draws it up and asks for friendly approval, but the different peoples are meaning different things. Such agreements are too rarely double-voiced and tend, rather, to be appropriative. Griffiths wonders whether *Jessica* is a treaty. “To me, it was a sacred thing,” she says. “A treaty is a sacred thing,” Campbell agrees, “but a treaty has to be two equals, two people sitting down and respecting what the other one has to offer, and two people doing it together, negotiating. Otherwise, it’s not a treaty” (82). She is describing, of course, the ideal, the sacred, not the historical. The printed forms threaten, however, to fossilize both relationships and texts that are still volatile and in process of negotiation. Such forms represent ownership to the white and that term does not seem to translate into Native languages or to belong in the cultures that the languages express.

Interestingly, these two women focus their talk about contract and treaty on their feelings of joint ownership of *Jessica*, the land that they have both worked so painfully and hard. (This spatial metaphor for the text is possible only for print, not for oral narrative. Campbell’s independent use of print, like her work toward the contextualising of an improvised play in print, reminds us that her traditions are hybrid and that Métis involves integration.) Interestingly, too, Batoche, and the centenary celebrations of the Battle of Batoche figure largely in Campbell’s ability to rethink and renegotiate their relative positions. As with her work with women in prison, Campbell seems to gain strength from positions perceivable as weakness: “vulnerability is strength,” she says in her interview with Doris Hillis (50). “That goes back to my grandmother, because she said that’s what the circle is: give everything away and it will all come back.” She struggles in these dialogues not for ownership versus appropriation but for a listener who really hears her and whose response is appropriate to what she has heard.

For all Griffiths’ serious attention and her remarkable intuitions (and Campbell acknowledges these as in the dance of liberation, for instance, that Griffiths introduces after the rape scene) Griffiths has a lot to learn. As with her fear that their project would die unless she completed it, Griffiths

expresses her passion for the treasures of Native spirituality in an extended explanation and appeal: “I’m just like all the other white people,” she says. “I’m a gold digger. . . . I saw your culture, and it was like a treasure chest opening up. . . . I am a gold digger. I went for that treasure chest with everything in me, my fists were full of your gold, my fingers closed in on your jewels. . . . So I’m a gold digger. I was then and I am now. And it hurt so much then, and it hurts so much now, to see magic come alive and then have your wrists slapped because that magic can never be yours” (84-86).

If we think in terms of negotiated meaning, of the processes of interactive readings, and of the limited value of the printed word, Maria’s answer is particularly challenging: “Nobody ever said the magic wasn’t yours,” she says, “that the power wasn’t yours, nobody ever slapped your wrists, that was your interpretation of what you were being told. You just said that you were tired of interpreting all the interpretations of the Cross, all the witches, all the things that theatre and poetry had done to those images. All I was trying to tell you was that if you were tired of it, then why are you trying to do the same thing to us? Then one day the same thing will happen to our stuff, the same thing that happened to European culture. . . . Maybe I get overly uptight when I tell you, ‘Don’t do that,’ but it’s only because, if we exploit it and don’t even fully understand it ourselves, then we’re giving something away to be abused” (86). Exploitation here may describe claims and “treaties” that fail to acknowledge the varieties and dynamic continuities of lived experience, or the ways, indeed, in which lived experience can spill into its own representation. Campbell seems to be privileging the living that generates life-story and fearing, indeed, the story that may prematurely “conscript” the living.

**T**heatre was a natural choice for the author of *Halfbreed* precisely because it works as live performance and blurs the boundaries between contingent reality and its narrative interpretation. “Theatre . . . gives the oral tradition a three-dimensional context,” Tomson Highway explains, “telling stories by using actors and the visual aspects of the stage” (Petrone, 173). It provided one more way in which Campbell could extend the story she needed to tell beyond the limitations of the printed word and ensure its return to the community. This particular theatrical drama, furthermore, enacts the drama with which we began—about who may speak and who may listen and what the listener may do with what



she hears. Drama can work as process—back into the past and forward into political effect. It contains revolutionary potential; you speak and I listen and play back what I have heard; in *The Book of Jessica*, such exchanges involve rage and silence and magnificent instances of hard-won empathy. The dialogue/drama continues and diminishes its own possibility of closure.

For this Métis woman, furthermore, the performance of relationship, the intersubjectivity with a white woman, becomes performatively significant for the autobiographical act. For her, as Jessica, and as Maria-and-Linda, the woman-self is not singular but interactive, mediating and mediated. And this mediation, that is performed agonistically by two women of each other, sets up a cyclical motion. “This mind goes in circles,” says the grandmother-figure of Vitaline in the play. “[A]nd don’t you forget it” (167). Her circles are those of the grandmothers, of the spirit world, of prayers for protection, of relationships in process, of recognition that all life forms are connected and responsible to each other, of performance that contains but does not confine evolution of character and of life story. Both the play and its dramatic context connect the inner life with its outer appearance in repeated transformations so that these women are both mother and daughter, both hurting and healing, both present and absent as befits the best of autobiographers—readers, writers, and performers for each other.

It is possible that Campbell withdrew from the final editing of *The Book of Jessica* because she foresaw no possibility of an appropriate representation of her life experience. I wonder, however, whether her “bag of goodness knows what” does not include this crossing of generic boundaries between ethnography, autobiography, and drama, whether she does not overrule the traditional genre boundaries of western literatures in order to connect her life with its spiritual roots, and its dramatic presentation with sacred ceremony. She creates a safe place in which, as she puts it, she can move forward by looking at what she is afraid of and gain strength from recognition. The courage of her enterprise becomes vivid in a brief story she tells of turning to face the devil from whom she has been running by the river in Saskatchewan. The interactive value of her enterprise includes Griffiths and *her* worst fears—even to the creation of Wolverine and the danger that two women begin the work and only one may survive. Because Campbell understands the magic properties of language to create reality, she performs the ultimate transformations of past times that have been intolerable to them both, through healing, into a new and integrated order from which Jessica is born.

Writing from a non-Native perspective must have, as Jeannette Armstrong tells us, “a lot . . . to do with listening first of all, listening and understanding and waiting till that understanding has reached a point at which you can say, do you mean this and that person says yes, I mean this” (in *Telling it* 51). “People at large,” says Profeit-LeBlanc, “can have a glimpse of understanding.” But, she adds parenthetically, “(You can never fully understand)” (115). Whatever happens in *The Book of Jessica*, however, is important to my own search for the voices and genres of autobiography. My discussion, therefore, is interrogative and my questions remain questions.

#### NOTES

- 1 My thanks for significant help with this paper may serve as a precursive comment on the problems it raises. Margery Fee, Eva-Marie Kröller, Arnold Krupat, Penny van Toorn, and Jerry Wasserman were generous with scholarly information. Blanca Chester and Valerie Dudoward, Marilyn Iwama, Jenny Lawn, Sharon Meneely, Dorothy Seaton, Julie Walchli, and Penny van Toorn kindly allowed me to read unprinted work. Marilyn Iwama, Jenny Lawn, and Penny van Toorn took their red pencils to my early drafts. Elizabeth Emond checked the accuracy of quotations. Both this paper and my working life have been enriched by such collaboration; as ever, the mistakes remain my own.
- 2 Terry Goldie has referred to the indigene as a “semiotic pawn on a chessboard under the control of the white signmaker” (70). Griffiths’ recognition of the ideologies controlling her perception of what Marcia Crosby has called “the imaginary Indian,” and of herself as also semiotically controlled, is important for the “exchange.”
- 3 Arnold Krupat tells me: “[o]ne reason there aren’t autobiographical documents in Native cultures is demographic: no small scale society, in which everybody knows everybody else and their business would *need* to hear people tell of their lives. They know their lives and know their own lives are known. The other reason, more complicated, is that narratives ostensibly about other people, “mythic” or “historical” are also taken as bearing on one’s own life history.” Letter dated 25 November 1993. Krupat’s comments on this paper were generous and constructive but did not support my reading.
- 4 The indeterminacy that Lionnet describes as *métissage* appears also in *Jessica*, the play; transformations blur the boundaries established in traditional theatre by scenes. Jerry Wasserman has pointed out in conversation that *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*, by Monique Mojica, another Métis writer, is the only other play he knows that uses transformations.

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# Hand

Holding this  
pale hand, the yellow wax  
at the cuticles  
spoil the effect of a young  
man merely asleep  
in this unnatural place, I can't

save him now. If only (phrase  
meant to torment) I could  
have that torrid summer  
day back, could have  
been at the cliff-edge  
as summer departed  
in one final whoosh  
of air from his body  
that dared the 90 foot  
bit of fun, the drop  
to black waters below. I would have

saved him, chafed  
his hand till warmth  
and colour returned, life-flush  
always outdone by  
his red hair. Can only reach now  
for his hand  
as I did that day at Whistler  
canoeing the River of  
Golden Dreams (hard to believe  
that name, that we were there once).  
Sharp bend and slight shift of  
roiling waters  
overturned us. Standing waist-deep  
in moving water, gripping the force-  
driven canoe with one hand, I shoved

his older brother swimming toward  
shore, turned to my eight year old  
son starting to bob downstream (life-  
jacket lifting him high), lunged  
with my empty hand (somehow  
noting a log-jam not far ahead)  
and caught him  
this hand  
for another ten years. Not being

there  
this time  
I can only trace  
the frail time-lines  
on his hand  
save him  
this way.

# The Autobiographings of Mourning Dove

**W**hy do we visit graves?

Why would we travel to a place we have never been to before, and stand at the foot of a grave in which lie the remains of someone we have never seen in the flesh?

In the summer of 1992 I drove to Omak, Washington, to visit the grave of Mourning Dove, the first Native American woman ever to write a novel. At the tourist bureau they had never heard of her, but they told me that the graveyard I had mentioned was in Okanogon, the next town.

The graveyard, white and dry under the hot familiar sun, was deserted. I parked my car and got out and stood where I could see the whole place. Then I walked to the area that looked 1930s-ish. The first grave I looked at was hers.

She had bought this plot out of her minimal wages from hard orchard work, a grave in a white people's cemetery. In Jay Miller's introduction to her autobiography, I had read that the words on her marker were only "Mrs. Fred Galler" (xxvi). But now I saw that someone had cut a rectangle out of the old stone and put a new marker in its place. It depicts a white dove flying over an opened book upon which are the words:

**MOURNING DOVE**

COLVILLE AUTHOR

1884—1936

There I was, a still living white male, standing, and eventually kneeling at the last narrow home of a great woman I had not heard of while I was being

educated there in that Okanagan Valley.<sup>1</sup> She died when I was seven months old. I did not read her books until I was the age that she had attained at her death. What did I think I was doing there? I was reading.

### **W**hy do we read autobiographies?

Reading is a cultural act, and our habits of reading will accumulate into a description of our culture. As Janet Varner Gunn puts it, “The truth of autobiography is to be found, not in the ‘facts’ of the story itself, but in the relational space *between* the story and its reader” (Gunn, 143).

Traditionally we have read male autobiography as a version of history, as the story told by those statesmen and militarists who have exercised power. Traditionally we have read female autobiography as *alternative*, the occluded life, domestic, personal and perhaps solipsistic. Perhaps concerned with the permission to write such a thing at all, with an identity. Estelle Jelinek writes: “In contrast to the self-confident, one-dimensional self-image that men usually project, women often depict a multidimensional, fragmented self-image colored by a sense of inadequacy and alienation, of being outsiders or ‘other’; they feel the need for authentication, to prove their self-worth” (Jelinek, xiii). Of course many of the most successful female autobiographies have narratized the overcoming of obstacles, and the attainment of an identity that is quite satisfactory, thank you.

Of course if you were a woman, and if you were from the Interior Plateau country, and if you were an aborigine, you were triply marginalized. You might be exotic, but if you wanted to be a writer, you had to do your writing with whatever skills you had managed to develop, in a tent or a shack, after ten hours of working in an orchard and after cooking the meals for your husband and yourself at least. That is why a still living white male will think more than twice before trying to apply normal academic, theoretical or ethnographic methods to your autobiography.

**T**here have been several versions of the main facts assigned to Mourning Dove’s life, the disagreements caused by her fictionalizing and by the errors made by white academics coming from their various angles to use her story. She was most likely born in 1885 in Idaho, the first daughter of Lucy and Joseph Quintasket (Dark Cloud). Lucy was the daughter of a woman from the Colville Tribe, one of the tribes who share the enormous Colville<sup>2</sup> Reservation in northeastern Washington, and of a



man who came from the Lakes people of eastern British Columbia. Mourning Dove's other grandmother was from the Nicola, a somewhat mysterious people who lived among the Okanagans near Merritt, B.C. Her other grandfather was probably an Okanagan, though for literary and political reasons Mourning Dove suggested that he was a white man named Haynes. There were white people named Haynes in the area. My mother used to work in Haynes's packing house in Testalinda, a mile from the Indian school at which Mourning Dove taught in 1917.

The Quintaskets usually lived on or near the Colville Reservation, among people of several Salish tribes<sup>3</sup> who had been reduced to poverty and the meanest of jobs in agriculture by the policies of the powerful whites in the eastern States. Christine Quintasket managed to get some schooling. First she went to a boarding school, and was introduced to the English language by French-Canadian nuns. Later she went to the Colville Mission school in Fort Spokane. When her widowed father married a young woman, Christine went to Montana, to trade menial work for a chance to go to an Indian school there.

But she spent more time at home than she did at schools. At home she learned a love for narrative from her two most important teachers, an adopted grandmother and an adopted white brother.

These two instilled in the Indian girl a desire to be a story-teller and a writer. For her last formal schooling she went to a business college in Calgary, where she endured the typical racism of that city, and learned things such as shorthand and typing, skills that would prove handy later while she was gathering traditional stories or writing her life by coal oil light in the night cabin. The school in Calgary did not make her spelling and grammar perfect.

But Mourning Dove wrote three important books that are in print now: *Cogewea the Half-Blood*, a novel that has been aptly called a "protest romance," (Larson, 177), *Coyotes Stories*, her versions of tales she collected from elders on both sides of the International Boundary, and *Mourning Dove: a Salishan Autobiography*, which was not to be published until a half-century after her death. The three books are equally autobiographical, and they are all about something other than Mourning Dove's life.

Mourning Dove worked herself to death. She died at the age of about fifty-one, though by her own construction she would have been forty-eight. She left no children. In the grave she was for decades Mrs Fred Galler. Now

the name on the stone is Mourning Dove, and the occupation is author rather than Mrs. For any reader standing over that stone she has no age.

**S**ometimes I ask students in my classes what their first and last names mean. Hardly any of them know. So this is what a name means in non-aborigine society: a few words on an ID card. But in a Salishan world, a name means a great deal more, whether a name of a place or a name of a person, and everyone knows this. A name is a gift, or it is family property. It is bestowed or it is earned. It is an act of honour.

When she was a little girl her parents called her Kee-ten. When an old neighbour woman named Ka-at-qhu died without passing her name to a grandchild, Kee-ten became Ka-at-qhu. A few years later a shaman woman who was pleased with the girl's help gave her her name to carry on, so now Kee-ten was also Ha-ah-pecha. Mourning Dove said that people on the reservation still used those names when speaking to her decades later.

But by this time in history Indian girls were also carrying Christian names. In the white world she was known by equivalencies of her name Kee-ten. She was Christine and Christal and Cristal and Catherine Quintasket. At the convent school she was enrolled as Christine Joseph, because her father's name was Joseph. When she was first married she signed her letters Cristal MacLeod. During her second marriage she was Christine or Catherine Galler. But Christine Quintasket wanted to be a writer, and she wanted to be an Indian writer who would be read by white readers. She decided that as a story-teller she would take the name Humishu-ma. Then she decided that the English version of her writer's name would be Morning Dove, because that bird is, in Colvile legend, the faithful wife of Salmon, and welcomes him upstream every year. Salmon-fishing is the sustenance of life for the peoples of the great Interior Plateau. In a museum in Spokane, Christine saw that the proper spelling was Mourning Dove, and though she said that it was because of that connotation not the same bird known to the Indian people, she settled on Mourning Dove as her writing name. That is the story of Mourning Dove's name.

The name Haynes does not figure at all. But these names do: Lucullus Virgil McWhorter, Heister Dean Guie, and Jay Miller. They are the names of three white men who had, in their various ways, faith in Mourning Dove's importance, and helped in the preparation of her three books, the last of course unknown to her.

When an Indian person authored a book in early twentieth century America, she was (and often still is) met with two challenging responses. One: is this person really an Indian or another Grey Owl? Isn't D'Arcy McNickle really three-quarters European stock? What about Thomas King? Two: did this person really write that book, or was it done by a white anthropologist with an ear? Did Black Elk speak much?

Anyone reading *Cogewea*, especially in these latter days, notices that the language is folksy and out-westish when the spirited "half-blood" heroine is joshing with the ranch hands: "I'm a thinkin' yo' all'd make a good preacher woman. Them there kind what wants ter be made perlice wimin an' jedges an' th' main push. Wantin' to wear breeches an' boss th' hull shebang" (42). But often the reader will find a lecture about the conditions imposed on Native Americans by the U.S. governments, and that these passages are rendered in the language one expects from a school teacher who once had to read Cato: "They lacked the perceptive sagacity of a certain great reformer of nearly two thousand years ago; who, when carrying the Message to the benighted Athenians, 'stood in the midst of Mars hill' and declared that it was of their 'Unknown God' to whom he had noticed an altar erected, that he spake" (133). This is Cogewea in conversation with the opportunist easterner she resists and then unhappily falls for.

The novel is, as it says on the title page, "Given through Sho-pow-tan," the Indian name that she and others gave to McWhorter. It is pretty clear that it was McWhorter who added the didactic diatribes against white exploitation that delay the narrative. One wonders whether the undoubtedly good-hearted McWhorter thought that the stilted language was normal enough to be used by Mourning Dove the author or by her characters. Was McWhorter's grasp of fiction so poor? Of course he had a somewhat different agenda than that of his co-author. In later years, when Mourning Dove sent new manuscripts to McWhorter she asked him to stay away from the arch rhetoric, from what she called white people's big words.

It is a sad fact of life that when white anthropologists who are genuinely sympathetic with the cause of indigenous peoples become interested in their stories, they are interested in them for anthropological reasons and thus marginalize their literary qualities, hence exhibiting what could be called a very subtle racism. Jay Miller says that Mourning Dove's letters show that while she was working on the Coyote stories, "McWhorter was concerned that *Indian* themes and concerns be highlighted, whereas

Mourning Dove wanted to express her knowledge and literary talents” (*Autobiography*, xxiii). Intelligent people on both sides of the text understand that problem and work together to make the best of an imperfect situation. There are several such problems in the area of ethnobiography. Mourning Dove’s Coyote stories and autobiography would have been, perhaps, more interesting to read in scripted Interior Salish.

Mourning Dove was an Indian woman writing in the language of her white readers. Just about any of her readers was going to be more interested in her as a representative of her people than as a novelist. The same was likely to be true of her editors. Mourning Dove was also a politician. In addition to the long hours she spent on ladders in orchards, at laundry sinks in rooming houses and at her ill-lit typewriter, she spent a lot of time working for Native people who were caught in the hard machinery of liberal democracy. She rescued families from border police. She wrote illuminating letters to newspapers and the State house. She became the first woman on the Colville Reservation Tribal Council.

In all her books one can discern her two principal social purposes—to make certain that her people’s stories and the story of their life will be preserved in print while their way of life is being threatened by officially-induced poverty, and to make a bridge between the Indians and the whites on their land. It is easy to assume that these two ambitions are at odds with one another. But Mourning Dove, whose view must be taken as better qualified than ours, did not think so. She was aware of the dangers one must inevitably pass through. One of the most amusing scenes in *Cogewea* concerns the heroine’s anger at a white woman’s fanciful book about Indian life. Some of the ranch hands joke about the misinformation they handed to an eager female tenderfoot scribe: “Why, them there writin’ folks is dead easy pickin’ for the cowpunchers” (94). Finally “Cogewea found solace in consigning the maligning volumn [*sic*] to the kitchen stove” (96). Writing this novel during the second decade of the twentieth century, Mourning Dove seems to anticipate most of the arguments heard more recently about paternalism and misappropriation of voice.

In *Cogewea*, with its melodramatic plot and editorializing, the most interesting and accomplished passages are those in which Cogewea’s grandmother, sometimes in her sweat lodge, tells the stories and traditions of pre-contact Salishan life. They are interesting not only because of their ethnographic information but also because of their narrative skill. They are

clearly Mourning Dove's purest contribution to the novel.

And they are most clearly the nearly perfect conjoining of tradition and the individual talent. That conjunction is what Jay Miller has tried his best to produce in the autobiography. I like to notice the nice title: *Mourning Dove: a Salishan Autobiography*. Everyone has treated of that word "autobiography," and its constituent parts. James Olney has shown the way in which twentieth century reading has shifted attention from *bios* to *autos*, from life to self (Olney, 19). Miller's title tells us that in our approach here we have to look for something else, something created by the concepts of person and people among the aborigines of the Interior Plateau, and by the dynamic of Mourning Dove's doubled ambition. It is after all *a* Salishan autobiography, and thus promising of a singular life. It is also a *Salishan* autobiography, not just that of Christine Quintasket.

It is assembled from boxes of mismatched writings that Mourning Dove left to Dean Guie's attic. In the frantic and illness-filled years before her death she thought that she was writing two books—one an ethnographic description of Salishan life, and the other a narrative of her own upbringing and education. The book that Miller assembled from her papers is an admirable conflation of these intentions. Curiously, in this "autobiography" of America's first Indian woman novelist, there is no recounting of her writing *Cogewea*, nor of the tiresome twelve-year wait to see it published.

Miller arranges the papers in three main sections: "A Woman's World," "Seasonal Activities," and "Okanogan History." The first chapter is called "My Life," and is the most clearly anecdotal autobiography as well as the longest chapter in the book. Yet it is filled with seemingly impersonal lore, and the later chapters on such things as salmon-fishing, are narratized with memoirs of the Quintasket family and others. Miller admits his own anthropological bias, and allows that he helped to "create" the text. Perhaps the academic professionalizing of his trade has saved us from McWhorter's stentorian rhetoric. And maybe we could say that all three editors "milled" Mourning Dove's texts, somehow extending her process when she developed the Indian tales she gathered from elders. Miller says of the compromise he has fashioned: "the autobiography does represent a personal ethnography of lasting value" (*Autobiography*,xxxiv).

Mourning Dove said that she wrote to prove to her white audience that Indian people were not the savage stoics that had been created in the white romances, that Indian people felt strong emotions, just as strong as those

felt by the recently arrived aliens. She said that the Coyote stories were “set down by me for the children of another race to read” (*Coyote Stories*, 12). It was not only Indian education that she was interested in. Though any text can offer only a momentary joining of understandings, she hoped that each of these joinings would contribute toward a world in which tolerance and familiarity would replace the systemic racism that characterized official life in her part of the country.

What about the danger of appropriation that seems now to accompany more interracial knowledge? It is obvious that any autobiography invites appropriation: here is my life for your dollar. Appropriation, if it is a problem, is not the big problem. For the First Nations of America, the problem has been misappropriation, and expropriation. Autobiographies and autobiographical fictions are going to be read, one hopes. If the reader somehow then becomes a writer, his writing will be about his experience. His experience here will be reading the book.

**D**o you remember when we were kids and we wondered whether what other people called “green” might be what we would see as “red”? As kids we learned that we had to accept the fact that we joined in our understanding only through words, through the text. Reading Indian stories, having good Indian friends, putting headbands around our heads, will not make us Indians. If we try to write or rewrite Indian narratives we will not do it. Autobiography is a narrative of mortality, and we all have our own deaths to do. Yet the pleasant thing about autobiography is that old-fashioned closure is impossible. Perhaps the author is dead, in Roland Barthes’s sense, but she is also never dead. At the “end” of her book one is left hanging, alive, expecting the truth to be revealed eventually but perhaps by another. A Salishan autobiography, then, should imply that the Salishan peoples are alive, that no one has written their epitaph.

Remember what Barthes wrote at the beginning of his essay “The Death of the Author”: “in ethnographic societies the responsibility for a narrative is never assumed by a person but by a mediator, shaman or relator whose ‘performance’—the mastery of the narrative code—may possibly be admired but never his ‘genius.’” (Barthes, 142) That is what we have to understand about Mourning Dove’s doubleness: when she wants us to appreciate her writing ability as well as the ethnographic information she is imparting, it is not originality she wants us to scrutinize, but performance.

She is not trying to get us to know that she has deep feelings, but that Indian people, the Okanagans and the Colvilles, have deep feelings.

Mourning Dove knew how important it was to the very lives of her family and tribe that she understand the function of the reader. She knew the principle that Barthes invokes near the end of his essay: “a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. . . a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination.” (148)

So how do we North American white men read Mourning Dove without looking for Pocahantas?

Pocahantas has always haunted American literature. And there has always been a kind of ethno-pornography in the response of white poets and other writers. First she was wild, savage, naked, lewd. Then she was romanticized, penny-dreadfulled, tom-tommed till her feet ached. In this century she was “redeemed” by poets such as Hart Crane and William Carlos Williams, becoming the essential Native spirit still alive in the Europeanized American continent. But always she was the image of desire, the exotic removed from her society to become the object of a male gaze. She was the literary equivalent of the naked model.

Certainly Pocahantas never wrote anything. One might as well permit women to become painters rather than the painted. In American publishing there was one kind of book about Indians that was always popular. This was the captivity narrative. It was especially successful when the captured and then rescued and then autobiographical person was a woman. The stories were usually religious in denouement, and filled with anti-Indian sentiments, filled with descriptions of cruelty, paganism and savagery. Reading them was not just a cultural act—it was a pornographic act as well.

There were no captivity narratives written by Indian women forced to live among the Christians. Not until recently.

Remember that there was in the nineteenth century (and still is in some quarters) a sentiment at large that says that all writing by women is autobiographical. Women, normally regarded as properly the object of the male gaze, would remain that in the reading of their writing. One would think that Gertrude Stein took care of that problem.

Early in the *Autobiography* Mourning Dove offers a story of her grandmother Pah-tah-heet-sa, a Nicola medicine woman. No one could make a

Pocantas of her. Once when the people were travelling over the high Nicola trail to visit in the Okanagan, Pah-tah-heet-sa went well ahead of them, gathering huckleberries.

When this brave woman drew near the berry patch, she saw a grizzly feeding. This did not stop her. She took her digging stick of dogwood and prepared to fight if the bear meant to charge at her, which the bear did not hesitate to do. With a howl that would have frozen the blood of any coward, it charged. She threw off her pack and held her stick to challenge the brute, saying "You are a mean animal and I am a mean woman. Let us fight this out to see who will get the berry patch."

The bear did not answer her but opened its mouth wide and came at a leap. She watched for her chance and drove the sharp stick into the animal's mouth. The bear fell back in pain, then jumped at her, even more angry. The fight went on long enough that the warriors approached, not expecting to see such a sight. When they drew their arrows to shoot, she commanded them, "Don't shoot. Wait! We are fighting this to the finish. He is a mean animal and I am a mean woman. We will see who is the strongest and conqueror in this battle."

The woman roared in imitation of the angry bear and drove her stick again into the wide, wide mouth. Every time it charged, this would drive it back. The people watched the fight until the sun lay low in the western sky. Only then did the grizzly walk away, broken and bleeding. The old woman had only a few scratches.

She picked up her basket and gathered the berries she had won, while the people stood in wonderment. She died very old when she and her buckskin horse rolled down a steep embankment near Oro-ville. She and the horse drowned and were both buried on the bank of the Similkameen River in an unmarked grave. Thus ended a brave, mean woman. (5-6)

Anyone of a comparative-literature mind will note the resemblance to European stories of the confrontations and deaths of noble knights. But I believe the story of Mourning Dove's grandmother.

I also think I know, as much as a white male reader in this latter time can know, what the story is for. I know that Pah-tah-heet-sa lives on in Mourning Dove herself, and that she continues to live in Okanagan stories. I think of Maeg, the rooted and political woman who appears toward the end of Jeanette Armstrong's novel *Slash*. Maeg is from the U.S. part of the valley, but has parents from the Canadian side. I think that she is seen to be Pah-tah-heet-sa, and Christine Quintasket and Mourning Dove and Jeanette Armstrong. I think that she may have had something to do with the transformation of that gravestone in Okonogan, Washington.

Beth Cuthand, a First Nations writer from the Prairies, put the question of autobiography this way: "Often when we are writing, it's not our words that are coming. The grandmothers, the grandfathers come and write



through us” (Dybikowski, 53). No need for a muse when there is a family around. And you do not need to be a writer to take part in the making of the family story, the tribal story, a story of the Okanagan land. Among the Okanagans and other peoples of the Interior Salishan, response was expected from the listeners, encouraging voices to keep the narrative going. Among the people of the Plateau, invisible property is more valuable and more lasting than visible property. Autobiography (if we post-Hellenic people can use that term here) is a care that would be failed if it were to fall simply to an individual with a unique story to tell.

But Mourning Dove’s *Autobiography* is also directed toward a non-Indian audience. What can we do to respond properly, to keep these stories alive among us too? Why do we bother visiting the banks of the Similkameen near Oroville?

Mourning Dove learned her double narrative task right at home in her Indian father’s house. Teequalt, the new grandmother she brought home taught her Salishan stories and taught her to pay attention to her own gift as a story-teller. Jimmy Ryan, the white boy her father brought into the family, was fond of yellowback novels, and taught his little sister to read the English found in them. Once her mother papered the walls with pages from a new one. Jimmy and Christine read the walls.

Mourning Dove decided that she would try to trust the white world. She knew that she was turning tales into text, the people’s property into information. Janet Gunn says: “What is made present is not merely a past that is past. What is presented is a reality, always new, to which the past has contributed but which stands, as it were, in front of the autobiographer” (Gunn, 17).

In front of the reader, too.

#### NOTES

- 1 On the U.S. side of the border the spelling is Okanogan, while on the Canadian side it is Okanagan.
- 2 The Colville Reservation in northeastern Washington is populated by several Salishan peoples. One group is called the Colviles, the spelling changed to avoid confusion between place and tribe.
- 3 The term “tribe” is used in the U.S. In Canada we tend to use such terms as “band” or “community.”

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*I would also like to express my appreciation of the extensive work and publications of Dr. Alanna Kathleen Brown of Montana State University. Dr. Brown is the leading scholar of Mourning Dove's writing and life, and a trusted friend of the Quintasket family. I encourage readers to seek out her work; they might begin with her essay "Mourning Dove's Canadian Recovery Years, 1917-1919" in Canadian Literature 124/125 (Spring/Summer 1990): 113-22.*



## This Side of the Border

Alberta lies mostly on the interior plain,  
its southern reaches dry  
and treeless, flat to the untrained eye.  
Outsiders drive quickly west,  
seldom notice sloughs far  
beneath skies of geese.  
They pull off the Trans-Canada  
at Brooks, picnic in the irrigated gardens  
of the Experimental Farm.  
A boy tips up a newly  
opened rose.

He breathes it in,  
the scent vivid as the prairie winds.  
He returns to the car, the rose  
unlike him bred to withstand  
the embrace of winter.

At the edge of each city, before  
the poplar groves are ploughed under,  
these green oases are rank with children.  
Only these trees are old enough  
to hold a child, shoulder  
forts dreamt about in the school library,  
the boards lifted from a half-finished house.  
Unwanted jackets hung on lower  
branches are thick with dust,  
sunset sweating in the wind,  
the call home for dinner  
virulent as pollen.

Long ago surveyors walked the 49th parallel  
past the Cypress Hills until they reached  
the Rockies and struck northwest,  
balanced along alpine ridges to an outlook  
where, at the 55th parallel,  
they grew tired of a view blocked  
by misted peaks.

They descended,  
cut north through  
a parkland of scrub forest.  
From Saskatchewan, the plains rose  
to meet them,

foothills that chose  
to kneel before them like  
stepping stones.

They crossed the Peace and Spirit Rivers,  
the day bitten with mosquitoes,  
the rivers called to an ice-clogged ocean  
beyond a border drafted one night  
when, faint with cold,

they could push no farther.

Alberta lies mostly on the interior plain,  
quarter sections paved for shopping mails  
and highways.

In winter what is left  
is open to masses  
of continental polar air held at a distance  
by block heaters and the Calgary Philharmonic.  
Outsider beware.

What is brought from elsewhere  
metamorphoses like pupae  
caught among the weeds of Lac-des-Arcs.  
The dragonfly that emerges has no name.  
A child catches one downstream  
in a mayonnaise jar.  
It spreads damp wings.  
The down-draft from holes driven  
into the lid with hammer and nails  
teases, barely keeps alive  
all instinct of what these walls  
of glass confine;  
and of the river—

the current stirs up urges,  
carries them along  
to settle unnoticed in the shallows  
of the river's more eastern dips and turns—

# BORDERS, borders

Letter on a poet's funeral:

László Kalnóky, dead at 74, Budapest

I

We'll never have that unnecessary

first meeting ...

So we can stay almost friends,

while I figure out

translatables

from your debatables.

The poetry doesn't need you, anyway

— never one for the literary come-on;

unobtrusively suited, tied,

putting up with each ministerial

push, pull, put upon

(anything but a radio fee europe

Freedom Writer).

Just this morning, news

of no-longer you — p.s. to a friend's

Szent György street ice-cream parlour

vanilla-stained letter,

baroque dusty border town

where southerly twilight

shadowed a lengthening spoon.

Over here, it's raining the living.

A green air-mail envelope (re-

sealed, you'd suspect)

dries out beside your poem on my desk,

corners curling at the englished ending

"into the depths."

By now, you'll know whose wording's

the more true,

what lay before you

(how did it go?):

“Tottering rags, rusty-leafed forest floor,  
 slimey stone steps down,  
 down...”

— That’s to say, sideways from here,  
 following your poem’s curve  
 across seven time-zones  
 between us, refracting  
 our respective readings.

Twilight mostly the days we shared:  
 you there in my yesterday,  
 I in your tomorrow here.

Even friends’ letters barely make the crossing  
 into alien brightnesses —  
 spilling the shadows that matter most  
 at corners of the eye and mouth  
 from prefixes, modifiers.

## II

Wish I’d said Hello, at the Writers Union poetry  
 reading in ‘82.

Something wasn’t right:  
 platform dental unease,  
 coat-hangers bobbing in the dark  
 behind a mere two audience rows...  
 Not that it bothered you, nor (for the wrong reason)  
 your Chairman’s

more to literature  
 than being a writer,  
 majoritied minorities.  
 — Soon to have his first real  
 dark night of the soul,  
 ousted from office:

“A vote, a palpable vote;  
 could be a hit,  
 a habit!”  
 — the way my companion told it,  
 in her best

Shakespeare Our Contemporary  
 BBC Overseas  
 accent (the rage of Pest).

The *sotto voce* rest

freest in parks, or  
crowded streets, for survival's sake,  
still in the shadow of

earlier decades' just  
bearable tightness of being,  
dug in behind a permanent half-smile.

Always with ways to stay intact:

"Look, no hands!"  
pulling rabbits from airless pockets  
— "never be serious," didn't you say?  
"when there isn't a choice."

### III

Only a few days ago,  
putting your body where that poem was,  
jolted downstairs

("lift" as usual "not working")  
under *hausmeister* black flags in  
rusty archway sockets  
gravemound spontaneous student roses.

— Not rating

week-long TV and streetcar grieving  
accorded a *pater patriae*  
(like those peasant poets  
on either side of Kodály),  
yet with unrestrained good-speeding  
your country does so well  
opening doors, belief.

— Nothing of it  
here, in what prides itself  
as a new country,  
hurrying its dead away.

"When I read him again, I laughed  
till I cried,"  
today's letter ended

to this  
so many times among you  
Outsider still.

— Never more so than when  
  wedged in,  
by some pensioner with a torch  
                        whisker back and forth of curtain ,  
among an audience hooting your                      prime-of-life

black-and-white epoch  
raised from the dead in Hungarocolor  
— to stumble into daylight,  
lump in throat,  
smelling burning in peacetime air.

## IV

I know, I know — too soft by half.  
But it's tough  
 in my inside-out country  
 to get a handle on your outside-in  
streetwise authenticities:  
never with reason to believe in  
anything as real  
 as the hatreds proving how well you feel,  
the love in your literature  
 before and after life.

— Tougher still  
to see what's ahead,  
the knowing unofficial comrades  
hell-bent on capitalist catch-up;  
here, those who wouldn't be seen dead  
sharing anyone or thing, take their time  
through the still to be experienced  
nineteenth century.

So in hoped-against-hope  
interim  
yours'll carry on sticking it to  
those eastern "cousins" (as M.  
would say of "ours"):



L.A.P.D. T-shirted  
    soft-coal burgering  
(where now national irony?)  
    all the time blowing kisses to *bik appel's*  
        East River goddess  
who torches northwards  
— you'll never believe —  
    the unlucky likes of us.

v

I know it's hopeless — didn't your write  
  "Believe only the dying?" —  
but have to tell you  
    things here too could make you sick.  
Reversals aren't enough to live by:  
right to left , for a start, didn't work,  
  almost all of you said.  
— Now left to right...  
I've made my bet (winning  
    to date the loss of a friend).

At least, I'll be hearing less  
                                of yours as the nation  
without a country — all the better  
to hear the whine  
    of "mine"  
                                without a nation:  
lookers-on at heroics of space and temperature,  
    while you more honestly turn away  
from locked-in supper-hour skies.

It wouldn't be any use, saying  
                                that mine's also  
a small country bordering power,  
stuck in post-this, pre-that  
    dependencies.

Behind our indefensible  
    alu-foil curtain, doggedly  
                        we bark a bit,  
baring teeth that aren't our own.

— Take it  
from one  
well into his second  
first-world country now — third,  
counting (and why not?) yours.

To each his own — you at least  
know what that is.  
Too bad our two  
aren't a better fit.

For a start,  
I'm thinking some of your history  
would suit us fine — on loan, say.

May I choose which bit?  
— Couldn't you?

Note: The poem was begun after receiving a letter from western Hungary describing the funeral of László Kálnoky (1912-86), one of whose poems I was then translating. Reference is made to Kálnoky's reading at the University Theatre, Budapest, chaired by a soon to be voted out of office Secretary of the Writers Union; a visit to a movie set in the Stalinist period; and conversations on the mutual incomprehensibility of unequal histories.

## Mourning Dove's *The House of Little Men*

On February 26, 1930, Mourning Dove dashed off an ending note to a letter for her dear friend and mentor, L. V. McWhorter: "Tomorrow-providing I have no company I shall write you a lenglend of 'House of little Men.'" [sheet 53; file 269]<sup>1</sup> She was in a train depot on her way back home to Omak, Washington, after having visited her sister, Mary Margaret, at Inkameep Reserve, near Oliver, British Columbia.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, she had heard the story on that visit to Canada. Her recounting of the tale is important for a number of reasons. First, it does belong to the long oral narrative tradition of the Okanagans<sup>3</sup> and thus its written recording preserves a part of that rich tradition. But equally important, elements of the story also illustrate how the telling of the tale was being adapted to incorporate commentary on and reactions against assimilation. It is also an important piece because Mourning Dove's rendition of the story well illustrates her storytelling skills and the command of English she had achieved by the time she was in her forties.

For those unfamiliar with Mourning Dove, it is important to know that she was one of the first Native American writers to use English to preserve the legends of her people and to comment on her times. Her life (1882/1888-1936) parallels a very harsh period in Indian-American relations, the assimilation period (1880s-1934), when Native peoples were to just disappear, if not physically, then culturally. Her final manuscripts published as *Mourning Dove, A Salishan Autobiography* (1990) include stories of her early childhood when the family followed traditional migration routes, to her experiences of

being sent off to mission and then B.I.A. schools, to the settlement of Indians onto farm plots, to a mineral rights and homesteaders run on the Colville Reservation. Her novel, *Cogewea, the Half-Blood* (1927), one of the first by an American Indian woman, explores young adulthood for a mixed-blood on the Montana frontier during the first decade of this century, and her collection of tribal legends, *Coyote Stories* (1933), is an important act by an Native American storyteller to preserve some of her cultural heritage in the face of what then appeared to be inevitable cultural genocide. The preservation of the telling of “The House of Little Men,” by carefully transcribing it for McWhorter, is just one more sign of the significance of that commitment. The sixteen pages of Mourning Dove’s original typed manuscript will be published in its entirety for the first time in this article; but before presenting it, it is important to help readers comprehend the story both as a traditional Okanagan legend and as an assimilation text.

“The House of Little Men” is about the little people who lived long ago and still live in the caves of British Columbia’s semi-arid region. It is also the story of Left Hand, a mythic warrior and medicine man. The story takes place in that time when humans could take the shapes of animal guides and where the spirit and human worlds were not distinct. Yet the story also takes place in recent historic time, that period when pale faces began to threaten the Northwest with massive immigration. It is the very combination of the timeless narrative with the crisis of White settlement that identifies Mourning Dove’s version as an assimilation piece. Such a work not only reveals to us the time-honoured cultural values of the Okanagans, it shows how they made sense through their oral tradition of cataclysmic events.

The astute reader is alerted to the themes of assimilation and cultural genocide in the introductory paragraph. The narrator links the coming of the frontiersmen and cowboy with “the Indians a mere handful of whom are left behind” [sheet 182; file 1505]. Those final two words also evoke an enigma; are the Indians left behind to die? or left to the rear of Manifest Destiny’s inevitable “progress?” Even the next sentence leaves such ambiguity open: “They too will follow to the happy hunting grounds of the ancestral race once strong in wars with neighboring tribes of the land of the setting sun.” Is death where happiness can now be found for the Indians of Mourning Dove’s generation? Does “setting sun” mean merely the West or the implied genocide of Native peoples so romantically depicted in the popular art of her period? Whether included in the original storyteller’s presen-

tation or incorporated by Mourning Dove as she transcribed the tale, the celebratory account of one of the mythic exploits of Left Hand is now juxtaposed to questions of cultural survival. Why then tell the tale? The answer to these series of questions lies in the story's ending.

The little people are honoured forces for the Okanagans, and it bespeaks Left Hand's medicine power that he can speak to these people as an adopted son. It is they who let him live when his father abandons him, and it is they who guide him on the shaman journey wherein he gains the spirit powers of all the animals. In "The House of Little Men," Left Hand successfully pursues the enemy by being able to turn himself into an Ol-la-la-bush and a fox, and he finds the enemy by imitating the bear, and escapes capture by singing his shoomesh song and swimming like a frog, a figure of special power for him. But it is the response of Left Hand to the coming of the Whites that alters the traditional heroic warrior narrative into a survival narrative. When his tribe learns of the coming of the pale faces, it is their numbers that worry the heart of his people. When Left Hand goes to speak to the little people and consult them, the little people's hearts also "sank with chill of fear, because they foresaw that their under-ground home was soon to be wrecked by this strange people" [sheet 195; file 1505]. Left Hand does not choose to fight. Instead, under cover of darkness, Left Hand guides the little people further West to a more remote mountainous region he knows of "where they still live and enjoy the wilds of the woods and the animals to their command, where hunting-grounds are not turned into the whiteman's herbs of food, nor their berry trees chopped down, and placed with the paleface berry bush" [sheet 196; file 1505].

The lessons here are multiple. There are traditional strengths for the Okanagan people: a knowledge of the spirit powers of the earth, a knowledge of their mythic past, and of their warrior courage; but White people are depicted as being like the monster gods of Northwest genesis legends: greedy, blindly powerful and destructive. Terrifying, they are also overwhelming in number. Facing such people, traditional perceptions of balance in social interaction, even war, no longer hold sway. Even the great warrior and shaman, Left Hand, must focus on the preservation of what is precious through stealth and inordinate care. The dialogue between the storyteller, Stemteema, and her granddaughter also reinforces that message, for the Indian youngster of the 1930s feels the need to challenge the grandmother's story. The granddaughter has grown up in a world driven by Whites and she

no longer receives the stories of her people as cultural stepping stones. When she violates her grandmother's injunction and throws rocks down the sage-covered holes, the wind, the thunder and the lightning come to teach her that, while no longer powerful in the settlement period of European colonization, the Okanagans know and treasure a way of experiencing the world which is also true.

Mourning Dove's version of "The House of Little Men" follows. It preserves her syntax, grammar and spelling, for to be careful of these is also to protect her sense of voice and dramatic presentation. The parenthetical translations are also hers. The few editorial inclusions are indicated by brackets. It can be presumed that she heard the story in Salish and transcribed it for she constantly sought out the "old time Indians" as sources for Salish legends and her letters are filled with references to the difficulties of matching English words to Indian meanings. What she had achieved by her forties was an ear for both languages and so the story conveys palpable oral-ity even as it is eminently readable.

## House of Little Men<sup>4</sup>

**T**he boney crooked fingers of Old Stem-tee-ma (grandma) commonly known among the Okanagons by old and young, shook her beady one eye half shut, sparkled as she pointed to me the house of the little men. We stood over the weed sage covered huge holes where deep under were tunnels partly caved in of the clay of the Okanagon hills. Still the memory of the sage brush smelly odor comes to my mind, the odor loved by the cowboy on the range and by the frontiersmen. They love it as well as the Indians a mere handful of whom are left behind. They too will follow to the happy hunting grounds of the ancestral race once strong in wars with neighboring tribes of the land of the setting sun. Stemteema spoke in a hushed voice, and cautioned me not to tumble any dirt down the sacred home of the little men, for fear that the wind might rise against us in revenge on the bigger people, to blow their typees down and raise the dust to the skies, and bring the water from the heavens, and anger the Thunder Raven Bird that spits fire in rage on any who makes light of the Cotszee (dug out

dwelling) of the little people. Stemteema paused a moment to wipe the tear which stole her wrinkled cheek, and told the story as follows, in her simple way.

“This is the home where once lived for a time one of my forefathers, who later became famous through the powers that the little men gave him. His name was Left Hand, and all the people still speak of him among the Okanagons as a powerful warrior and medcineman. There has been no one who has been born since that could compete with him in knowledge and wisdom. I am the last of his decendants, and I have passed more snows (years) than any one living among our tribe.

When my grandfather was a little boy, he was very lazy, and he failed to hunt the Shoomes (powers of a medcineman) no matter how much his parents urged him to hunt it in the darkest of the night, he would only go a short distance and lay down and sleep the rest of the night. When he was sent to the sweat to hunt powers, (The sweat-house is a cone shaped structure used for cleansing. They sweated in them and washed in water afterwards) he would fall asleep rather than watch and sing his prayers for the animal powers to come to him, to make him a warrior of bravery.

Each morning his parents would be obliged to hunt him up and waken him for his daily cold baths that would strengthen his sinews so that he might be strong in later years. He was not like other children, he was very greedy and lazy. No matter how much his elder talked and advised him he turned a deaf ear to the good word.

At last the father of Left Hand gave up hope for his only son, because he was ashamed of him. Rather than keep a child that would be worthless, he decided that Left Hand should die, rather than see him grow a cowardly warrior. In spite of all the begging of his mother, the father of Left Hand took him one dark night close to this of little men, and he tied a strong buckskin string around his waist, he dropped him down in the deep unknown fathoms of the cotszee, there dwell the fearless little people. No one ever returned to tell of their death among them when once condemned to die, such was the customs many snows past. When a warrior is found stealing a mans food or furskins, or stealing the love of another ones wife, such is the price he has to pay when convicted by the members of his tribe. It was supposed that the little men ate them. A person can never get close to the little people without being chilled to the marrow, and cannot make the moccasined feet move, nor the hand lift up. This made the Indians very afraid of the little men, and they held their haunts very sacred. Their hunting

grounds were never touched by the feet of the braves, only in the dead of the night would they dare come close to their home to punish the evil doers.

When Left Hand was dropped easily down the bottom of the cotszee half asleep he woke up surprised to see so many little people under- ground, almost as small in body as he was, but as they came closer to view him in surprise, his body chilled, it was without feeling in numbness. He tried to cry out in fear, but his speech failed to come, his tongue was dead, so was his body. The little men came to pick him up, and he lost the use of his mind.

Next that Left Hand knew they had him in one - of the deep under ground tunnels beside a sparkling dancing fire, and a sweet herb was smoking at his side to bring him back to life. The little people spoke an unknown language, and no smile ever passed their lips as he came to know. He saw that among them were women and little babes that were much smaller than any pappoose he ever saw, wrinkled up little old men and women, that looked like they were nothing but little children of the bigger people that Left Hand had come from.

It was not many sun-dows (days) after when child like, Left Hand forgot his own parents and began to take interest in the ways of this strange and new people, whom he came to love as his own tribe. He found that mysterious long and deep tunnels were dug everywhere under the hill sides of this mountain, and fountains of spring water dripped in wonderful hues, where the bathing places of the people were made. Soon he found that he could find the outlets either at the bottom of the mountain, or else at the sides and top. He unconsciously forgot his own people in exploring this hidden play ground underneath the hill, and when any of the big people would pass close to the mouths of the tunnels, he could smell them as the human odor which he learnt to dislike like the little men.

He learned to eat all the birds, and animals that the little men brought in from the hunt from the outside world. Reptiles were brought in and made pets off, while others were fattened to eat, and the skins of them were made into gowns for the little women and papooses. Moss, and tree hair were brought in for the bedding of the infants.

Left Hand played with his pets, the frogs and snakes, till one sun-down his favorite pet frog gave him the vision of the Shoomeesh song, and before many moons passed Left Hand came to know all the powers of the underground animals. The bow and arrows he made from the ribs of the mountain goat which the little men killed on the outside hunt. But no arrows ever



touched his pets, for he loved them. He would shape the clay into imaginary animals and practise shooting at them, pebbles were also his “wounded victims” with the little arrows. Soon he was capable of shooting an arrow straight at the aimed mark. The little men taught him the shoomesh powers of all the animals. Each sun-down (day) he took his daily bath in the underground springs, so that his body would be strong of sinew for the future warrior he was to be. The oldest men and women gave him the good word for the future in cunning, and in tracking the hunt.

Whenever a pebble or clay came down the smoke outlet of the cotszee, it angered the little people and they would start their strange Shoomesh songs and soon the whizzing songs of the wind would be heard above in accompaniment to their music, and the thunder-bird would travel over the skies in anger, because of the powers of the little people. It is their revenge for being made light of by the bigger people of the out-side world.

Thus Left Hand lived with these little men for many moons (months) till he grew larger than the wrinkled up old men and women. He found that the under-ground tunnels of the little people were too small for him to travel through. This cramped feeling caused him much worry. Thoughts of his early life came back to him of how bright the out-side world had looked to him, when the sky was clear and wonderful blue in color, and how white the snow lay in winter. He remembered how with the coming of spring the birds sang so joyously. Such thoughts caused him to lose interest in his pets, even the beautiful colored rattler lost its hue as he sat in thought brooding of his own people.

Left Hand approached the Cheif of the little men with a sad heart, because he had grown to love them better than his own tribe. He laid out the troubles of his heart before them. The Cheif called all the male members of the tribe of the wise little people and held a council to decide what was to be done with Left Hand, because he was outgrowing his adopted people. Soon it was decided that he should return back to his own tribe. Because he had found the ways deep into the hearts of the little men, he was given powers of the shoomesh from them, equal to their strength, as a token to their friendship.

The little men climbed the steep walls of the smoke flue of the cotszee where Left Hand had been let down when a little boy by his father to die. It was the only big enough hole to let him out of the under-ground home. Soon they had hewed steps, so that Left Hand was able to climb out to the open world. But he had a sad heart for the people that he had left behind

him. In his belt he carried the sweet-herb of life in preparation for the meeting with his own people.

As Left Hand drew near the first encampment of Indians he fell down because of the strength of their scent. He was found and picked up, and after failing to have him come back to life, they found the herb in his belt. With the wisdom of the old, they burned it and smoked the nostrils of Left-Hand, and life came into his limbs, but his tribal speech was only a fragment of a memory. He had almost forgotten his mother tongue. He soon learned it again, and found that other children had come into the home of his parents. They were a beautiful boy and little sister. He was welcomed back to the tepee fire-side of his father, because he was soon found to be a wonderful hunter, and powerful warrior. Also they learned that he was capable of changing himself into an animal when needed.

One day after his parents were dead Left Hand lived in the Inwa-petk-qua country (Kettle river) with his younger brother and beautiful virgin sister. Warriors came far and wide to ask her in marriage, but on token of refusal she would not prepare food for the braves, who came to her tepee.

One time Left Hand and his brother were on a fall hunt, and were with a large Indian encampment. As was Left Hand's habit, he hunted only with his brother, while the rest of the hunters usually went in groups for fear of meeting the enemy. They had many wars with the surrounding tribes, especially the hated Shu-swaps. Of this Left Hand had no fear, and he hunted alone.

Soon Left Hand tired of the chase after killing all the game that he and his brother could carry, he decided that he would build a sweat-house and enjoy a plunge into the mountain stream. He gathered fire-wood and taking his flint arrow he struck them together over the rubbed dried bark of the cotton-wood, which soon started a blaze of fire and a cloud of smoke curled up skyward. Through the smoke a vision came to him. He jumped up suddenly with a growl like a grizzly-bear and said to his brother.

"Brother, the Shu-swaps have killed all our people and have stolen our sister. Follow me." He quickly took up his arrows and went in pursuit after the enemy, after putting out the blazing fire smoke, which gathered and made itself look like a rising fog against the sky. This the quick eye of the enemy soon saw, and they said to one another.

"That is the smoke of Left Hand, he is close to us." But while others said it was only a fog rising. They ended the argument by taking the virgin sister of Left Hand as prisoner of war, with-quick moccassioned feet they flew back

toward their country. The Shu-swaps left in a large number, after killing the whole encampment, women and children.

Left Hand and his brother followed till they came close to Nee-eh-hoot (site, near Rock Creek B.C.) just as they crossed the creek, they saw the possession of the enemy where walked in their midst their sister. The quick eye of the Shu-swaps saw them. But Left Hand immediately changed himself into an Ol-la-la bush, swinging its branches from side to side with loaded berries, while his brother stood behind him hidden by the bush. The enemy argued that people were on their trail, while others said that it was only an ol-la-la bush. But the sister knew it was her brother, for she knew his ways, and was comforted.

The Shu-swaps continued their journey much faster, but had not gone far, when Left Hand again came in sight, and he was again spied by the enemy. This time he was too far ahead to hide himself and he turned into a fox, while his brother followed in his wake also a fox. They climbed the hill over-looking the enemy. This brought out another argument among the Shu-swaps. Some said that they were positive that it was two men, while others now their pointed that it was only two foxes, and their eye were deceived. But the girl had courage for she knew it was her brother. The enemy went till darkness over-took them and to be sure that Left Hand was not to find them, they went off the trail into the depths of the brush close to the river and camped after surrounding the bed of the girl so that her escape would be impossible.

Left Hand soon lost the tracks of the Shu-swaps and failed to follow by the help of the light that was left. His brother was discouraged. Left Hand soon found a way. He took the bear pelt stripped from nose to tail from his belt, and putting it over his nose he crawled over the ground and scented the tracks of the enemy, like the bear does. About the time that his brother thought that Left Hand was deceiving him, Left Hand told his brother to stab the first enemy he came to, and keep killing till overpowered. He was to escape by the way of the river by fording it across and they would all meet on the other side.

Left Hand started killing the Shu-swaps, but his Shoo-mesh getting the best of him, and instead of quietly doing the stabbing he soon gave a war-whoop which awakened the remaining warriors. They were too many for him and his brother. So he cut the strings that tied his sister, and the younger brother took her across the ford, while Left-Hand stayed in the

glory of murdering the enemy, but soon they over-powered him and he made his escape by jumping into the river. Left Hand wore a skin cape, and a sharp snag in the river caught his fur blanket. He was almost drowned when the frog that he played with, as a child in the house of the little men spoke to him under the waters, saying

“Have you forgotten me in your haste? I told you that waters would never kill you; because it is my home. Why not sing my song and loosen your blanket and swim to shore?” Then Left Hand thought of his frog shoo-mesh song, and as he sang it, he was loosened and he swam like the frog to safty to his waiting sister and brother.

Left Hand, satisfied with his hunt with his sister and brother moved back to his home close to the house of little men.

Many snows had past and Left Hand was the only person of the big people that ever could visit and talk with the little men in their unknown language. One day far from the rising sun (east) came word that men of the pale-face were coming in hordes to the hunting-grounds of Left Hand and his people. This caused the Indians many thoughts and worry of the heart. Soon Left Hand heard that the men with the pale faces were drawing nearer and nearer to his home. In the darkness of the night, he went to his adopted little people and consulted them on these men with the white skin. Then the hearts of the little men sank with chill of fear, because they foresaw that their under-ground home was soon to be wrecked by this strange people. Left Hand told them of a wonderful rocky hunting toward the setting of the sun (west) where he would take his adopted little people; where the mocasioned feet of the palefaces will not intrude, where new homes can be built away from all the big people, red and whit faces.

One dark night, Left Hand led his little men away to the rocky tops of the big mountains of the setting sun. He took them all—men women and papooses[.] That is why the little people moved their camp forever to the sinking of the sun, where they still live and enjoy the wilds of the woods and the animals to their command, where hunting-grounds are not turned into the whiteman’s herbs of food, nor their berry trees chopped down, and placed with the paleface berry bush”[.]

Heaving a little sigh, Stemteema turned away. Picking up her pee-cha (root digging stick) she started to digging more spit-lum (bitter roots), she stripped the dirt which left the herb white and tender. She soon filled her basket and started homeward. Before following her, to satisfy myself I

threw rocks down the sage covered holes of the old home of the Little men. The wind soon came accompanied by thunder and lightening just as Stemteema warned me, and this made me believe her story to be true.

S-temteema turned her wrinkled face towards me and asked:-

“Did you throw stones into the House of Little Men?”

I shook my head in denial. Pointing her accusing crooked finger at me, she said:—

“You lie”.

[sheets 182-197; file 1505]

“**T**he House of Little Men” is complex in narrative structure and rich in narrative detail. Okanagan beliefs and cultural habits, particularly in the raising of children, are clearly illustrated, and the ability of storytelling to reinforce values and cultural cohesiveness also can be examined. But beyond analysis, “The House of Little Men” is an engaging story. It stimulates imagination. It can hold a reader’s or listener’s attention. That is why the note Mourning Dove appended to the end of the narrative is such a surprise:

Note - Location of the house of Little Men is situated near Orville [Oroville] Washington. Some 18 miles north in B.C. Scientists have made researches but no one is found small enough to investigate the unknown tunnels of this legend.[sheet 197; file 1505]

As a mediator between her own Salish-speaking peoples and Whites, Mourning Dove often straddled an abyss where meanings and assumptions did not connect. Through the footnote, Mourning Dove tried to respond to the European demand for scientific accuracy. She tried to bridge the authority of legend with the authority of science. She believed that that might be a way for Whites to understand the potency of the story, and therefore, the potency of a people and their culture. But her reference to scientific methodology reveals ignorance and thus her “proof” undercuts her purpose. What is touching is the attempt. Mourning Dove was caught between transcribing a legend from an ongoing oral tradition and a living people whom she loved and valued, to a language and to a Euro-American readership who presumed that all Indian tribes would be non-existent by the twenty-first century, that Indian “artifacts,” including the very bones of their dead, were curiosities to be examined, not honored. If Mourning Dove had understood the latter, she might never have been able to write. Her

belief in the significance of the stories and of the human capacities to imagine and comprehend, to be intrigued by difference, is remarkable given a period of so much suppression and ridicule.

Her final hand-written note to the typed tale and footnote is positive and proud.

Of course, this story was corrected in second writing, but not very many changes, even at that [.]

Mourning Dove [sheet 197; file 1515]

Mourning Dove had learned to move in two worlds. She had found value in both of them. Why wouldn't she assume that Whites could do the same?

#### NOTES

- 1 This legend is among the extensive twenty-year correspondence between Lucullus Virgil McWhorter and Mourning Dove which is housed at the Manuscripts, Archives and Special Collections Division of the Washington State Universities Libraries, Pullman, Washington 99164. The correspondence is kept in individual folders and each sheet of paper within a folder is numbered. The letter reference is sheet 53 of file 269. All further correspondence from the L. V. McWhorter collection is indicated in brackets to distinguish my references from Mourning Dove's. She always used parentheses. The quoted material maintains the writer's original spelling and grammar, including her typographical errors, with the exception that a period or comma in brackets is my insertion in order to help reader clarity. Such additions have been kept to a minimum. The materials are published with the knowledge and permission of the family elders, Mary Lemery [recently deceased] and Charles Quintasket. While "The House of Little Men" has not been published in its entirety before, further discussion of the story as an assimilationist text can be found in my essay: "Mourning Dove, Trickster Energy, and Assimilation Period Native American Texts," *Tricksters in Turn-of-the-Century American Literature*, Ed. Elizabeth Ammons (New England UP, 1994).
- 2 For a further discussion of Mourning Dove's visits to Canada, read my article: "Mourning Dove's Canadian Recovery Years, 1917-1919," *Canadian Literature* 124-125 (Spring-Summer, 1990), 113-122, which also has been reprinted in *Native Writers and Canadian Writing*, Ed. W. H. New (Vancouver: U British Columbia P, 1990), 113-122.
- 3 In the United States, the name is spelled Okanogan; in Canada, Okanagan.
- 1 In 1988, I gave a copy of the original transcription of "The House of Little Men" to Jeannette Armstrong, Canadian writer, Director of the En' Owkin Center in Penticton, British Columbia, and cousin to Mourning Dove, to thank her for helping me locate the family elders, Charlie Quintasket and Mary Lemery. It is my hope that she will bring out an edition of this text which can be widely read by the Okanagans both of Canada and the United States. The En' Owkin Center is dedicated to preserving Okanagan language and culture.

# That Someone Special

two o'clock to four-thirty  
the breezes thereof pure and simple  
a tune in an eggshell

then a broth  
in need of potatoes and something else  
the word coat throwing warmth over her shoulders

that slips away gradually  
in stillness  
whether she kneels sits reclines or merely fills with repose

secure in the anticipation with which she waits  
at the terminal  
like so many others catching the 7:15  
although it stops at many different places  
never really comes back  
crosses the border heading south

# “Being a Half-breed”

## Discourses of Race and Cultural Syncreticity in the Works of Three Metis Women Writers

In his introduction to *All My Relations*, Thomas King asserts that “being Native is a matter of race rather than something more transitory such as nationality”: “one is either born an Indian or one is not.” While King adds that there is no “racial denominator” among Natives and that it is important to “resist the temptation of trying to define a Native,” at least until the body of work by authors of Native ancestry “reaches some sort of critical mass,” he contends that Indianness is an inborn genetic trait (x-xi). The danger of King’s position is elucidated by ethnohistorian James Clifton:

the uncritical use of Indian, White, and Black, and the associated ethnocentric assumptions about ancient differences in behaviour and potentialities, history, and culture effectively block analytic thinking. These historically derived, culturally patterned, institutionally reinforced convictions include such persistent ideas as being and becoming Indian is a matter largely of biological ancestry, that Indianness is fixed by blood. A related assumption is that the labels White and Indian mark sharply defined categories—culturally defined ways of sorting diverse people into a few classes. A further assumption is that these differences are primordial, inevitable, original, durable and natural. (23)

In other words, when race is considered anything more than an “accident of birth” (King xi), biological determinism soon follows and is inevitably used to justify and perpetuate the disempowerment of oppressed groups. Historically, as Noel Elizabeth Currie asserts, “Europeans constructed the different ‘races’ they encountered in their colonialist and imperialist ventures as ‘inferior’ and ‘savage’ in order to exploit them economically; racism provided a justification, after the fact, for that exploitation” (139). In



contemporary Canadian society, internalized racism is a key element in Native people's oppression. Beatrice Culleton's novel *April Raintree* demonstrates the way in which a light-skinned Metis girl, for whom assimilation into white society appears a possibility, is convinced by her teachers, foster family, and social workers that Native people are responsible for their own disempowerment and that their social positioning is unalterable. Growing up isolated from any Metis community, April Raintree perceives her options as dichotomous: either become the drunken Indian Other or assimilate. In contrast, Maria Campbell's autobiography *Halfbreed* illustrates the validating effects of having been raised in a family with a strong sense of Metis identity. Situating the Metis historically, Campbell characterizes their identity as a cultural construct; her emphasis is thus on ethnicity rather than race. In *I Am Woman* and *Sojourner's Truth*, Lee Maracle too focusses not on race but on cultural heritage and political disempowerment as determinant of Metis experience. Hybrid by definition, Metis identity is *predicated* upon what is "an inescapable and characteristic feature of all post-colonial societies," namely, cultural syncreticity (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 30). Thus, a positivist emphasis on race such as that put forth by Thomas King is peculiarly problematic for the Metis. That racial stereotyping has had a devastating impact on the Metis and other Native peoples is, however, undeniable. Its operation is thoroughly explored in *April Raintree*.

At a young age, April (Culleton's narrator) discriminates between "brown-skinned" and "fair-skinned" children at a playground. She dismisses the former as "dirty" and "raggedy" but is herself rejected by the fair-skinned group, who "didn't care to play with Cheryl and me. They just called us names and bullied us" (6). This name-calling is a literal form of what Marxist critic Louis Althusser terms interpellation, during which individuals "recognize" (or misrecognize) themselves in discourse and adopt subject positions accordingly, and through which existing distributions of power are perpetuated (170-177). In the park, the race relations of the next generation are being established as the children of the dominant group hail the Native children as Other. Later in the novel, members of April's foster family reinforce her racial categorization through such repeated comments as "I know you half-breeds, you love to wallow in filth" (26). Soon April forms what she considers a complete definition of "half-breed":

Being a half-breed meant being poor and dirty. It meant being weak and having to drink. It meant being ugly and stupid. It meant living off white people. And giv-

ing your children to white people to look after. It meant that kids like me, had to take what kids like the DeRosiers gave, and none of that was good. (34)

The only time April refers to herself as a half-breed is “to spite” the DeRosier children when they have done poorly at school: “Hey Maggie, you told us that half-breeds were stupid. Well, if we’re stupid, you must lack brains altogether” (40). The taunt ironically challenges the DeRosiers’ stereotyped view of the Metis and interrupts the dominant racist ideology by foregrounding a moment of contradiction within it. At the same time, the taunt reiterates the terms of the original putdown: “we’re stupid.” Indeed, April continues to believe that half-breeds are stupid, resolving the anomaly through her belief that “I wasn’t a half-breed” (26). Motivated by “spite” instead of by pride, April’s brief acknowledgement of her Metis identity is reactive in nature and does not reinscribe the meaning of “half-breed.”

The roles April and her sister Cheryl are expected to fill in the social formation are mapped on to them from an early age. One of their social workers gives them a “little speech” about what she calls the “native girls’ syndrome”:

...and you girls are headed in that direction. It starts out with the fighting, the running away, the lies. Next come the accusations that everyone in the world is against you. There are the sullen uncooperative silences, the feeling sorry for yourselves. And when you go on your own, you get pregnant right away or you can’t find and keep jobs. So you’ll start with alcohol and drugs. From there, you get into shoplifting and prostitution and in and out of jail. You’ll live with men who abuse you. And on it goes. You’ll end up like your parents, living off society. ...you’re going the same route as many other native girls. If you don’t smarten up, you’ll end up in the same place. Skid row. (48-9)

The social worker’s narrative construct is naturalized by the use of the future tense and the second person pronoun. Because the role of language in the construction of the subject is suppressed by ideology, individuals appear “willingly” to adopt the subject positions necessary to their participation in the social formation” (Belsey 61), and the fact that these subject positions are *apparently* voluntarily taken up absolves the racist dominant society of responsibility. While April rejects the social worker’s interpellation for herself, she accepts the explanation it implicitly supplies for the situation of Native people in Canadian society.

April refuses to identify with Native people because “in today’s society, there isn’t anything positive about them” (125), and she tells her activist sister Cheryl that “you’ll never change the image of the native people” (90). In her view, the only advantage of biculturalism for the Metis is that it gives

them the perspective of “critic-at-large” (98), able to “feel only the shortcomings of both sides” (white and Indian) (125). In renouncing her Native identity, April joins “many Metis people, especially those who have integrated and/or assimilated with the French Canadians” (Lussier 1). Though April’s attempt to integrate eventually fails, the lasting impression of this novel is April’s preoccupation with passing herself off as white.

In contrast, the narrator of *Halfbreed* only contemplates “calling [her]self French or Spanish or anything else” at one point in the narrative, not because she is ashamed of her people, but because she is ashamed of herself (139). Maria Campbell is subjected to the same racial prejudice as April Raintree and, like April, she initially internalizes shame and hatred. (Hereafter I will use “Maria Campbell” or “Campbell” to refer to the author, and “Maria” to refer to the character within the text). Maria comes home from school and says that she hates her mother, her father, and “all of you no-good Halfbreeds” (50). Thanks to her great-grandmother, the young Maria soon learns the historical and political context of this self-hatred and from then on tries “to keep [her] head up and defend [her] friends and cousins in front of those white kids” (51). Though it is laden with negative connotations, Campbell retains the word “Halfbreed.” The negative image of Native people, including the Metis, is embedded in discourse and a simple substitution of words is not enough to effect a change in consciousness (though terminology can play a role in such change). Instead, Campbell takes on the challenging task of transforming the meaning of “Halfbreed” from within.

**T**hroughout the book, Campbell typifies the Halfbreed people through generalizations that counter the derogatory stereotypes associated with the word “half-breed” in the dominant discourse. Campbell delineates the history of the Metis and demonstrates that they are a unique group, distinct from white Canadians, and “completely different from” their “Indian relatives” (25). “Halfbreeds [are] quick-tempered—quick to fight, but quick to forgive and forget” (25). “Treaty Indian women don’t express their opinions, Halfbreed women do” (26). “Halfbreeds are very superstitious people. They believe in ghosts, spirits and any other kind of spook” (35). Halfbreeds are “noisy, boisterous, and gay” (111), and they “love weddings” (120). “No one can play the fiddle and guitar like a Halfbreed. They can make these instruments come alive—laugh, cry and shout” (115). At funerals, Halfbreeds grieve, “but in a different way. The women [cry], but

they [accept] death,” meeting it “with great strength” and keeping “their grief inside as they [do] with so many other things” (67). Campbell asserts that her “people have always been very political” (72) and characterizes Stan Daniels, a political activist, as “a Halfbreed through and through”:

He could sit down at his table with authority, his wife and children around him, and the room full of noisy, shouting people. He would eat up food as if there would be none tomorrow, slurping up coffee, belching, children climbing all over him, shrieking and laughing. The whole room would revolve around him and there would always be lots of music. (169)

As important as the positive images Campbell offers is the fact that she defines “Halfbreed” in a way that emphasizes ethnicity over race. Ethnicity, “defined by mutable, extrinsic characteristics,”

is marked by a group’s style of dress, by speech, by their learned, culturally patterned behaviours. The presumption is that people joined in an ethnic group share a common historical and cultural heritage.... (Clifton 26)

At the same time as she valorizes Halfbreed culture, Campbell implicitly challenges the Euro-American belief that “blood” is determinant of character and experience, and thus offers a challenge to racist discourse more radical than a mere inversion of terms would have been.

Discourses of race divide people by suggesting that their differences are genetically entrenched. Cultural syncretism, conversely, emphasizes hybridity, and the Metis identity has always been syncretic. Campbell says that her family members “were a real mixture of Scottish, French, Cree, English and Irish. We spoke a language completely different from the others. We were a combination of everything: hunters, trappers and *ak-ee-top* farmers” (23-24). In *The Book of Jessica*, Campbell says:

my people have walked behind other cultures picking up things their parents discarded for generations: moral traditions, sacred things, songs, prayers, everything...a way of tying a scarf, a jig step. When you look at what we have as mixed-blood people you see all these things woven into something that became a new nation. (86)

The principle of inclusivity which characterizes the Metis culture also conduces to the expression of solidarity with other people of colour. Though it occurs in the work of both Campbell and Lee Maracle, this solidarity has been overlooked by critics such as Agnes Grant who, in her discussion of *Halfbreed*, quotes Campbell as saying “I’d hated those nameless, faceless white masses all my life.” Grant then states that “Such blunt comments

about non-Natives...dominate the book" (127). When Grant translates "white" into "non-Native," she effaces the particularity of Campbell's sentiment: she says white because she means white, not "non-Native." As an illustration, Maria is welcomed into a Chinese family when she is abandoned by her husband in Kristen, Alberta. She finds them "kind and happy," and grows "very fond of them, as they" do of her daughter Lisa and her (128). Maria witnesses the fact that the Sing family is derided by racists in much the same way that her people are. Her identification with the Chinese is later symbolized by the prostitute whose room is next to hers, a "Chinese girl, who was part Indian" (134). The common experience of racial discrimination and oppression unites the groups in an important and potentially pivotal way.

Lee Maracle's story "Yin Chin" also explores the relationship between Native and Asian people. As a result of the common experience of oppression,

when people of colour get together they discuss white people. They are the butt of our jokes, the fountain of our bitterness and pain and the infinite well-spring of every dilemma life ever presented us. The humour eases the pain, but always whites figure front and centre of our joint communication. (67)

The reactive nature of this communication is necessary at first, but obsession with the oppressor ultimately limits growth. Happily, Maracle recounts the story of a later meeting of a "table-load" of "Asian and Native" people at which, she says, "we ran on and on about our growth and development, and not once did the white man enter the room. ...We had been born during the first sword wound that the third world swung at imperialism. We were children of that wound, invincible, conscious and movin' on up" (67-68). Maracle here situates the progress of Canadian Natives and Asians within a post-colonial context, thus broadening the group of sympathizers even further. This anti-imperial solidarity is reinforced in the acknowledgements of *I Am Woman*, in which Maracle "expresses her debt to 'Native people, Palestinians, Chileans, Philipinos [*sic*], Eritreans, Ethiopians, El Salvadorans, Anti-apartheid activists and Black Canadian and American people'" (qtd. in Godard 204). In discussing *I Am Woman*, Agnes Grant denies Maracle's pointed attack on "white males" when she uses the more sanitized "non-Native men" as though it were synonymous—an imprecision which enacts violence on the text (130). By specifically naming the colonizer, while asserting her solidarity with other groups struggling for an end to oppression, Maracle lays bare the racist (and sexist) biases underpinning global distributions of power.

Maracle further interrogates the dominant discourse in her short story “Bertha” by using the dialogic voice. According to Barbara Godard, “the dialogic or double-voiced discourse—whether parody, irony, parallax, imitation (with a difference), stylization—re-marks convention by incorporating the word of another within it” (197). In “Bertha,” the first story in the collection *Sojourner’s Truth*, Maracle recontextualizes heavily connotative instances of diction and sentence structure in order to undermine the ideologies in which they are based. Mimicking capitalist language, Maracle refers to the workers of cannery row as “very fortunate employees,” a label contradicted by every detail given about their living conditions (15). In describing the workers’ shacks, Maracle employs lilting, distinctly nineteenth-century British syntax for increased parodic effect:

At high-tide each dwelling, except the few nearest shore, was partially submerged in water. It wasn’t really such a great bother. ...A good pair of Kingcome slippers was all that was needed to prevent any discomfort the tide caused. ...Besides which, the sort of tides that crept into the residence occurred but twice or thrice a season. Indeed, the nuisance created was trifling. (18)

The long-suffering tone which purports to downplay the conditions of course draws attention to them, and words such as “thrice” and “trifling”—hardly in common currency—are examples of “incorporating the word of another” (Godard 197) for the purpose of irony.

A description of a fight between “X” and “X’s brother” over whether a certain foreman was a “dog” or a “pig” illustrates the way in which Natives’ rage against whites is expressed through violence directed at each other. The labelling of the fighters is a blatant indication of the absence of Natives within the signifying system; their place is marked as the place of a number is marked in an algebraic formula. “X” also evokes the signature of the illiterate. Theoretically, the identification of one character as another’s brother could reinforce the importance of familial ties in the Native community, but in context, the fact that the two men are brothers deepens the pathos of the situation. At the end of the tale, X’s brother, whose identity has already been effaced by his labelling, is killed by synecdoche and in a subordinate clause (“the water that filled X’s brother’s lungs settled the argument forever” [16]), so that even his death is under erasure. In the middle of this scene, the narrator incorporates Marxist terminology—“food being a much higher use-value” (16). Since the dialogue is reported, the question of whether X’s brother actually used the term “use-value” is conveniently

blurred. Regardless, its citation here is both absurd and pathetic, a sharp challenge to the relevance of the Marxist analysis of capitalism, especially given its failure to address systemic racism. Elsewhere, Maracle contends that “the European labor movement was built on our backs” and that “the workers of this land have always had us as a cushion to soften the blow of recession” (*I Am Woman* 138). Though Maracle allows that “to renounce the principles of communism because the character of its adherents contain [*sic*] flaws is absurd,” a Marxist analysis is insufficient to articulate the experience of Native labourers, especially Native women like Bertha (*I Am Woman* 138).

The narrator’s savvy, cynical tone and the subversion of both language and sentence structure are successful instances of interrogating the dominant discourse. At the root of the tension in Maracle’s style is the implication that if a Native woman can excel within white patriarchal discourse, then that discourse, which consigns her to illiterate invisibility, is contradictory and thus lacks validity in its implicit claim to be a totalizing ideology. In *I Am Woman*, Maracle states that “Each time I confronted white colonial society I had to convince them of my validity as a human being. It was the attempt to convince them that made me realize that I was still a slave” (15). Maracle’s chosen strategy in some of the stories in *Sojourner’s Truth* can be seen to circumscribe her: to manipulate the dominant discourse into betraying itself, she adheres (slavishly) to its rules (even dialogic discourse must repeat the conventions it “re-marks” [Godard 197]). At the same time, Maracle declares that “the desire of our people to gain a foothold in this society is arrogantly interpreted as a desire to be like Europeans. ...But quite frankly, we do not respect the ways of European Canada. We seek knowledge that we may turn it to our own use” (*I Am Woman* 112). For Maracle, then, mastering the discourse of the colonizers is not (or is no longer) an “attempt to convince them”; rather, achieving competence within the system is always subsidiary to the goal of subverting it.

**M**aracle’s stated aim in the short story collection is to “integrate two mediums: oratory and European story” (11). She finds that “not much is left to the imagination in European stories,” in which “the answer to the question posed lies within the lines of the story” (12). She stresses that, in contrast to the “instructive” European style, “there is no explanation” in Native stories; “just the poetic terseness of the dilemma is presented” (12). There is, however, a fair amount of didactic exposition in

Maracle's stories. In the story "Too Much To Explain," for example, the motivation of the central character *is* explained: "The little girl, traumatized by the scene, had jumped inside the same trap, running a marathon of imprisoning relationships because she had not wanted to remember" (120). Not only is the surreal "Sojourner's Truth" a "one-joke" story, but the joke is explained for the reader: "Jesus, I am getting tired of this guy. Every rhetorical or philosophical remark prefaced by his name calls him forth" (125). In the first person stories, the narrators tend to maintain an interior monologue in which they situate themselves as superior to the other characters thanks to their comprehensive viewpoint. In "Who's Political Here?," the narrator explains that it is Frankie's

great pretence at morality, his sneakiness and his belief that I belong to my husband that really get to me. If I were to suggest we jump in bed, he would ask me about my husband; he does not think of him while he is brushing my tits, though. DING DONG. (30)

(In fact, Frankie withholds his question until after the sex act.) When she discovers that her husband has been jailed for posterizing, the narrator's response is "Who is in prison here? My sentence is 'until death do us part'; he's going to be there overnight. I don't say it; he wouldn't understand" (32). Furthermore, the narrator knows that her husband is having an affair but does not "say anything because [Frankie] would insist that that's different" (36). She adds that she is jealous of her husband's lover, "not sexually, but because my husband and his friends accord her her mind. I can't explain that to Frankie" (37). Regardless of the accuracy of her estimation of Frankie, the narrator, by refusing to voice her insights, seals them into a vacuum that grants them ultimate authority within the story. While Maracle's declared intention is "to draw the reader into the centre of the story" (13), this self-congratulatory form of narration precludes, or at least severely limits, the reader's participation.

Though the narrator of "Eunice" also declines to put her ideas into circulation, her emphasis throughout the story on her own silence contextualizes—and politicizes—the vacuum of interiority. In empathizing with Eunice, an agoraphobe—"In my silence, I don't feel so different from Eunice"—the narrator is explicit about the influence of socially constructed gender roles: "We were both somewhat comfortable in our feminine invisibility" (57). The narrator's gender is, of course, only one of the factors contributing to her invisibility. At a meeting of women writers, the narrator



portrays herself as “lost in a kind of reverent retreat, drifting irresponsibly in and out of the conversation without helping to focus on the project at hand, but still wearing a look of attention on [her] face” (58). The significance of a Native woman’s “wearing a look of attention” amongst a group of predominantly white women writers is suggested by a later story, “Charlie,” in which the central character, a Native pupil in a residential school, uses a “practiced look of bewilderment” in class to avoid thrashings from the white teachers (99). The narrator of “Eunice” breaks her silence to share with the group her insight that “the invisibility” white editors “are responsible for creating is the cause of our death” (61). Otherwise, she scarcely participates in the meeting; the final clause of the story’s penultimate sentence is “I don’t say a word” (64). The narrator of “Eunice” is doubly oppressed as a woman and as a Native, and, like most of Maracle’s first-person narrators, rather than speaking she editorializes heavily. Julia Emberley, in commenting on a scene from Minnie Aodla Freeman’s *Life Among the Qallunaat*, demonstrates how an Inuit woman “is silenced by the seemingly benign generosity of her [white] roommate, and how Freeman strategically displaces this silencing in the writing of this text as an explication of that silence” (168). Maracle’s strategy in “Eunice” is similar. Frequent editorializing is held to be a flaw by Eurocentric literary standards (as in the axiom “show, don’t tell”), but Maracle uses it in response to the silencing of Native women within the white patriarchal discourse that dictates those standards.

In *Halfbreed*, Maria Campbell also challenges Eurocentric standards, in particular, the rules of genre. In fact, the genre of “Indian women’s autobiography” is already hybrid, drawing on traditions of Native orature and on the “written tradition of Euro-American autobiography.” Autobiography is not an indigenous oral form, but “it shares with oral forms some basic characteristics: emphasis on event, attention to the sacredness of language, concern with landscape, affirmation of cultural values and tribal solidarity” (Bataille and Sands 3). In addition, most Indian women’s autobiographies convey a sense of “the connectedness of all things, of personal life flow, and episodes often are not sequential but linked thematically to establish a pattern of character developing through the response to private experience” (Bataille and Sands 8). Working within a syncretic genre, Campbell not only redefines “Halfbreed” in positivist terms but deconstructs racist stereotypes. One of Maria’s employers says that “Indians” are “only good for two things—working and fucking.” She makes “jokes about hot bucks and hot

squaws” as though the Metis were “animals in the barnyard” (109). Campbell undermines the employer’s stereotyped discourse by informing the reader that whenever this woman “got a chance she’d go to dances in nearby native communities and sneak off into the bush with the men. I know she made countless passes at Dad.” She adds:

This was common in our area: the white men were crazy about our women and the white women, although they were not as open and forward about it, were the same towards our men. (108)

By revealing the fetishistic attitude and behaviour of the whites, Campbell subverts the hegemony of the universalist white discourse, offering a corrective local story (note the phrase “in our area”) in its place.

Campbell also uses the form of autobiography to subvert the master narrative of white imperialist history. Using conciseness as a form of understatement, Campbell, in a few pages at the beginning of the book, recounts critical events for the Metis in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and eloquently demonstrates the impact of colonization and racism on her people. She reveals the way in which impossible circumstances produced in the Metis feelings of failure and shame which have been passed down inter-generationally. She explodes the image of lazy, dirty Halfbreeds promulgated by white sources (3-9). Campbell modestly undercuts this exposition by saying, “But I am ahead of myself” (9), as though this causal analysis had been a mere digression, an error in chronology. It is precisely this sort of interruption of linear history which makes *Halfbreed* an act of decolonization. As Barbara Godard says:

Narrative is a way of exploring history and questioning the historical narratives of the colonizer which have violently interposed themselves in place of the history of the colonized. Experimentation, especially with structures of chronology, is part of this challenge, a radical questioning of historiographical versions of the past as developed in the “master narratives,” in order to rewrite the historical ending. (198)

Conventional linear history would tend to flatten out Campbell’s comprehensive analysis under the strictures of chronological order. Indeed, *Halfbreed* was subjected to “the reshaping activities of an editor” (Godard 225, n.49) in order to make it “fit the conventions of Native life-writing” (Godard 204). Fortunately, some of Campbell’s subversive strategies slipped past the editor.

Campbell disregards chronology again when she gives a preview of her childhood games at the end of Chapter Two before recording her own birth at the beginning of Chapter Three. Campbell moves metonymically from a

mention of her mother's books—by “Shakespeare, Dickens, Sir Walter Scott and Longfellow”—to a description of the “Roman Empire” game, which involved playacting Caesar, Mark Anthony and Cleopatra (14). Campbell's disruption of chronology foregrounds the influence of European authors on the children, thus making a deliberate point of cultural syncreticity. By emphasizing commonality instead of difference, Campbell destabilizes white readers' preconceptions about the Native Other. (That the book is primarily addressed to white readers is indicated in the introduction—”I write this for all of you, to tell you what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in our country” [2]—and throughout the text by such statements as “I know that poverty is not ours alone. Your people have it too” [9]). At the same time as she defies their expectations, Campbell encourages white readers to enter the text through the door of familiarity rather than to look at the “Indian” through a “study window” (Brizinski 300). Disarmed, the reader is less likely to fetishize the information that soon follows about Native ways, such as:

they would take us on long walks and teach us how to use the different herbs, roots and barks. We were taught to weave baskets from the red willow, and while we did these things together we were told the stories of our people.... My Cheechum believed with heart and soul in the little people. (18)

Campbell does not fetishize tradition and certainly does not long for a return to mystical, pre-colonial purity: the Metis are a product of the meeting of two cultures—are, as Duke Redbird says, “THE ONLY ETHNIC GROUP INDIGENOUS TO THE CONTINENT” (53)—and their cross-culturality is “the potential termination point of an apparently endless human history of conquest and annihilation justified by the myth of group ‘purity’” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 36). Bataille and Sands assert that the purpose of “Indian women who consciously” choose “to write their own life stories” is “to correct misinformation about Indians as savages and to bring the Indian and white worlds closer together” (21). This assertion is supported by Campbell's statement at the end of *Halfbreed* that “I believe that one day, very soon, people will set aside their differences and come together as one. Maybe not because we love one another, but because we will need each other to survive” (184). In terms of literary hybridization, Bataille and Sands assert that *Halfbreed* “serves as further proof that the two modes of autobiography, written and oral, continue to exist simultaneously” (116). Indeed, Campbell's colloquial, conversational tone in the book—”I should tell you about our home now before I go any further” (16)—coupled with her use of

(often humorous) anecdote and development by association rather than chronological sequence all represent traces of the oral tradition within the written form. Thus, Campbell's text is a site of cultural syncretism.

**C**ultural syncretism is not to be confused with universalism, which is characterized by disregard for historical, socio-economic and political realities. One specific aspect of universalist thinking in North America, used to rationalize the way in which capitalism perpetuates and depends upon inequality, is the American Dream which promises a "rags to riches" transformation for anyone with enough innate resourcefulness. Significantly, all three Metis authors discussed in this paper challenge the universality of the American Dream. Maria Campbell describes the racial specificity of dreams in no uncertain terms:

I know that poverty is not ours alone. Your people have it too, but in those earlier days you at least had dreams, you had a tomorrow. My parents and I never shared any aspirations for a future. (*Halfbreed* 9)

Beatrice Culleton says that, in order to escape negative images of themselves in the mainstream society, "Some of us drink. Some of us deny our heritage. Some of us merely exist from day to day, with no ambitions and no dreams. ...I had accepted a long time ago, that my dreams would be limited" ("Images" 50). In Lee Maracle's "Polka Partners," the narrator responds to "polka boy's" plan to create a "centre" by saying:

No one here dreamed dreams like that. Life here is raw, wine is drunk not because it is genteel, but because it blurs, dulls the need for dreams, knocks your sense of future back into the neighbourhoods for whom it works—white folks. (85)

All of these texts concur on the lack of, and necessity for, dreams among Native people. Dreams provide narratives to live by, and *April Raintree* illustrates the current crisis: white society projects the narrative of the "native girls' syndrome" on to Cheryl and April (48). In order to resist this narrative, Cheryl uses a traditionalist fantasy of living with her family as "olden-day Indians" (68), while April dreams of assimilation and a "promising future in white society" (82). Neither fantasy is helpful in transforming the position of the Metis in contemporary society. Like April, Maria initially frames her dreams in terms of materialism:

Take for example the driving ambition and dream of a little girl telling her Cheechum, 'Someday my brothers and sisters will each have a toothbrush and

they'll brush their teeth every day and we'll have a bowl of fruit on the table all the time and, Cheechum, they'll be able to do anything they want and go anywhere, and every day we'll have a glass of milk and cookies and talk about what they want to do. ...The little girl's Cheechum would look at her and see the tooth-brushes, fruit and all those other symbols of white ideals of success and say sadly, 'You'll have them, my girl, you'll have them.' (133-34)

Campbell later indicates that Cheechum's sadness stems from Maria's misguided focus on material gain; elsewhere she cautions her to "find what you want and take it, but always remember who you are and why you want it" (98). Even the young Maria, though, craves agency as well as material goods—the opportunity to *do*, not only to have. Later in the text, this distinction is further clarified:

I began to understand what Cheechum had been trying to say to me, and to see how I had misinterpreted what she had taught me. She had never meant that I should go out into the world in search of fortune, but rather that I go out and discover for myself the need for leadership and change: if our way of life were to improve I would have to find other people like myself, and together try to find an alternative. (166-67)

Campbell uses the leverage of her position of exclusion from the American dream to challenge the materialistic basis of that dream. Instead, she emphasizes the importance of community-based political action in changing the narrative of her people. Adopting a similar position, Culleton says that the Metis-owned and operated publishing company, Pemmican, "has an opportunity to help empower Native people, enabling them to dream" (50).

The challenge to universalism and the inscription of alter/native narratives are characteristic of post-colonial literature, or indeed literature in the process of decolonization. As the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* point out, "in all post-colonial cultures, monolithic perceptions are less likely." Rather, a "hybridized and syncretic view of the modern world...provides a framework of 'difference on equal terms' within which multi-cultural theories, both within and between societies, may continue to be fruitfully explored" (37). The notion of "difference on equal terms" is a Utopian one; we cannot afford to be naive about the realities of access to power. Still, in an example of internal multi-culturalism, the Metis "have taken on a conglomerate of customs, attitudes, etc. to form their own unique identity" (Lussier 1), and cultural syncreticity in Metis literature is a source of strength. Even though there are instances in *Halfbreed* in which Maria's behaviour is explained away by the elders with "It's the white in her" (*Halfbreed* 26), "originally, no

native North American society subscribed to the idea of biological determination of identity or behaviour" (Clifton 11). Those like Thomas King who adhere to blood quantum as the basis for a definition of "Native" do not have the support of Native North American tradition. Besides which, Clifton points out that "modern Indians...are *all* of composite native and Euro-American biological ancestry" (11; emphasis added). Ethnicity, not race, is what may form the basis of a truly multi-cultural society.

The Canadian model of the "multicultural mosaic" is not without problems, some of which Neil Bissoondath has articulated:

We like to think, in this country, that our multicultural mosaic will help nudge us into a greater openness. But multiculturalism as we know it indulges in stereotype, depends on it for a dash of colour and the flash of dance. (502)

Any policy which freezes diversity rather than permitting a fluid movement of differences will eventually become essentialist and deterministic. Additionally, as Duke Redbird asserts, through the multicultural initiative, the Trudeau government "devised a plan whereby minorities could maintain ethnic eccentricities and peculiarities without the basic rights of self-determination" (30-31). The fact that multiculturalism has failed in the past, however, does not mean that the model lacks value. Redbird claims that the "cultural mosaic" was an idea "that Louis Riel had proposed 100 years" before it became the theme of the Trudeau government (30), and he retains the image in his conclusion to *We Are Metis*, which speaks of "the full impact of the consciousness of the Metis people...in the mosaic of Canadian society" (54). Redbird says that "the prophecies of Louis Riel are the song of the Metis soul and they will be sung...in the synchronistic harmony of a pluralistic and truly Canadian reality" (55-56). Campbell shares Bissoondath's distrust/ disgust with the sort of multiculturalism that would put her "in an Indian woman's costume, parading around while white people took pictures" of her (155), but can envision a world in which "people will set aside their differences and come together as one" (184). For Beatrice Culleton, "Multiculturalism is instinctively right.... Multiculturalism has helped me to begin achieving a pride in being a Canadian citizen." Culleton believes that multiculturalism is the answer to how to demonstrate Metis participation in Canadian society, the mandate of Pemmican Publishers (now Peguis) ("Images" 50). Maracle warns, though, that "until we are also seen as people, then we are not equal and there can be no unity between us. Until our separate history is recognized and our need for self-determination satisfied we are not equal" (*I Am Woman* 103).

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## the apocalypse will begin

and  
we'll convene  
again all right  
and it'll be nothing  
like you could ever imagine  
and there won't be any petitions  
seeking any permission from anyone  
they're just be medicine wheels and dream catcher rings  
everywhere and blow outs that'll start to make oklahoma look like  
a saturday afternoon tea and nostalgia to get back  
to something less onerous like maybe the little  
big horn lyin there naked and  
frozen in the  
dust

but  
the claws  
of these melodious birds  
will be at your throat caressing  
the chords and veins to choke out that  
warbler sound and have you trill as sweet  
as any song bird could ever be  
because this ain't gonna  
be no picnic bein  
force fed  
like  
this

so  
get  
ready for  
that elixir so wild  
and free and sweet that  
you'll never go back never again  
to the way you used to be  
and the way you used  
to see and the way  
you used to  
never  
be



and  
hear anything at all  
except lightening and pounding  
and all the people telling you loud enough  
to hear enough to hear and scare  
the livin' jesus out of yuh  
with the announcement  
coming directly  
directly  
from magicians  
and sorcerers  
and wizards  
and shaman  
and raven  
himself out  
in front  
of the  
mob

dancing  
a spooky kind  
of ghost  
dance

and  
voices  
everywhere  
i repeat "They will be everywhere!"  
so you won't go mad at all at the big  
finale you never ever ever thought  
could ever happen at any time  
of history or any place  
you ever thought  
you might  
get to  
be

the past  
the future  
and the present  
grinding together all  
at once you try to forget  
and all the times you wished  
for and all the times you couldn't be there  
for all the times i needed you for the times  
i longed for you and the times you  
forgot who i was and the times

i wanted you close to me  
wrapped up in some kind  
of divine circle you  
never understood  
what happened  
if i explain  
it all  
to you  
now

again  
and again  
and again  
it won't be the end of the world  
but it sure as hell's gonna be  
the end of something so don't  
get this one confused with  
the way you'll be able to  
tell the difference  
in the voices  
and believe  
me they  
will  
be

different  
all be different  
all right  
there'll be so many voices there  
you'll gag on so many words from the likes of  
alootook and jordan, thomas and duke and buffy  
and annharte, simon and joseph and sarain  
and skyros and rita and harold  
lee and tomson and daniel  
and ruby and wayne  
and jeannette  
and jack  
and jim  
drew and pauline  
and beth and george and fred and marty  
basil and margo and lenore and emma lee  
you'll start to shake and shudder  
when they come swarming, come  
swarming out of those stormy  
clouds right out of the sky  
with their last

breath lasting  
just about  
for ever  
and ever  
and ever  
  
so  
get ready  
cos i don't wanna  
have to say this all again  
because things  
aren't  
ever  
ever  
  
gonna be  
  
quite  
the same  
  
ever  
the same  
again

# "Please Eunice, Don't Be Ignorant"

## The White Reader as Trickster in Lee Maracle's Fiction<sup>1</sup>

In the Preface to *Sojourner's Truth and Other Stories*, Lee Maracle explains how she attempts, in her writing, to integrate conventions of Native orature and traditional European story. She also constructs the role of the reader, who, in accordance with the tradition of Native storytelling, assumes responsibility for the generation of meaning. In the oral tradition, Maracle explains, "the listeners are drawn into the dilemma and are expected at some point in their lives to actively work themselves out of it" (12). In Maracle's written text, this audience involvement is signalled in the direct address of the title to the Preface—"You Become the Trickster" (11). As A. Lavonne Brown Ruoff notes, the power of the Trickster derives from his ability to "live interstitially, to confuse, and to escape the structures of society" (Ruoff 127). By giving the reader this role, then, Maracle might be seen to be abandoning—and granting her reader permission to abandon—the traditional categories and the hierarchies of author/reader, subject/object, Native/European in favour of a less restrictive, more playful engagement with the text.

One of the signal characteristics of Trickster, however, is that he is often tricked, usually through an attempt to overreach his own capabilities, a point Maracle does not allow the white reader—and in particular the white academic reader—to forget. In the Preface to *Sojourner's Truth*, and in many of the stories that follow, Maracle undermines the freedom of the reader to "become the Trickster" by emphasizing the reality of a world so rigidly and unequally divided that the Trickster's very survival as a boundary figure is

threatened. By using “We/I” and “You” throughout the Preface, Maracle interpellates the reader into a discourse where “White” and “European” are manifestly “other.” While white Canadians might want to disclaim or qualify the label of “European,” Maracle’s discourse here insists on this categorical definition, limiting the freedom of the white Trickster to transcend difference and denying the reader’s freedom to assert a multivalent identity.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the succeeding stories, Maracle alternates between accommodating and alienating narrative strategies. After seeming to engage the reader as her co-conspirator in a deconstructive project that seeks to dissolve identity in an acknowledgement of the provisionality of all categories, she repeatedly forestalls the possibility of such a rhetorical exercise by grounding the reader in a realistic narrative in which discursive play is constrained by the operation of identity politics. The stage on which the critic can now attempt to perform tricks is suddenly cluttered by a *mise en scène* that interferes with a pure engagement with script.

In this paper I want to explore the idea of the white reader—specifically the white academic reader—as Trickster, and to locate the contradictions of such a construction, as it is posited by Maracle’s text, within current debates about post-colonial reading practice. To do so, I will look at some of the ways in which Trickster has been taken up in contemporary critical theory, particularly post-modernist theory, as well as at some critiques of such deployments as essentially appropriative gestures. Maracle’s text, I will argue, does not offer the reader an easy path between these contradictory positions; indeed, by inviting the reader to become Trickster, she points to the necessary failure of all attempts to consolidate a comfortable theoretical position, even as she insists on the reader’s responsibility as an “architect of great social transformation at whatever level you choose” (13).

The “level” of transformation effected (assuming, with Maracle, that social transformation is a desirable—a possible—outcome of textual engagement) is, I would argue, at least partly dependent on the way the architect/reader construes the figure of “Trickster.”

For Tomson Highway, Trickster is as important to Cree culture as Christ is to Western culture (qtd. in Johnston 255)

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that as the role of Christ has diminished in Western culture, non-native invocations of Trickster have become more frequent. The question of the legitimacy of such transgressions of cultural boundaries is addressed by white and native writers with varying

degrees of concern. For Robert Kroetsch, the issue is simple: “the artist him/herself:/ in the long run, given the choice of being God/ or Coyote, will, most mornings, choose to be Coyote” (“Death is a Happy Ending” 208). Asked in an interview whether he sees “a difference between using the mythology that is already a part of one’s culture... and using the mythology of an alien culture, such as the Blackfoot?,” Kroetsch responds that he has read extensively in both Greek and Blackfoot mythology, and that “in the latter case, there was a sense of being free from its residue of meaning that was very exhilarating” (97). The interview proceeds:

*Wilson:* When you encountered the figure of Coyote were you struck by a sense that some of your characters.. had already been embodiments of the Coyote figure even before you had come into contact with Blackfoot mythology?

*Kroetsch:* Yes, I went and looked in my copy of Radin, but I couldn’t discover when I first read him on the trickster. In any case, I was certainly aware that I had tuned in on the figure of the trickster before I knew that it was a trickster in Radin’s sense. The trickster’s a mythic figure that really speaks to me. Partly this is because a trickster breaks down systems. There is no logic to his behavior, or only an anti-logic (99).

For Kroetsch, then, to “become Coyote” is an issue of artistic choice; moreover, Trickster’s very nature seems to sanction that freedom to ignore or transcend cultural boundaries. For many Native writers, however, these boundaries cannot be so easily dismissed. As Native American writer Chrystos eloquently points out in the poem “Vision: Bundle”:

They have our bundles split open in museums  
 our dresses & shirts at auctions  
 our languages on tape  
 our stories in locked rare book libraries  
 our dances on film  
 The only part of us they can’t steal  
 is what we know (21)

Lest the white reader associate “they” with nineteenth century anthropologists, Chrystos insists elsewhere that “No matter how sensitive you are/ if you are white/ you are” (“Those Tears” 131). Her writing further suggests that the “white” activities of anthropology and literary criticism are ultimately not that different; if “they” can’t *steal* what she knows, they can translate their own interpretations of it into cultural capital; that they have missed the essence of what they sought is small consolation when their misrepresentations help to consolidate their power, and confirm her marginalization.

As Lenore Keeshig-Tobias argues, the appropriation of knowledge can be as aggressive—and as potentially devastating—as the theft of material artifacts. She asks “Why do Canadians assume the right to know whatever they want to know but not question their right to knowledge nor the impact their words will have?” (“The Magic of Others” 175). Unlike Chrystos, Keeshig-Tobias suggests that knowledge can be stolen, or at least effaced, by colonization. As testimony to European rapaciousness, she notes in the poem “Descant” that “storytellers say/ the Trickster disappeared/ with the newcomers’ advent” (37). This belief is reflected in the Committee to Re-Establish the Trickster, which was formed in 1986 by Native writers in recognition of “the need for self-determination, the need to reclaim the Native voice in literature, to restore Native sensibility, and the need to consolidate and gain recognition for Native contributions to writing, in aboriginal language as well as in the dominant languages” (Keeshig-Tobias 173).

**T**he urgency of these goals—in particular, the need to reclaim the Native voice in literature—is acknowledged by Native American writer and critic Gerald Vizenor who has published numerous critical and fictional works with the express goal of promoting tribal literatures. Unlike Keeshig-Tobias, however, Vizenor is not concerned with the possibility of the theft or loss of the Trickster, who cannot, he argues, be reduced to a “code,” or even to a determinate figure. Vizenor demonstrates the impossibility of such reduction through his stories, which represent the performance of Trickster as they undermine academic attempts to define him/her. An extract from a story in which an anthropologist (Shicer) is interviewing an old Native woman nicknamed “the sergeant” for information on the Trickster exemplifies this approach:

Shicer was never at ease on the reservation; his academic tactics to harness the Trickster in the best tribal narratives, and to discover the code of comic behavior, hindered imagination and disheartened casual conversations. The anthropologist would celebrate theories over imagination; in this sense, academic evidence was a euphemism for linguistic colonization of tribal memories and trickster narratives.

The story unexpectedly shifts into a recitation of such a piece of “academic evidence”:

Paul Radin reviews the tribal trickster as the “presence of a figure” and as a “theme of themes” in various cultures. He declares that the trickster is a “creator and destroyer” and that he “knows neither good nor evil yet he is responsible for

both. He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come (*Trickster of Liberty* xiv).

These words are not attributed to the anthropologist, suggesting, perhaps, that Vizenor as omniscient narrator/critic is stepping in here to provide the reader with helpful background information. The roles of both the anthropologist and the knowledgeable critic are undermined in the next lines, however as the “sergeant” (thus far nearly silent) shifts the commentary back to the level of story, addressing the anthropologist directly: “‘The values, not the trickster, come into being,’ said the sergeant. ‘The trickster is a comic *holotrope* in a narrative, not a real person, but then neither are anthropologists’” (xiv).<sup>3</sup>

Though someone has definitely been tricked, here, Trickster finally eludes identification; he is, Vizenor argues, merely “a comic sign with no histories, no political or economic signification, and no being, or presence in the narrative” (“Trickster Discourse” 285). In this sense, Vizenor suggests, Trickster is essentially a postmodernist figure (281). Suggesting that the meaning of tribal literatures has been distorted by “neocolonial consumerism” he argues that

Native American Indian literatures are unstudied landscapes, wild and comic rather than tragic and representational, storied with narrative wisps and tribal discourse. Social science theories constrain tribal landscapes to institutional values, representationalism, and the politics of academic determination...

Postmodernism liberates imagination and widens the audience for tribal literatures; this new criticism rouses a comic world view, narrative discourse, and language games on the past (279).

Leaving aside the question of whether postmodernist discourse can actually serve a liberating function,<sup>4</sup> Vizenor’s argument raises some interesting questions. While Chrystos and Keeshig-Tobias might be accused of subscribing to an essentialist notion of native authenticity that replicates the colonialist binaries of native/European and self/other, Vizenor celebrates the generative power of textual miscegenation, of which Trickster is the priapic emblem. Trickster, Vizenor points out, shatters an illusion of the monologicistic integrity of all anthropological notions of identity by exposing the fictionality of their boundaries; thus both Trickster and the anthropologist can finally be revealed as imaginary. While the discursive dismantling of anthropology arguably frees up a much needed space for the play of other, competing narratives, behind the comic act of defiance lurks a



serious—even a tragic—consciousness of the effects of anthropology not just on native discourse, but also on native history. Vizenor's assertion that "postmodernism... widens the audience for tribal literatures" silently attests to the operational, if not ontological, substance of something called tribal literatures, and another, perhaps oppositional category of critical readers for whom this literature needs to be validated by locating them within the academically credible domain of postmodernist discourse. This theoretical vindication of Trickster may be seen in one way as merely the most recent manifestation of a historical tendency to define and evaluate native cultural forms according to the current biases of European epistemological systems. Vizenor's uncritical celebration of the vision of Trickster at play in the fields of postmodernism seems disturbingly oblivious to the more violent relationship that historically preceded and actually discursively engendered the current theoretical mood. If Trickster could not actually be killed off by colonization, his tricks have had to adapt to the radical alteration of the textual space in which he operates.

**A**s Karl Kerényi notes, the indeterminate and amoral figure of Trickster could not easily be reconciled with Christianity; accordingly, his mythic importance changed and diminished with European contact. Kerényi notes:

There were several ways of disposing of him. The first, and more arbitrary, was to reduce his original function to harmless entertainment by stressing his ridiculous traits. A second was to assimilate him to the [non-divine] culture heroes... The third way was his transformation into a devil either under Christian influence, by equating him with Satan, or by treating him as one who had once been a deity and had then forfeited his higher divine rank to a more powerful and genuine deity (186).

Once he has been deposed in this manner, Trickster's stories become "lies" in the pejorative sense; this transformation in particular may explain, in part, the attraction of the Trickster for postmodernist critics. Postmodernist valorization of indeterminacy, ambivalence and, perhaps most significantly, marginalization, permits the co-option of native culture under the guise of rehabilitation; the reader can approach the Native text as a form that is "equal," in both meaning(lessness) and (in)accessibility, to the white text. Keeshig-Tobias argues that such white reclamations of Native texts are, at best, illusory:

While readers may feel a kinship with Native people because of this literature, they do not recognize it is their own image and reflection they see and love. As is

sometimes said of the Trickster when he falls victim to his own folly, this creature never learns (175).

The Trickster here is invoked, in one of his more negative aspects, as a figure for the white reader. More significantly, perhaps, he functions here not as an active principle but as a metaphor, an absence, which has been elided by the overwhelming presence of the white reader. The disappearance of the Trickster to which Keeshig-Tobias refers in “Descant” may be seen as metonymic of the subsumption of native culture into European institutional discourses of religion and, more recently, literary theory. Theory, according to this argument, is merely the institutionalization of the egocentric reading practice described by Keeshig-Tobias.

As African writer Wole Soyinka observes:

[We] have been blandly invited to submit ourselves to a second epoch of colonisation—this time by a universal-humanoid abstraction defined and conducted by individuals whose theories and prescriptions are derived from the apprehension of their world and *their* history, *their* social neuroses and *their* value systems (x).

The case against theory, made by such writers as Barbara Christian in the U.S., and—not surprisingly—by Keeshig-Tobias in Canada, has been too well-documented to address in detail here<sup>5</sup>; that Maracle herself has taken up a position in the anti-theory camp merits further examination, as it informs the kind of contract she offers the reader in the Preface to *Sojourner's Truth*. She sums up her objections in *Coming to Oratory*:

Theory. If it can't be shown, it can't be understood. Theory is a proposition, proven by demonstrable argument. Argument: evidence, proof. Evidence: demonstrable testimony, demonstration... None of these words exist outside of their inter-connectedness. Each is defined by the other (3).

Theory, according to this argument, fails by virtue of its failure to connect with anything outside of language. Maracle goes on to offer an alternative approach to literary understanding, suggesting that, unlike theory,

Oratory... is unambiguous in its meaning. Oratory: place of prayer, to persuade. This is a word we can work with. We regard words as coming from original being—a sacred spiritual being. The orator is coming from a place of prayer and as such attempts to be persuasive (3).

The principles of oratory are informed, then, by a belief in the referential—even, perhaps, the reverential—power of language. As Chrystos writes, “No metaphors/ Mountains ARE our mothers” (“Savage Eloquence” 42). At the other extreme, Keeshig-Tobias points out “Native stories deal with the expe-

rience of our (Native) humanity, experiences we have laughed, cried, sweated and shit for. Experiences we have learned from” (“Magic of Others” 176). What Chrystos’s and Keeshig-Tobias’s assertions have in common is their claim—at the mythic and vernacular levels respectively<sup>6</sup>—for a special referential purchase of language in a Native context.

Aside from the dubious suggestion, implicit mainly in Keeshig-Tobias’s argument, that native writing is somehow more imbued with the substance of “real life” than white writing, the assertion of an unproblematic connection between expression and experience is successfully challenged not just by contemporary theory, but by Maracle’s fiction. Her belief in “unambiguous” meaning is belied in a Preface that asserts the freedom of the audience to derive meaning “at whatever level you choose” (13) from stories in which “all conclusions are considered valid” (12). Meaning, Maracle seems to be suggesting here, is created not so much through an unequivocal language (within which this kind of Preface would arguably be unnecessary), as through a contract between writer and audience, who “[the writer] trusts will draw useful lessons from the story” (12). The meaning of such a contract cannot be guaranteed by the sacred power of its words; rather, it must be negotiated within the historical space in which the functions of reader, writer and text are produced. To the place of the Transcendental Signified, the deity in which these functions were once rendered both indivisible and invisible, in steps Trickster, working *within* the historical space of the text to facilitate not a sacred communion, but secular communication between reader and writer, word and world. If not exactly a historical agent, Trickster is an agent with a history, not merely a semiotic sign. To attempt to thus construct him, on a culturally undifferentiated plane of textual *différance* is to make him into a parody of the transcendent deity of referentiality; here, perhaps, some *caveats* about theory need to be heeded more carefully.

Postmodern/poststructuralist theory has resulted in a proliferation of readings that, while asserting the validity of “otherness,” seek to transmute cultural specificities into universal theoretical principles. One example, described by Kumkum Sangari, may be found in the concept of “simultaneity,” a characteristic of much Latin American writing, which entails the synchronous presentation of different time-frames, modes of experience (real and mythical) and literary genres. Sangari points out that while synchrony is, for the West, a product of the discredited linear time of modernity and

progress, for Latin America it is “the restless product of a long history of miscegenation, assimilation, and syncretization *as well as* of conflict, contradiction, and cultural violence” (158). Post-modernism negates the specific historical and cultural forces by which narrative forms are produced by subsuming them within a universal deterritorializing framework. As Sangari has further noted, “since postmodernism both privileges the present and valorizes indeterminacy as a cognitive mode, it preempts change by fragmenting the ground of praxis” (181).

One of the criticisms Bell directs at the Trickster in Vizenor’s stories is that he does not accept responsibility for his actions. Without taking up that idea as it applies to Vizenor’s work specifically, I think it is worth noting one of the central ironies that characterizes postmodernist discourse as a whole: by self-consciously exhibiting the discursive under-pinnings of all truth claims, including its own, postmodernism would appear to leave its proponents discursively naked, without a veil of objectivity to hide behind. The idea of nakedness, however, of course presupposes the possibility of a something else, a subjectivity concealed beneath the neatly accessorized postmodernist suit. By reducing the idea of the coherent historical subject to a collection of discursive effects in an institutionally sanctioned space, the postmodern theorist remains safely on the level of theoretical performance without having to enact the daring role of which he speaks.

**D**istinctions between theory and practice, discourse and history, safety and danger are of central importance in Maracle’s writing. In talking about the essential vulnerability of the postmodernist position, Kroetsch has noted:

You stay alive by moving around on those edges where you risk meaninglessness all the time. That’s one of the risks you have to take on the edge, that it might be just totally meaningless... It is the old trick of Proteus or the trickster figure... saying “I don’t know the rules and I don’t really want to know the rules. I’m willing to stay out here where the rules are shifting and maybe even unknowable (*Labyrinths of Voice* 130-1).

For Maracle the choice of whether to adopt a rhetorical position of interstitiality is eclipsed by her concern mimetically to render the historical conditions by which marginality is not chosen but conferred on the native subject. This condition is represented in her novel *Bobbi Lee* in which the narrator-protagonist observes:

no welfare from the city because I couldn't prove I wasn't a Registered Indian, and no assistance from Indian Affairs because I couldn't prove I was a Registered Indian.

Maybe, if I'd pursued the thing higher up in the bureaucracy I could have gotten something. But I was really ashamed and the whole thing seemed such an ugly mess. "Fuck it!" I thought. "I'm not going begging any more. (93)

Bobbi Lee manages to turn the situation to her advantage, using it to assert her independence from both juridical categories. By thematically representing the condition of liminality, Maracle is able both to expose the arbitrariness of official discourses of race and to stage the performance of an identity that refuses to be contained by them. In her writing she also seeks, through her integration of the principles of European literature and native orature, to enact her own liberation from rigid discursive categories. By grounding her emancipatory gesture in an essentially realist narrative, she foregrounds the importance of negotiation and struggle in all such political projects.

In the story "Who's Political Here?," for example, the activity of the narrator, which consists of shopping, doing laundry, tending children, cooking dinner and having sex, is counterpointed with conversation about the activity of her husband, who has been jailed for postering. For her husband's friends, who have planted themselves, uninvited, in her living room, his situation assumes a monumental symbolic significance. While the narrator cooks them dinner, they "discuss the 'politics' of Tom's arrest":

"He was probably arrested because the subject matter of the poster was South Africa," someone says.

I resume doing dishes and mothering my daughters and only half listen to the chatter. Some of it is pure theatre. It seems absurd to me to attach a whole world analysis to a simple postering charge (36).

By this point, it seems absurd to the reader as well. Drawn into the consciousness of the narrator, we are confronted by a world in which existence is defined by activity. Fraught by emotions of irritation towards her husband, mingled frustration and love for her daughters and desire and revulsion towards her husband's friend, the narrator is constantly forced to compromise these feelings in the face of the need to act in the world. Caught up in the reality of the narrator's domestic life, the reader shares her impatience with the solemn and empty pronouncements of the men around her.

The principle of activity is reflected in a narrative style that is consistent with one aspect of postmodern "synchrony"; distinctions are seldom drawn between modes of speech, thought and action. The principal vehicle for this

confluence of modes is free (direct) discourse, as is illustrated in the description of the narrator's attempt to leave the house to go shopping:

"You said you were going to do laundry." He is whining now. There is nothing worse than hearing a grown man whine. Grown man. Since when have you known a man to really grow up, Lee. I agree that I am going to do the laundry, today, and put both girls in the stroller (back-to-back), and haul the shopping cart and kids down the lane (29).

This narrative strategy functions here in the way Henry Louis Gates describes, with reference to African literary texts, "as an implicit critique of that ancient opposition in narrative theory between showing and telling, between mimesis and diegesis" (208). In Maracle's story, where meaning is explicitly embodied in action, the use of free discourse signals the inseparability of description and process, interpretation and being. In this way, it signals, as Gates observes, an aspiration to the dramatic (208). While such a trope may function in a postmodernist text to highlight the discursive constructedness of all ostensibly "pure" events, it becomes, in Maracle's text, a way of getting around the constraints of written discourse mentioned in the Preface. She explains:

In these stories I've had to delete some wonderful moments in the listening process. When our orators get up to speak, they move in metaphorical ways. Anyone who has watched our speakers is familiar with the various faces of the orator. Each facial expression, change in tone of voice, cadence or diction has meaning for us... The silent language of metaphor is a story in itself. I substitute physical description for physical metaphor" (13).

Free direct discourse functions as a bridge between physical description and verbal utterance. Even when she is not employing this strategy, however, Maracle succeeds in conveying a sense of speech and activity as continuous:

"OK."..."Don't put your fingers in the butter," and I move it out of the reach of my youngest girl. "Put the hat back on his head," to the older one. "Cream, sugar?..."Practically speaking, fifty bucks is a bit of a wad. I don't have it." (33).

This passage seems to demonstrate the narrator's mastery—both of her environment within the story, and of the story itself; indeed, according to Maracle's principles of story, the two arenas are inseparable. Within the story, the narrator ultimately demonstrates that mastery is an illusion. While she clearly gains a victory over Frankie and the other men, refusing to validate their belief in the superiority of their discourse, she confesses to being unnerved by Patti, her husband's mistress. While she is not bothered

by the affair, she observes “she has some sort of secret inside of her that inspires men to respect her brain and not intrude on her person by reducing her to a servant. I envy her position” (37). Patti’s “secret” is contempt for women, and a willingness to play by the rules of the male discourse. The narrator—Maracle—refuses to be bound by those rules and so is denied the “position” they could confer on her<sup>7</sup>. She cannot, however, refuse them entirely, as is disturbingly illustrated by her initial encounter with Frankie, about which she comments

I have to put up with gross physical nuances like having his arm accidentally brush my breasts, but I don’t care. Under the coercive pressure of hauling fifty pounds of babies and another seventy-five of groceries a full five blocks, the stupid little rubs don’t seem so bad (30).

Both accepting Frankie’s help and, later, sleeping with him require an act of compromise—something which Frankie shows himself to be incapable of understanding. He and the other men, comfortably entrenched in the unassailable simplicity of their “political” theories, are disengaged from the world around them, and are thus able to maintain the illusion that their power is both uncompromising and uncompromised. The narrator, and Maracle, on the other hand both see compromise as a means of survival, of being “political” in an active, instead of a theoretical sense.

This vision is clearly demonstrated in “Eunice,” a more overtly autobiographical story about a meeting of women writers who are preparing a feminist program for community radio. The meeting is being hosted by Eunice (whom Maracle has not previously met), a white woman suffering from agoraphobia. At first, Maracle is reluctant to attend the meeting, fearing that Eunice, who had not been a part of the group during the past ten years of consciousness raising, might make tactless comments such as “Why do Indian women drink so much?” (57). Deciding that her desire to meet with other women writers is stronger than her misgivings about dealing with an unknown white woman, she silently pleads “*Please Eunice, don’t be ignorant*” (57). As it turns out, Eunice is, in a sense, ignorant. After speaking to Maracle for some time, someone else’s comment leads her to say “You’re Native Indian, aren’t you?” Maracle reacts

*Oh christ*, here it comes, as I answer “yes” and numb up for the next line.

“How stupid of me, now I see it. I guess you get enough of that? I mean, I knew you weren’t white, but... Oh, I better shut up before I get both feet in my mouth” (62).

“The stiffness in the room,” Maracle notes, “was palpable” (62). The moment passes and, when Eunice doesn’t make the kind of racist generalization Maracle feared, their conversation resumes, and Maracle’s anxiety subsides somewhat. Later in the conversation, another woman asks “How come women don’t write about political meetings?” to which Eunice replies weakly that she “doesn’t go to meetings, but that she’s getting ready to” (62). Empathizing now with Eunice’s embarrassment, Maracle observes “No one says it, but we all feel like Jam has said something out of turn” (62). The meeting is filled with moments like these—words uttered, words withheld, not because they serve the agenda of the meeting (which is eventually abandoned), but because they facilitate the communication which is necessary to begin the process of dismantling prejudices. The project for which all the women have gathered—a program on “the politics of international feminism” for International Women’s Day—remains the central force of the meeting, even as it becomes peripheral. The significant action in the story becomes the conversation of the women, the guiding direction of which is continually compromised by the difficult task of creating an atmosphere of tolerance in which to frame their discussion. Though such an atmosphere is ultimately achieved, it is both precarious and provisional. It would, in fact, have been easier for Maracle to stay home. Reflecting on Eunice’s agoraphobia, she notes “We were both somewhat comfortable in our feminine invisibility, only Eunice stayed there while I merely desired to” (57). Writing, for Maracle is a relinquishment of invisibility. It is, at the same time, a compromise, as she is forced to translate the principles of oratory into a form that is unwieldy in both literary and political terms.<sup>8</sup> She explains the importance of writing thus:

The value of resistance is the reclaiming of the sacred and significant self. By using story and poetry I move from the empowerment of my self to the empowerment of every person who reads the book. It is personally dangerous for me to live among dis-empowered oppressed individuals (14).

In order to become empowered by Maracle’s writing, the reader, too, has to relinquish the comforts of safety that are afforded by the adoption of a theory that wards off conflict and contradiction by a ritual invocation of heterogeneity. To “be the Trickster” is not just to celebrate the dissolution of discursive boundaries, but to engage, as Maracle does, with the complexities and contradictions of history. In the oral tradition, Maracle points out, “the listeners are drawn into the dilemma and are expected at some point in their



lives to actively work themselves out of it.” As readers—as academic readers—we need to continue to look for ways of achieving such an engagement.

#### NOTES

- 1 A version of this paper was given at the Div. on Orality and the Construction of Indigenous Texts, MLA Convention, New York, 27 Dec. 1992.
- 2 Dorothy Seaton comments on a similar interpellative strategy in Chrystos’s poetry, noting that Chrystos simultaneously draws white readers into her narrative conscious while rigidly maintaining their exclusion: “The result is that i,... am being made foreign, other, both to the field of experience and knowledge constructed in *Not Vanishing*, and ultimately, even to myself” (1).
- 3 For a variation on this theme, in which the anthropologist, this time, unwittingly becomes Coyote, see Thomas King’s *One Good Story, That One*.
- 4 This issue has been debated in a post-colonial context by a number of critics, including Kumkum Sangari and several writers in *Past the Last Post*, Adam and Tiffin, eds. For commentary on Vizenor in particular, see Betty Brant who, though she endorses the emancipatory potential of Vizenor’s project, also questions the connection between ludic performance and political engagement.
- 5 For a different perspective, see Paranipe. Among the more cogent responses to the anti-theorists are those by Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak.
- 6 Working from a model proposed by French linguist Henri Gobard, Sylvia Söderlind differentiates between four different linguistic registers—mythic, vehicular, referential and vernacular—which vary in accordance with their territoriality, or rootedness in a particular cultural location. In spite of their different frames of reference, mythic or sacred language shares with the vernacular the function of demarcating a realm of belief shared by all members of a particular community. In semiotic terms, these languages carry the perception of the sign as “natural and indivisible” (11).
- 7 The conflation of the roles of author and narrator are suggested not only by Maracle’s use of her own name within this and other stories, but also by her assertion in the Preface that they are “stories from my life, my imagination and my history” (11).
- 8 In noting this opposition, I am not invoking the argument that Maracle has advanced elsewhere (discussed above), that “oratory... is unambiguous in its meaning” (*Coming to Oratory* 3). In a politico-historical context, however, the translation of oral narrative into writing is attended by special difficulties.

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## An examination

Again the doctor's mechanical prodding:  
when did your parents die,  
and why? It's a pity your children  
are not your own: we might have told

from their diseases the reasons  
for your complaint. (I'm getting old:  
that's complaint enough.) It hurts  
when I do this? and this? and this?

(Yes. And that and that and that.)  
Take these pills with every meal,  
take these for pain as needed (I don't need

pain) and these before you sleep.  
(I cannot sleep. My children are not my own.  
Why *did* my parents die?)

# Raven Travelling: Page One

A Lost Haida Text by

Skaai of the Qquuna Qiighawaa

Transcribed at Skidegate in October 1900

by John Swanton

*Edited & Translated by*

*Robert Bringhurst*

## Introduction

Haida is one of the dozens of Native American languages in which a substantial oral literature has been transferred to written form. In this case and in most such cases, it is ludicrous to speak of anonymous folktales. In Haida, what we have is nothing less than a major classical literature—one which would be admired worldwide if it were freed from the deadly combination of critical neglect and uncritical awe with which outsiders often respond to Native American intellectual and literary traditions.

The home territory of this literature is Haida Gwaii, “the Islands of the People,” which are shown on most maps as the Queen Charlotte Islands, off the northern coast of British Columbia. These islands were once ringed with small beach-front villages of seahunters, whose population at the time of European contact has been estimated at about 10,000. After the smallpox epidemics of the 19th century, scarcely 1000 Haida were alive. This remnant was concentrated in the two mission villages of Skidegate and Masset, and in the southern Alaskan settlements of Hydaburg and Kasaan.

All the important texts in classical Haida were manually transcribed by one man, the American linguist and ethnologist John Reed Swanton (1873–1958), who spent the fall of 1900 and the spring and summer of 1901 in Haida Gwaii on assignment for the Bureau of American Ethnology and for Franz Boas at the American Museum of Natural History. Swanton recorded some 150 narratives and a number of short songs in both the southern and northern, or Skidegate and Masset, dialects of Haida. The southern and

northern texts differ not only in language but in literary form, and for the student of oral narrative poetry, the southern or Skidegate texts are considerably the more important.

The two most capable oral poets Swanton recorded are Walter of the Qaayahllaanas (born in the village of Qaisun circa 1850, and baptized in the 1890s as Walter McGregor) and his older colleague Skaai of the Qquuna Qiighawaai of Ttanuu (born in the village of Qquuna circa 1840, and baptized at Qadasghu on 31 January 1894 as John Sky). Both were speakers of the southern dialect, and both were living at the mission village of Skidegate—known in Haida as Hlghagilda—in 1900, when Swanton arrived.

Skaai in particular impressed Swanton as a poet of great gifts. The two men met on Monday, 8 October 1900, in the Skidegate house of the headman of Ttanuu, where the poet was living. Introductions were made by Swanton's Haida assistant, Henry Moody of the Qaagyals Qiighawaai, whose active participation was indispensable to the transcription process, and the three men worked together intensely for the remainder of the month. On Sunday, 14 October, Swanton wrote a long letter to Boas. He has been working, he says,

with an old man in the village who has a crippled back but is admitted on all hands to tell the old legends very correctly. His first story covers 126 pages with twelve or thirteen lines to the page. The second is not yet complete but will probably cover about seventy. It seems that a certain set of tales were told ... in a definite order.... Of this series the Raven story comes last, and this old man is almost the last in Skidegate who remembers the whole of it.... I consider him quite a find....<sup>1</sup>

Out of Swanton's year among the Haida came five books, published between 1905 and 1912. All are of interest to the student of oral literature—but it is important to realize that the most important fruits of Swanton's work were never published at all.

All the narratives that Swanton collected in the northern dialect of Haida were published in bilingual form in 1908 as *Haida Texts: Masset Dialect* (Publications of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition, vol. x.2. Leiden: E.J. Brill). The songs, both northern and southern dialect, were published (again in bilingual form, but without music) in 1912 as *Haida Songs* (in one volume with Franz Boas, *Tsimshian Texts: New Series*, publications of the American Ethnological Society, vol. III. Leiden: E.J. Brill). The crucial texts in the southern dialect were not so fortunate. Swanton prepared them meticulously for publication in a volume to be issued by his employer, the

Bureau of American Ethnology, but when that volume came from the press, only a few brief sample texts were included in the Haida language. The masterpieces of Haida oral literature had been published, to Swanton's dismay, only in his English prose translations, which give little clue to the style of the originals. (The resulting volume is *Haida Texts and Myths: Skidegate Dialect*, BAE Bull. 29. Washington, DC: Bureau of American Ethnology, 1905.)

To supplement these three collections of Haida texts, Swanton published two important studies: *Contributions to the Ethnology of the Haida* (Publications of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition, vol. v.1. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1905) and a short work on the language, *Haida: An Illustrative Sketch* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1910).<sup>2</sup>

**S**wanton began the editing of the Skidegate texts in October 1901 and finished his typescript by the end of 1902. Sometime after 1905, when the Bureau had failed to print the texts as expected, the unpublished typescript was transferred to Swanton's mentor, Franz Boas at Columbia University—evidently in the hope that Boas could arrange for its publication. Boas was indeed responsible for seeing that the Masset texts and the Haida songs were eventually published in full bilingual form, as Swanton desired, but he did not arrange for publication of the Skidegate originals.

In the 1920s, the Skidegate manuscript was studied and annotated by another anthropologist, Theresa Mayer Durlach, whose line numbers are now to be found in the margins.<sup>3</sup> In 1942, on Boas's death, the manuscript was transferred with many of Boas's other papers to the American Philosophical Society Library in Philadelphia. It rests there today, as Ms Boas Coll. n1.5, or to insiders, item 1534 in John F. Freeman's *Guide to Manuscripts Relating to the American Indian in the Library of the American Philosophical Society* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1965). The manuscript was also microfilmed around that time, and microfilm copies have made their way to interested scholars around the world—including Haida students, who have access to these texts and others through an archive of their own at the Queen Charlotte Islands Museum in Skidegate.

The Skidegate manuscript is a handsome and legible typescript, in the old phonetic alphabet used by Boas and all his students. It bears Swanton's emendations in ink on every page. But sometime between 1905 and 1942—

that is to say, before its transfer to Philadelphia and before it was micro-filmed—page one of the Skidegate manuscript was lost. Because the first text in the pile was Skaai's story of creation, this loss is not insignificant. What is missing from the Skidegate manuscript is the opening of a Native American Genesis, a great Haida poet's vision of the birth of the world. Restoration of the text from Swanton's original field notes has not been feasible, since almost all of the notebooks from his months at Skidegate have also disappeared.

In March 1992, I was rooting through the Swanton papers at the Smithsonian Institution. The Smithsonian catalogue listed a letterpress book, donated to the archives in 1972 by John Reed Swanton, Jr. When I asked for it, I was handed not a letterpress book but an old brown binder full of wrinkled onionskin. To the cataloguer, this is Ms 7047, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. To me, it turned out to be something more. Moments after I opened it, I realized that I was looking at Swanton's uncorrected carbon copy of the Skidegate texts. Then I brushed my hand across the page, and whole sentences vanished before my eyes. The carbon was so fragile I could send entire paragraphs to oblivion with the simple touch of a sleeve. But I had not, in my clumsiness, damaged page one. Within an hour, we had copies of the missing page.

At the top of page one is a title—*Xhuuya qagaangas*, "Raven Travelling." Beneath that is the opening of a two-hour poem, in the voice of the poet Skaai of the Qquuna Qiighawaai, or John Sky. It is not *the* Haida vision of creation, but *a* Haida vision, spoken in the ruins of a culture a century ago by an old man with a crippled back and a beautiful mind.

The opening of the poem—page one and some of its sequel—is reproduced below in Haida and in my English translation. I've made a number of small corrections to the Haida text as Swanton transcribed it, but in general I follow his phonetic judgements very closely. The language is classical southern Haida, which was already archaic in 1900, and the text has *not* been modernized to accord with the pronunciation and syntax of more recent speakers at Skidegate. I have, however, converted it to a typographic format designed to reflect the formulaic structure and pace of the original oral narrative, and to a simpler orthography than the one Swanton used.

A copy of the missing page in Swanton's own orthography is now on

deposit at the American Philosophical Society Library in Philadelphia, with the rest of the Skidegate manuscript, and in Skidegate itself at the Queen Charlotte Islands Museum.

### Guide to the Alphabet

Short vowels are written once (*a, i, u*) and long vowels are written twice (*aa, ii, uu*). Consonants include the following:

'	glottal stop, except between <i>n</i> and <i>g</i>	<i>qq</i>	glottalized <i>q</i> (glottalized unvoiced uvular stop)
<i>dl</i>	λ (voiced lateral stop)	<i>tl</i>	λ (unvoiced lateral stop)
<i>gh</i>	uvular <i>g</i> (voiced uvular stop)	<i>tt</i>	glottalized <i>t</i>
<i>hl</i>	ɬ (unvoiced lateral fricative)	<i>ttl</i>	glottalized λ
<i>kk</i>	glottalized <i>k</i>	<i>tts</i>	glottalized <i>ts</i>
<i>ng</i>	ŋ (velar nasal: <i>ng</i> as in <i>wing</i> )	<i>x</i>	unvoiced velar fricative ( <i>ch</i> in German <i>ich</i> )
<i>n'g</i>	<i>n</i> + <i>g</i> ( <i>ng</i> as in <i>Wingate</i> )	<i>xh</i>	unvoiced uvular fricative ( <i>ch</i> in Scottish <i>loch</i> )
<i>n'gh</i>	<i>n</i> followed by uvular <i>g</i>		
<i>q</i>	uvular <i>k</i> (unvoiced uvular stop)		

## Xhuuya Qagaangas

Aanishau tangagyangang, wansuuga.

L xitghwaangas, Xhuuya a.

Tlgu qqaugashlingaay gi la qiingas.

Qaudihau gwaayghutgwa nang qaadla qqaayghudiyas

lagu qqaughaayghan lagha xiidas.

Aa tl sgahaana qidas yasgagas giinuusis gangang

lagu gutgwi xhihldagahldiyaagas.

Ga sghaanagwaay ghaaxas la ttista qqaa sqqagilaangas,

tlgwixhan xhahlgwi at wagwi a.

Ghaadagas gyanhau, ising ghaalghagang, wansuuga.

[Nangkilstlas nagma ghahau tatl tsigha'awagan.

Singghalghada l qaaxuhls gyan l kindagaangas.

Sta la xitkkuudahldajasi

gyan gaguu la qqaughaawas guxhan la qqaugingas.



Gyan nang qqaayas taaydiyas gam lagwi qiihxaganggangas.  
Qaudi ising ising l qaaxuhls gyan kindaagangas  
gyan sta la kkuugwijaasi gyan l qqaaugangas.  
Gangang la suugang.  
Qaudihau ghaatxhan l skujuu dayasta la kyanangas:  
«Jaa, gaasintlau daa suuganggang ‘aa,’ kilstlaay?»

«Gam hau hla guudangangghi suuganggangga.  
Sghaana qidas tsiyahlingaay gaawun diigi suuwus.  
Ghaagaanhou hl suuwugangga.»

Gyan han la la suudas,  
«Hla tlguhlghaasang.»]<sup>4</sup>

Gyanhou lasta ising l xitghwang qaudi,  
aanang qaxustagha ghaadasis.  
Gyagang la qiyastahlguhling, wansuuga.  
Gyanhou gha la xitxyaawuhlasi.  
Gyanhou gudang ghi la gijahlasi gyan agang la danggaahlasi.

Lnaaghaay guutgha statliiyihlasi  
gyan qqaadaxustagaay gan nang laana augas giitga qiighaawas.  
Gyanhou singxayas tl qqaastldlgagas.  
Gyanhou l sttagusta nang ghaaxhas la hlghuntlstas  
gyan ghi la qaajas.  
Ladla silaaygha dlgudyasi.

Daghalaygha l tsin’gha l ginangas  
gyan lagi la tl dlstlas.  
Gyanhou la la dlndhlhlayas gyan l sttagu la dadatldayas.  
La la danggyaaxhaayas.  
Ising gutgghi la la isdas.  
Gyan daghalaygha ising gangang la la isdas  
gyan sihlgyang l augha gi la la dlstlas.

Aasiigu l qquudasi.  
Gam l xhihliigha ttl abaagangas.  
Ghaatxhan singxayas gyan ttl taystldlgagas  
gyan ttl qqaastldlgagaay dluu,  
xhiilang la qqaahludayas.  
Naxha gut agang la guudangadas.  
Gutgangang ttl qqaastldlgagas.

Gyanhau ghaghwaangkkiyagha l dldajaadaayas.  
Ghistaghang la xitxiisdaayas gyan l qaaxuhls.

Kun'gidaygha nang ttiiji hlghagha naawasi l qingdiyas.  
Gyanhau l gaawas l qqaau qaudi.

Giina la skyuustltsas,  
gyan l augha qqaatgu stlghusinggaayas  
tlgwi la (2)<sup>5</sup> stlstlaayas,  
gyan silaay la kitxaalas,  
gyan waghii giina la skyuugyaangas la skyuuwagasghas.  
Gyan ghaayxhadaay at gutghi la kkinhlghahldiyasi  
tlaaguda la taadiyasi.  
Wagu kumdalgangasi.  
Gan agang la qquqqadiyasi.  
Ahlsi kun'gidaay sta la qingdiyasi.

Ising singxayas gyan taaystlaayas  
gyan ising l qaaxuhlas.  
L gau qaudi ising giina la skyuustltsas  
gyan la skyuughasghasi  
gyan ghayxadaay at gut sighii la kkinjigulaangasi.  
La sqqagaagyalasi gyan la taawasi gu ghan agang la qquqqaagasi.  
Kun'gidaay ghiista nang ttiiji hlghaagas qingaghadiyasi.  
L uugiigas,  
gyan ghagwaangkkiyaay ghii taaytsaasi.

Singgahlanaay gu lnagaay ghatliihlxhan waagha xilangdaasi.  
Aasi la gudangdiyasi.  
Lnagaay ghatliihldaayaagani,  
gyan ghastansing xhangii iinaghwaay gawuhlghiyalagani.  
Gyanhau nang qqayaagas ghansta siwung, wansuuga.  
«Jaa, hau tl giidagha qiigan hau waadiga.  
La hla qingghu.  
Ttl qqaasdla atxanhau ghiistaghang ttl gyaaxhattlxagangga.»

Gyanhau l tsin'gha lagi kkuuxu gya'at isdaayas,  
gyan gha la ttl dlskiidas.  
Gyanhau l tsin'gha kihlguaaayas gyan nang qaaxuhls.

«Hala nang giidagha qiighan ghan giitqaghandaaga gwa-gwa-aa-aa.»  
Gyan lnagaay tl giijatdaghaagasi dluuxan

tł stajuugixhas suugħa la tł ghaginggyagans gu la għan tł suuwidiyas.  
Qaudiħau la gut agang tł dlghatguħldas  
gyan lagi tł qiyatajas.  
Squulagi għaadang l għatgaajghuulangdailas  
gyan l għatghaaskitgiyas.

Gyanħau l gaayguugiigwangas kiyahl la sghayihlgwangas.  
Qaudiħau kihlsindihlgang la qqaadigas.  
L qqa qaudi ħan ġiina l suuwudas,  
«Dang tsin'gha quuniigaay gwaahlang dang qaattsixħalga.»  
Ġii la xaahltattlxhaayasi  
gyan gam ġiina gut ghahlgħaagħangas.  
Gyan ising l gaayghagiighwang qaudi  
ising gangang ġiina l suuwudasi.  
Ġii la xatldaayasi.  
Gam ġiina gut ghahlgħaagħangas.  
Gyanħau kkuuxwaay xħangii ġhii la qingttlxħaasi.  
Yaaxħudada dljittlxhas.  
«Dang tsin'gha quuniigaay gwaahlang dang qaattsixħalga.»  
Ĥan l suuwus atgudluu l ttagas.

Gyanħau l qaahlaywas.  
Hlqyaama qaaji sqqasting hlħiit l gaayghaghadaangdiyas.  
Gyanħau gut la qaagaayasi.  
Ttiis gyaghan qaaji sting gut ttagħanii la qaagyas.  
Gyanħau gut la qaattaalasi.  
Sagaay laaghan ġhiidas gangaaxħan tsighangaay laaghan ġhiidasi.

Gyanħau naay qqiyuugi la gyaxhattlxasi.  
Gyanħau laghan la għaaguyingttsaayaghan.  
«Hala qaattsi ttakkingħa,  
diigha daa gyasildagħsas danggha kiiyinga (3) ġan.»

Gyanħau ġhii la qaattsaa'asi.  
Tajxwaa nang qqaayaga sqqin gangang ġhiida qqaawuwas.  
Gyanħau kun'gidaygha ġhuuda kkuskkaxyawasi la la diighldaayasi,  
gyan lagi la la skkastlsgħaayagani gangaaxħan  
gut ġhiista la la danttsistatliihlas.  
Gyan ġhiista ġiina skkadala sghwana kkaangalxyahlkkamdahlsi  
nang sghwaana ising kkaangalhlghaahls  
gyan ħan la la suuwudas lagila xħastliyaay dluu,

«Diihau dang iiji.

Waa'asing dang iiji.»

Tajxwaaxhit lalaghaay gutgha kunhuusi

ungut giina ghuuhlghahl stlapdala ganhlghahl daayasi la suuwudasi.

Gyan han la la suuwudas,

«Aanis hla qqaaystlgiighutstlang

giina l ttiiji qquhlang la at xutskidang.»

Gyanhau dangat la qaaxulaay dluu

anang hlghaahls la qqaaystlgiitlaagans,

gyan nang xyahlkkamdals tiiji la qquutlaayas

la at la xutsidaay dluu

haying wasta gadaasis.

La suudaayagani iila la isdaasi

ghaagaanhou wasta gaadajaagani.

Wiyidhau nang hlghahls gwi la stihls

gyan ttiiji la qqutlas

gyan la at la xutsgidaas

gyan waygi ttatsgidaasi.

Gyanhau nang xahlkkamdals ttiiji la qqutlayas

gyan la at xutsgidas.

Waygi ttatsgiidasi.

Aahau qaayt hlingaay hau iijang, wansuuga.

Aanis la gaaystlgaayaay dluu

gutsta agang la dangdaxhaagangas.

Tlaaguda sghaana qidas gaayu gut tsiiyagas l dlgidaawas.

Qqadaxwa laana ising gangaxhan isisi

la ising ghiihlgii qqaaygistlas.

(4)<sup>6</sup>

# Raven Travelling

*Skaai of the Qquuna Qiighawaai  
told at Hlghagilda, October 1900*

Hereabouts was all saltwater, they say.  
He kept on flying, Raven did,  
looking for land that he could stand on.  
After a time, beyond the Islands, there was one rock awash.  
He flew there to sit.  
Like sea-sausages,<sup>7</sup> gods lay across it,  
putting their mouths against it side by side.  
The newborn gods were sleeping, out along the reef,  
heads and tails in all directions.  
It was light then, and it turned to night, they say.

[Loon was living in Voicehandler's house.  
One day she went out and called.  
Then she flew back in and sat waiting,  
right where she usually sat.  
An old man lay there, not looking up at her.  
She went out a second time and called  
and hurried back in and sat.  
She kept saying the same thing.  
After a time, with his back to the fire, the old man said,  
«Tell me, Great Speechmaker, why do you keep on talking as you do?»  
«I am not talking only from my own mind.  
The gods tell me they need places to live.  
That is why I have been speaking.»

And he said,  
«I am going to make some.»]<sup>8</sup>

Now when the Raven had flown a while longer,  
the sky in one direction brightened.  
It enabled him to see, they say.  
And then he flew right up against it.  
He pushed his mind through and pulled his body after.

There were five villages strung out in a line.  
In the northernmost, the headman's favored daughter had just given birth  
to a child.  
When evening came, and they were sleeping,

the Raven peeled the skin off the newborn child, starting at the feet,  
and put it on.

Then he lay down in the child's place.

Next day, his grandfather asked for the child  
and they passed him along.

His grandfather washed him.

Then, he pressed the child's feet against the ground  
and stretched him up to a standing position.

Then he handed him back.

Next day he stretched him again  
and handed him back to his mother.

Now he was hungry.

They had not yet started feeding him chewed-up food.

Then evening came again, and they lay down,

and when they slept,

he raised his head and looked around.

He listened throughout the house.

All alike were sleeping.

Then he untied himself from the cradle.

He squirmed his way free and went outside.

Something that was half rock, living in the back corner, watched him.

While he was gone, it continued to sit there.

He brought something in in the fold of his robe.

In front of his mother, where the fire smoldered,

he poked at the coals.

He scooped out a cooking spot with a stick,

and there he put the things that he carried.

As soon as the embers had charred them, he ate them.

They slithered.

He laughed to himself.

Therefore he was seen from the corner.

Again it was evening and they lay down,

and again he went out.

He was gone for a while.

Again he carried things back in the fold of his robe,

and he brought them out

and roasted them over the coals.

Then he pulled them out and ate them, laughing to himself.

The one that was half rock watched him from the corner.  
He ate them all,  
and then he lay down in the cradle.

When morning came, all five villages were wailing.  
He could hear them.  
In four of the five villages, each of the people was missing an eye.  
Then one of the old people spoke, they say.  
«The newborn baby of the favored child goes out.  
I have seen him.  
As soon as they sleep, he gets up and leaves.»

Then his grandfather gave him a marten-skin blanket  
and they wrapped it around him.  
His grandfather whispered and someone went out.

«Come bring the baby of the favored child outsi-i-i-i-ide.»

And as soon as the people had gathered,  
they stood in a circle, bouncing him up as they sang him a song.  
After a while they let him fall,  
and they watched him go down.  
Turning round to the right he went down through the clouds  
and struck water.  
Then as he drifted about, he kept crying.  
After his voice grew tired, he slept.

He slept for a while, and then something said to him,  
«Your father's father asks you in.»<sup>9</sup>  
He looked all around.  
He saw nothing.  
Again, when he had floated there awhile,  
something said the same thing.  
He looked around.  
He saw nothing.  
Then he looked through the eye of his marten-skin blanket.  
A pied-bill grebe appeared.  
«Your father's father asks you in.»  
As soon as he said this, he dived.

Then he sat up.  
He was floating against a two-headed kelp.  
Then he stepped onto it.

He was standing—yes!—on a two-headed stone housepole.  
 Then he climbed down it.  
 It was the same to him in the sea as it was to him above.

Then he came down in front of a house,  
 and someone invited him in.  
 «Come inside, my grandson.  
 the birds have been singing about your borrowing something from me.»

Then he went in.  
 At the back an elder, white as a gull, was sitting.  
 And he sent him to get a box that hung in the corner.  
 As soon as he had it,  
 he pulled out the boxes within the box, totalling five.  
 In the innermost box were cylindrical things,  
 one colored like mother-of-pearl and one that was black,  
 and he handed him these as he said to him,  
 «You are me.  
 You are that, too.»  
 He spoke of some slender blue things turning black  
 on top of the screens forming a point in the rear of the house.

Then he said to him,  
 «Set this one into the water, roundways up,  
 and bite off part of the other and spit it at this.»

But when the Raven brought them up,  
 he set the black one into the water  
 and bit off a part of the one like mother-of-pearl.  
 When he spat that at the other,  
 it bounced away.

He did it the other way round from the way he was told,  
 and that is the reason it bounced away.

Now he went back to the black one  
 and bit off a piece of it,  
 and spat that at the other.  
 Then it stuck.  
 And he bit a part off of the one like mother-of-pearl  
 and spat that at the other.  
 It stuck.  
 That is how trees started, they say.



When he set this place into the water,  
 it stretched itself out.  
 The gods swam to it, taking their places.  
 The mainland did the same,  
 as soon as he set it into the water roundways up.

#### NOTES

- 1 Original in the Department of Anthropology Archives, American Museum of Natural History, New York.
- 2 Additional linguistic material of importance includes Robert D. Levine's unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, "The Skidegate Dialect of Haida" (Columbia University, New York, 1977) and Erma Lawrence's (northern dialect) *Haida Dictionary* (Fairbanks: Alaska Native Language Center, 1977, with a grammar by Jeff Leer). Much important work on Haida linguistics has been done in more recent years by John Enrico, but very little of this work has yet been published.
- 3 Durlach's work yielded a useful book: *The Relationship Systems of the Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian* (New York: American Ethnological Society, 1928).
- 4 The section printed here in square brackets was dictated to Swanton separately by Henry Moody's father, Job Moody of the Sttawaas Xhaaydagaay. Swanton inserted it into Skaai's text.
- 5 The bold figures in angle brackets mark the page breaks in the original Swanton manuscript. Thus (2) marks the transition from the lost ms page one—which exists only in the form of an uncorrected carbon copy at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC (manuscript 7047 [Swanton] in the National Anthropological Archives)—to ms page two, which is the first page of the Philadelphia manuscript.
- 6 This is the first one eighth of Skaai's poem.
- 7 *Parastichopus californicus*, called *giinuu* in Haida, and sea-cucumbers or sea-sausages in English, are edible holothurians—tubular animals—living in tidal waters. They are red or brown, with very short, stubby but pointed tentacles. Alive and fresh, they tend to be about 30–45 cm long. Cleaned and boiled, they shrink to resemble hollow sausages.
- 8 See note 4 above.
- 9 The mythcreature behind the invitation is called *dang tsin'gha quunigaay*, "your grandfather the big." The qualifier *quuna*, big, has a special meaning here, analogous to the special meaning of 'great' in the English phrase 'great grandfather.' *Quuna* is used alone to refer to a father-in-law, who is necessarily a senior male of the *same moiety*. In the Haida kinship system, a person's own father is necessarily of the opposite moiety; so is one's mate. The father-in-law—the mate's father—is therefore always of the same side. Among grandfathers, one's mother's father is always of the opposite side, and one's father's father always of the same side. *Tsin quuna* is a male of the same moiety and the grandfather's generation, or indeed of any generation older than that. It means 'male ancestor, older than a father, of the same side.' The relationship between a younger male and such an ancestor is, therefore, potentially one of reincarnation.

## The Password is “Drum”

The hardhat is removed,  
momentarily, to tighten  
the elastic that holds  
his ponytail in place.  
Another man watches this,  
sad about the baldness  
he shares with his father,  
who calls guys like that gay.  
The father sits in a car,  
beside his son, looks him over,  
proud, unable to say so,  
laughs at the still shovels.  
Behind them others wait,  
many men at a light,  
all looking, eyes on the times,  
that don't close, or turn away.  
They see, perhaps themselves,  
what the present could be,  
would be, or should be:  
ties being straightened,  
babies being walked,  
hands being held,  
money being counted.  
What may make them men  
becomes emotion when it's quiet,  
& they drive off  
alone on the inside  
with the only past they know.

# On the Road with Tomson Highway's Blues Harmonica in "Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing"

**T**omson Highway observes in the Production Notes that precede his play "Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing":

The 'sound-scape' of 'Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing' was mostly provided for by a musician playing, live, on harmonica, off to the side. The 'dream-scape' of the play is laced all the way through with Zachary Jeremiah Keechigeesik's 'idealized' form of harmonica playing, with a definite "blues" flavor (Highway 10).

The harmonica player invites the reader/audience to enter the dream, but the link between the play and the Blues warrants a preliminary explanation.

The blues is the music that arose from the recently freed slaves of the United States at the end of the 19th century. The Hayes Compromise of 1877 ended the hopes of Afro-Americans for authentic political participation in American life. This law caused the withdrawal of federal troops from the South, troops who were perceived as a buffer against white southern prejudice. By 1896 the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was declared unconstitutional and a situation of apartheid existed, for the doctrine of "separate but equal" (Cone 101) was the law. The blues emerged out of this socio-political setting.

The spirituals, which came directly out of the slavery experience, at once resemble and differ from the blues in that both forms of music emerge from the suffering of slavery and move toward transcendence, but the transcendence of the spirituals involves life after death, whereas that of the blues involves only that of historical reality on earth. The blues, although sometimes referred to as "secular spirituals" (Cone 100), are totally secular. "The blues are about black life and the sheer earth and gut capacity to survive in an extreme situation of oppression" (Cone 97). Not surprisingly, the blues

have strongly sexual overtones since on this earth the only possession the Afro-American had was the body, the body that must be celebrated.

The blues music emerges from the horror of the failed reconstruction of the South, but its power lies in the affirmation of the Afro-American self as it transforms itself through song. Thus, the structure of the blues moves from the tragedy of a lost dream, lost in the tragedy of the Post-Civil War South, toward a transcendence of this agony within the visceral affirmation of the Afro-American self.

The role of the Blues harmonica is one that parallels that of the Blues itself. Known as "the French harp," this instrument is well suited to the songs of a people hungering for a freedom that they have, yet do not have. Since the mark of the slave had been the absolute curtailment of all movement, trains and buses are important images in the Blues. Because the harmonica player could easily mimic trains, the sound of locomotives, the symbol of movement, of freedom, the harmonica was the ideal Blues instrument. Furthermore, the harmonica is seen by Blues experts as having a considerable expressive range, more volume, more versatility than the other instruments that were used by the Blues musicians. The harmonica, more easily than other instruments, can mimic the human voice.

Although Tomson Highway's characters have a very different history from that of the Afro-Americans in the South after the Civil War, the Blues harmonica suits well the situation of the Native People who are also struggling with a freedom that they have and do not have, toward some form of transcendence, some affirmation of the self. Thus, the Blues harmonica is an excellent medium of exodus for Highway's characters on the road toward meaningful liberation. This harmonica is the music that leads the characters from the poisons, sufferings, of their present state, on a journey that takes them toward a new world.

The Blues harmonica player does not participate in the play as one of its characters. Nevertheless, the musician's absence-presence is crucial for the full development of the play's potentiality. The placing of the musician on the side is symbolic of the assertion of a dynamic intertextuality by forces outside the text upon the actual play itself. Outside forces are always potentially disruptive, but in this case, this outside historical force, the suffering of the Afro-Americans of the Post-Civil War South, is interwoven into the play in such a way as to add a powerful, supportive new dimension. The eruption of an outside into the work has tremendous transformative potential for

two different reasons. (1) The sound of the Blues harmonica sings of free movement and the possibility of transcendence. (2) The concept of performance, as personified in the semi-invisible musician, also carries within its process the transformation of the text. In the new idea of performance, the work that is being performed is opened up to the forces outside it (Lenticcia and McLaughlin 97). “[P]erformance can be defined as an activity which generates transformations, as the reintegration of art with what is ‘outside’ it, an ‘opening up’ of the ‘field’” (Lenticcia and McLaughlin 103). Since, in a sense, the musician is performing Highway’s play, the musician takes the characters on a journey that will allow them to move outside the confines of their narrow, sordid existence, toward the transformation of their lives.

The tools of Northrop Frye and Jacques Derrida will be helpful to the reader/audience who must accompany the characters on this journey. Although these critics are so obviously dissimilar, analyzing the play from these two different perspectives will add two different, but meaningful, dimensions to the deciphering process. The use of Frye will reveal an exodus that moves from the bondage of misery to freedom, whereas the use of Derrida will lead the characters, as well as reader/audience, on a journey from the present moment of this misery back, back in time, beyond time, toward the origins that allow such an exodus to take place.

### **The Frye perspective**

Deep within the rhythm of the Blues harmonica lies a hidden impetus that finds the characters within the world of tragedy, not that of an apartheid American South, but that of a Native People’s reservation that bears all the marks of an apartheid North. But this Blues harmonica, with its images of movement, of trains toward true freedom, will direct the characters from the present world of tragedy to the road of satire. On this road the characters will be given the weapons of liberation; they will see clearly all that is wrong with their society. A powerful light will shine upon them and they will understand their reality. They will see in the lucid light all vices, depravities, cruelties, all the demonic forces that have imprisoned them in a labyrinth of darkness, of violence. Highway will expose for them the torture and crucifixion of their women, the destruction of the vulnerable foetal brain of their children through foetal alcohol syndrome and the premature, senseless, violent death of their young men. But the Blues harmonica will give hope, will give the characters the gut capacity to survive, will tell the people on this reservation that the road from Corinth to Thebes is not

caught within the strange circular path of the moebius strip.

Now, a brief look at what this circular path is, this structure of classical tragedy, is necessary. If one uses Sophocles' "Oedipus Rex" as an example, the structure becomes clear. Points A and B on the opposite sides of the circle are Corinth and Thebes. No way out of this enclosed circle is possible except through ostracism, exile, death. At first, on the road from Corinth to Thebes, while one watches Oedipus fleeing his fate of parricide and incest, as predicted by the Delphic Oracle, the reader/audience thinks that true escape is possible. But as the play progresses, every step that every character in the play takes on the road to Thebes from Corinth is really a step on the road to Corinth from Thebes. Corinth represents the irreparable fate of the past. Thebes seemingly represents the freedom to create one's own destiny of the future. But Oedipus, in fleeing his past, his fate, is actually moving toward it of his own free will. Similarly, Big Joey, in attempting to flee the fate of misery on the reservation, goes to Wounded Knee in 1973. But instead of finding liberation from his fate, he finds murder and assassination. When he returns to the reservation, he brings with him the hatred and violence of the South Dakota site. Seething in hatred and despair, he becomes responsible for the three strikingly tragic events of the play: the damaged birth of his son, Dickie Bird, whom he refuses to recognize, the brutal crucifix rape of Patsy by Dickie Bird, and the subsequent accidental, suicidal death of her lover, Simon. His hatred has both caused and allowed Black Lady Halked to drink constantly for the three weeks preceding Dickie Bird's birth. This same hatred allows him to watch silently as Patsy is raped. Every one of these events can be seen as one of the steps that binds Big Joey and his people more securely than ever in their agonizing fate of impoverishment.

This tragic structure is one of narrowing inevitability in which all the characters move closer and closer to hell. The plagues of Sophocles' Thebes, which threaten to kill all life, would have killed all life here as well, but the aching beautiful strains of the Blues harmonica are heard. Somewhere within their feverish brains, the characters, through the Blues, become aware of an opening in the tragic circle. Somewhere, on this earth, within history, some form of transcendence of this agony is possible. The Blues song purges anguish, horror, just as did the ancient plays of the Greek tragedians. The harmonica, with all its range and versatility, tells them that this narrow hell is not all that exists. The Blues harmonica places them on the road toward satire which will give them the code that leads them out of

the Corinthian-Theban impasse. As Frye reminds us, this world of satire is often a wasteland, a desert, but, in this case, because the Blues harmonica continues to play, the desert is not that of the wilderness and death of the ancient Greek exiles. Rather, it will be the desert of Moses and his followers going to the Promised Land.

The weapons of satire that break the structure of the tragic circle are: militant irony, burlesque, caricature, wild, obscene humour, the hallmarks of satire. The militant irony contains a sharp-edged attack against all that the characters see. The militant aspect contains the passion and the irony contains the intellectual ability to invert reality so that contradictions are unearthed, so that the present reality is juxtaposed with an ideal of Wounded Knee that has been absolutely defiled. Instead of being a source of transcendence, Wounded Knee casts a long shadow of devastating drunkenness, brutal rape, razor-edged misogyny and accidental death over the reservation.

The burlesque, wild, obscene humour that works with this militant irony on the wasteland road of satire, allows the characters, and ourselves, the reader/audience, to have the courage to face the horrors with a bravery that otherwise would not have been possible. A drunken nine months pregnant Black Lady Halked, looking very much like the Virgin Mary, suddenly appears in the bright spotlight in mid-air, trying very hard to become more inebriated than she already is. A few scenes later the reader/audience realizes that the mid air is held up by a jukebox. This same drunken Virgin, in the Dickie Bird Bar, giving birth astride this jukebox to a brain-damaged child, is the epitome of this type of humor. So too are all the appearances of Nanabush as she, in true Rabelaisian manner, romps through the play wearing either false, gigantic rubberized breasts, belly or bum. This burlesque humor allows the characters and the reader/audience to see the demonic, chaotic labyrinth in which the characters live in such a caricatured manner that a liberating process begins. The gross exaggeration is so close to the truth that a shock occurs. What appears as wild exaggeration on the printed page or on the stage is a faithful representation of the tragedy of reservation life. But the burlesque humour creates a distancing effect allowing the recognition that what is portrayed is so absurd that surely it is not normal and natural; it is not given. Surely another way must be better. The grotesque humour creates a sense of utter chaos, but, ironically, this realization of chaos means that a certain kind of freedom exists, the freedom that comes from not having to destroy the rigid structures of society, for in this play there is no society.

Hope lies in the realization that such unbounded freedom is the stuff with which to build a new world. The zeitgeist of the Postmodern world suggests that it is only upon ruins that creativity takes place<sup>(1)</sup>. The world of satire is a world of ruins, of pure anarchy. Within the Frye perspective, the world of comedy, which succeeds that of satire, rises from the chaos of anarchy toward the creation of a new society. The most paradigmatic example of this new society is the wedding banquets that end so many comedies, banquets to which the entire human community is invited.

The musical strains of the Blues harmonica fit beautifully into this bawdy world, for “the most expressive and dominant theme in blues is sex” (Cone 114). Here Nanabush can bump and grind and strip and kiss men’s bums to her heart’s content. Here the harmonica can sing the agony and praises of the only possession that these characters have: their bodies.

Then, faithful to those who have been on the road of bawdy, Bakhtinian carnivalesque satire, Highway moves the play in the last scene, from the desert wasteland of satire to the Promised Land of comedy. Suddenly the dream-scape of the Rabelaisian world disappears as Zachary awakens from the dream that has been the play, and all the elements of the comic world are neatly in place, including the happy ending.

Through the comic classical twist in the plot that is clearly manipulated by the intelligence of the author, the play moves from the world of satire where chaos reigns to a new order that is that of a new society. Here we see Zachary united with his wife Hera and their infant daughter. The reader/audience realizes that the mayhem of the previous scenes, the riotous drunkenness that leads to brain damage, rape, and suicide was Zachary’s nightmare. Now the scene is one of peace and love. Even the less harmful, but, nevertheless, disruptive actions of the earlier scenes were all a play within the sleeping brain of Zachary. In the opening scene of his play dream, he awakens naked on the couch of Gazelle Nataways. Panic ensues when he realizes the situation. What will Hera say? To make matters worse, he cannot find his shorts and he discovers the marks of a woman’s lips in lipstick on his bum. Throughout the dream play, his male friends, who have found his shorts, threaten to send them to Hera. The threatening complications that could perhaps destroy Zachary’s relationship with his wife are suddenly removed by the manipulated twist of Zachary’s awakening. Zachary had indeed fallen asleep naked on a couch, but it was a couch in his own house. His shorts are missing, but Hera discovers them beneath the



couch. The lipstick mark is indeed on his bum, but the conveyor of the kiss is Hera. Thus, in a sense, from the point of view of the reader/audience, a reconciliation has occurred. The furious Hera of Zachary's dream is serenely happy with the now happy, rather than harassed, Zachary. Furthermore, the reader/audience recognizes that Hera, Zachary and their infant daughter are the proper and desirable society that all have desired. The proper act of communion occurs with the reader/audience who feels that "this should be".

The new society that Highway depicts is an interesting one. Hera and Zachary's names are rooted in Western culture. Hera was the wife of Zeus and Zachary was the Hebrew Testament prophet. But Hera speaks Cree to Zachary, and a powwow bustle hangs over the poster of Marilyn Monroe on the wall. It would appear that the ingredients of the new society are composed of the richest roots of Western and of Native society. The bustle hanging over the photograph appears to imply that the richest roots of Native society can become more powerful than some of the more superficial, glossy Hollywood aspects of Western society.

Frye says that the new society of comedy is pragmatically free, free from the old obsessions that haunt tragedy and satire. Oedipus's obsession with parricide and incest, Antigone's obsession with the burial of her brother, and Big Joey's obsession with the massacre at Wounded Knee have vanished, along with the classical comic blocking character, Big Joey, himself, a constant source of hatred and violence. This pragmatic freedom exercises itself visibly as Zachary lifts his infant daughter high into the air in an act of exaltation, of celebration. She is the future and, freed of ancient poisoning obsessions, she will be able to create her own new world. The shape of that world is not defined, as it never is in comedy.

But that world will be founded upon reality, rather than upon illusion. Big Joey and Simon had lived with the illusion that traveling to Wounded Knee would free them from the grinding poverty and misery of the reservation. The Marilyn Monroe poster, with no powwow bustle draped over it at the beginning of the play, can be interpreted as a symbol of illusion. Norma Jean, the original name of Marilyn Monroe, was a signifier of the real, but the face of the woman named Marilyn on the poster is an image of illusion that led to drug abuse and suicide. Now, at the end of the play, this illusion is exorcised(2).

In true Frye fashion, one of the great myths of the Judaeo-Christian culture has been accomplished. An exodus has occurred. To the strains of the Blues harmonica, the characters have boarded the train and traveled the road from

the fallen world of tragedy to the new world of comedy through the chaos of satire. The Blues harmonica, through the structure of its music, through its singing the human heart out of its anguish toward transcendence and exodus, has enabled the characters to accept and to use the weapons of satire so that they could tread the difficult road toward comedy, the land of milk and honey. Moses is the invisible musician of the harmonica. True to scriptural tradition, once the characters have arrived in the new world that has been promised, the music of the Blues harmonica ceases. Moses never reaches Israel. Only his people do. Our harmonica player has expired in the desert. Once the world of freedom has been created, the Blues Harmonica, the instrument of liberation, has fulfilled its purpose, is no longer needed.

### **The Derridean Perspective**

In Derrida's poetic piece *Cinders*(3), whose 1991 publication by the University of Nebraska has an excellent introduction by Ned Lukacher, the concept of "cinders" becomes the primary tool through which to understand what Derrida means by the non-presence within language. Derrida's theory concerning language, the written language, in particular, states that in order to read language properly, the reader must pay attention to the site within language, within the word, which is haunted by a lack, a kind of absence. This absence is "irreducible to either presence or absence"(Derrida 7). On the one hand, non-presence threatens all meaning, but on the other, it presents a promise that calls one to undertake a journey that can never be fully accomplished toward the origins of language, of the universe itself. Lukacher makes clear that it is Derrida's concept of "cinders" that inaugurates the journey toward the reading of the absence\presence. Cinders precede words; they are the "clinging to language of something beyond language"(Derrida 12), "the quarks of language"(Derrida 1). The call, the clinging of something entirely other(Derrida 12), is that of the "You"(Derrida 14), the Other, the Nameless One that can never be named. The reader must, in reading the word, listen to the "inaudible song, prayer"(Derrida 14), this quark of language, and in so doing, take a journey to the "there" where the cinder is, "on the far side of Dasein, just on the edge of its Being-in-the-world"(Derrida 15). It is here, "there," on the border between speech and the silence of that which lies beyond the universe of language that the cinder lies. It is there, where it beckons to an unreachable site "that is not to be conceived or experienced spatially"(Derrida 15), where "the voice of the Other burns in the silence," at the site of the first all-burn-

ing, the original holocaust that marked the big bang, the all-incineration that brought being, the universe, into existence. Derrida's methodology thus takes the reader to the Alpha moment of time.

The undertaking of the Derridean journey toward that Alpha moment will reveal that we need not mourn the death of the Blues harmonica player. We must find her\him again by making a reverse journey through the play. Toward the end Highway states that Zachary "sleep-walks through the whole lower level of the set, almost as though he were retracing his steps back through the whole play. Slowly, he takes off his clothes item by item, until, by the end, he is back lying naked on the couch where he began the play..." (Highway 124). Let us now walk backward with him.

In the final scene, two very important things occur in relation to this backward journey. Hera speaks Cree, and in her laugh one hears the laugh of Nanabush which, because it is wordless, carries one toward the silent ringing that lies beyond language. As the androgynous trickster of Native religion who is the mediator between ourselves and the Great Spirit(4), Nanabush is the perfect guide toward the big bang of the all-burning, the originary moment of creation. One also hears the silent ringing in the inaudible song of the Cree words, the song that is promised in the cinders that cling to language. The combination of the spoken Cree and the laugh of Nanabush will take the characters and the reader/audience on the road, back through the world of satire, through the world of tragedy. But the world beyond tragedy takes on the characteristics of a Derridean, rather than of a Frygian space. This world is one of shimmerings, of flickering fires, of space beyond language, rather than the green new world of Frye's romance. Frye's world of romance is the world at the time of its birth and infancy. Derrida's shimmering world is the space beyond the origin of our world, the space that moves one toward that moment of the all-burning, that moment of the birth of the cosmos. The laugh of Nanabush, the laugh beyond language, will guide us back to this world where all things are possible, the world before poison is poured into the ear of the king and into the minds of the Highway characters in the fallen world of the tragic circle.

In the land of satire, the Blues harmonica player will join us on the road so that we can more easily follow the laugh of the trickster. The musician will readily follow her. In the Production Notes Highway states that "the sound of this harmonica...under-line[s] and highlight[s] the many magical appearances of Nanabush in her various guises" (Highway 10). We need the

structure, the rhythm, the cathartic sorrow and hidden promise of the Blues to prevent us from going astray.

Perhaps more than anything else, the language of Cree (as well as Ojibway), that Hera speaks and that many of the characters speak throughout the play, makes possible Zachary's retracing sleep-walk journey. Hera's words of Cree enable the reader/audience, the characters, to set out on the journey of sensing the non-presence in her words that leads us to the cinder that clings, that calls us through its inaudible song. For a non-Native reader/audience, the hearing of the Cree language is a defamiliarizing experience that causes an awareness, in an acute manner, of the absence that clings to the words, to the silence that haunts them. Re-immersion in the play through Zachary's walk backward takes the reader/audience once again to the dramatic hockey game of the women and the wild narration of that game in Cree. Such an extended defamiliarizing experience can then apply to the words of English that inform most of the play.

The final words of the fatally wounded young Simon allow us to follow the cinders of words on the journey toward the hockey game, with its barrage of Cree words. Simon, who has dreamed of restoring Native spirituality to his people, utters these words: "Kammoowanow...apple...pie...patima...neetha...igwo Patsy...n'gapeetootanan...patima...apple...pie...neee" (Highway 116). The cinder that clings to every English word is accentuated by the juxtaposition with the Cree words. "Apple" and "pie," the most familiar and everyday of words, appear to develop an unrecognizability, an inaudibility that makes them strangely alien, as if the meaning that they usually convey is absent. A mysterious code is presented to us, a code that is augmented by the pauses that the dying Simon places between his words. This sense of the absent meaning of the code calls the audience toward something, towards the laugh of Nanabush. The call toward this journey is facilitated by the Blues harmonica, an audible song, whose sound, with its familiarity, urges us onward. Since the harmonica, a great simulator of the human voice, is without words, this instrument is a perfect vehicle for calling the characters beyond the world of language toward the silent ringing.

The stage directions say, "From the darkness of the theatre emerges the magical flickering of a luminescent powwow dancing bustle" (Highway 38). "The two bustles "play" with each other, looking like two giant fire-flies (Highway 38). Another stage direction says, "The shimmering movements of the bustle balloon out into these magical, dance-like arches" (Highway

115). The luminescent shimmerings are the cinders of the fires of the original all-burning toward which all language takes us. The presence of Nanabush is strongly associated with shimmering fire.

But one must recognize also in the shimmering fire the semi- invisible figure of the Blues harmonica player who has now become silent. This player was the initial absence/presence that called the characters toward the original all-burning. By means of an audible song, the Blues harmonica called everyone toward the inaudible song which the strains of the music always promised. The Blues harmonica is now part of that inaudible song.

We, the reader/audience and the characters, cannot reach that unreachable Other who is the origin of this wondrous activity, but the words of the languages lead us toward the Other. This is the journey that Zachary takes as he sleep-walks backward through the play. This journey is toward the “place for giving, rendering, celebrating, loving” (Derrida 39), for it is the site of the promise of the giving of the original, all-burning moment of creation, the promise of the name of the Nameless Other beyond Being that holds everything in being. A nice comic twist occurs within the last scene when Zachary, who has just awakened from his walk toward the origins of time, to a fresh world that still shimmers with the fires of creation, holds aloft in a triumphant gesture, his infant daughter, who, as yet, is a nameless one.

Thus, a strange dialectical movement pervades the play: one is the exodus of those fleeing bondage, and one is the free falling through time of those seeking the origin of the giving which created the universe. Perhaps the cinders of the dying words of Simon, the one who most passionately wanted to journey toward the shimmering fire of Nanabush, are one of the most important guides on that free falling journey. Both movements involve journeying on a road that is perilous, but one must remember that the greatest facilitator on that road is the Blues harmonica. Perhaps on a journey toward his own roots, songs of free West Africans, the harmonica player sings the audible song that makes the journey possible. The harmonica expresses the sorrow and, in the luminescent shimmerings of Nanabush with which it is so closely joined, promises the joy of liberation that permeates the lives of those who are “en marche,” those who are on the road.

#### NOTES

- 1 The works of such Postmodern novelists as Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Recollections of the Golden Triangle*, are filled with scenes of devastation, abandoned and derelict buildings, smoldering ruins of luxurious mansions. In short, this novel is filled with narrative fragments

that the narrator finds among the flotsam and jetsam of these ruins, jetsam from which he creates this very novel that is in the process of gestation.

- 2 OR! A very different interpretation can point to the idea that the icon image of Marilyn Monroe, an image that carries with it all the dubious baggage just mentioned, has, through its mingling with Native culture, been transformed into a Nanabush character, a messenger of the Great Spirit. In this interpretation illusion also is dispelled. Marilyn becomes "real" in a positive sense.
- 3 Although one is aware of the Derridean traces of such early works as *Of Grammatology*, where his concern with language creates a linguistically dense atmosphere, the linguistic pre-occupation in *Cinders*, a poem, one of the latest works of Derrida, is superseded by a much more mystical orientation. Other very recent works of Derrida, such as *Memoirs of the Blind*, that was published in English in the summer of 1993, also bear the mark of this mysticism. It is as if the earlier influence of the French Jewish intellectual, Levinas, plus Derrida's emphasis upon the interrelationship between philosophy and literature, are the seeds that have brought forth this flowering. Since this play of Tomson Highway has such a strong component of the spirituality of Native People, the use of this recent work of Derrida seemed more fitting than did his earlier work.
- 4 The meaning of the trickster changes from tribe to tribe. But some fundamental characteristics of meaning can be gleaned among these differences. The trickster is a transformative element in the lives of the characters in the pieces of literature where he/she is operative. Kimberly M. Blaeser. "Transforming the Self with Trickster Humor: Vizenor's Autobiographical Vision." M.L.A. conference, 1993. Session called Crossing the Genres: Trickster, Tropes and Transformations in Native American Literature. Program arranged by the Division on Native American Literatures. The transformation is usually from pain and horror into humor, a healing process that is crucial for tenacious survival. The leading American Indian Literature scholar, A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff, uses the word "trickster" only in hyphenation with the word "transformer" in her book *American Indian Literatures: An Introduction, Bibliographic Review, and Selected Bibliography*. New York: Modern Languages of America, 1990. Finally, the trickster exhibits a supernatural power, while simultaneously acting as the prototype of human possibilities.

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## Farm Wife

They put up fences for women like this  
women who think they can fix things  
like she did the sewing machine  
the cream separator and the boy's .22t  
he time her husband was off at Agribition.  
The instructors could never get through  
a lesson, couldn't even get the kids  
into the water, and some mothers  
would be breast-stroking through air  
saying—see, see, this is how ya do it.  
One woman even hopped in the pool,  
fully clothed, and started dog-paddling.  
This one stares through the links  
at her youngest—led to the edge  
and told to jump—squirms  
through the time away from the farm  
the best crop she's ever seen ripening  
for next to nothing thanks to governments  
she's never seen and her trying  
to make up the shortfall selling  
venetian blinds in a town of 2200  
where 100 houses are up for sale.  
It can't be done, so they fence her off  
from something she thinks she can fix:

she'd just draw her youngest to her  
leap

and come back up.

# The Bingocentric Worlds of Michel Tremblay and Tomson Highway

*Les Belles-Soeurs* vs. *The Rez Sisters*

**T**he emergent theatre of Native peoples offers theatre scholars and historians a unique opportunity to observe the fusion of cultures in the making. While contemporary postmodern theatre represents just one more link in a long chain of historical evolution that goes back two and a half millenia, contemporary Native playwrights are forced to work in a genre without direct antecedent in their culture—although theatrical elements are present, of course, in many aspects of traditional ritual and storytelling. In the best plays to emerge so far, the authors have successfully grafted the techniques of Euramerican postmodern theatre onto this traditional matrix of ritual and storytelling. The result is a theatre which shares all the surface aspects of Western postmodernism, but differs essentially in spirit. A comparative study of Tomson Highway's *The Rez Sisters* (1988) and Michel Tremblay's *Les Belles-soeurs* (1968) illustrates this point vividly, because of the exceptionally close parallels between these two sister plays.

The parallels are immediately apparent on the levels of subject matter and dramatic techniques; there are also less apparent parallels with respect to the authors. Both *Les Belles-soeurs* and *The Rez Sisters* are first productions which catapulted their young authors, and with them the society they represent, into the spotlight of national and international attention; both plays marked the beginning of a new and original dramaturgy, the "nouveau théâtre québécois" in the case of Tremblay, Native Canadian theatre in that of Highway.

Both plays focus exclusively on female characters. In both plays, these characters are closely related, as indicated by the respective titles. In both plays, the characters are struggling against poverty, as indicated by the respective



settings: East Montreal in one case, the Wasaychigan Hill reserve in the other. In each play, Bingo represents a central experience in the characters' lives.

The critical statements which were made about *The Rez Sisters* not surprisingly parallel many comments made earlier about *Les Belles-soeurs*. Daniel David Moses, for example, points to "the spiritual malaise which is the subject of the play" (Moses, 89)—a clear parallel to Tremblay's much-commented "maudite vie plate" motif. Moses also states that "The accomplishment of *The Rez Sisters* is that it focusses on a variety of such undervalued lives and brings them up to size" (Moses, 89)—a point much emphasized in the reception of *Les Belles-soeurs*. Finally, the two plays share a central image: Bingo, symbol and illustration of the consumerism of the women represented and the spiritual emptiness of their lives.

### **Dramatic Techniques**

Both playwrights have developed an original and highly effective way of combining bold superrealism, 'verbal and non-verbal, with theatrical techniques, most importantly, the use of spotlighted inner monologues and surrealistic effects. Dramatic structures in both cases reflect the two authors' passionate interest in music. Tremblay's *Les Belles-soeurs* has been referred to as an oratorio, his *Forever Yours, Marie Lou* as a string quartet, *Sainte Carmen of the Main* as an "opéra parlé." Similarly, Daniel David Moses says of Highway's plays: "He structures his theatre pieces according to models of musical composition. He uses characters like themes and thinks of character conflict in terms of counterpoint and contrast" (Moses, 1987, 89). Pennie Petrone states that Highway combines his "knowledge of Indian reality in this country with classical structure, artistic language. It amounted to applying sonata form to the spirit and mental situation of a street drunk" (Petrone, 173)—words that catch Tremblay's mixture of lyricism and naturalism exactly.

Given the fact that Highway himself has stated his admiration for the work of Michel Tremblay, one might be tempted to look upon *The Rez Sisters* as a purely derivative work. Nothing could be more wrong. On the contrary: close analysis shows that the surface similarities actually help to bring out more dramatically the deep seated differences between the two works. These are, of course, rooted in the basic difference in Weltanschauung on which the plays are based: *Les Belles-soeurs* reflects the negativism, nihilism and spiritual void of Western postmodern society; *The Rez Sisters*, in spite of the similarity of its dramatic matrix, reflects the essential humanism, life-affirming and hopeful world view of Native peoples.

The striking parallels between the two plays might therefore seem paradoxical. However they can perhaps be explained by the fact that, historically, both works stand as early monuments to postcolonial emancipation and self-assertion, each appearing in the wake of a—more or less—“quiet revolution”: that of Quebec in the 1960s, that of native people in the 1980s. Politically, Native demands for self-government echo Québécois demands for separation. Just as Tremblay’s use of the *joual* was in itself a political act in 1968, the very emergence of a Native dramaturgy represented a political act in 1988. The choice of all female characters in both cases underlines the oppression of the respective societies and their desire for empowerment. Each play brought in its wake a veritable explosion of theatrical activity—in the 1970s in Quebec, in the 1980s with Native people. The political impact of these cultural revolutions became clearly manifest in a change of nomenclature from colonial to independently assertive: “French-Canadian” to “Québécois”, “Indian” (the colonizers’ term) to “Native or “Aboriginal.” An oft expressed and deep-seated nostalgia for the precolonial heroic past accompanies the cultural and political revolution in both cases. In Quebec, it is a nostalgia for the pioneering glories of the period before the British conquest; with Native peoples, it is the memory of pre-contact lifestyles, free from the psychological tutelage and social and physical ills imported by the colonizers. One might offer the hypothesis, then, that obvious similarity in the “moment” within the historical evolution at which the two plays were written accounts for their many parallels, while the equally obvious essential differences between the two societies living through this “moment,” would account for the differences. Let us proceed to an examination of these two aspects of the “sister plays.”

## Parallels

### 1. *The Bingo Game*

In both plays, the authors focus on a group of disadvantaged women whose lives revolve around bingo. In *The Rez Sisters*, “THE BIGGEST BINGO IN THE WORLD” [sic] actually provides the axis on which the action of the play revolves, from news of the impending event, to preparations for the trip to Toronto, to the event itself and its aftermath. In the earlier play, the importance of bingo in the women’s lives is presented more subtly, through one of the two stylized Odes which create the leitmotifs for each act. In act one, it is the *Maudite Vie plate* recitation, a summary of the *belles-soeurs’*

frustrated and meaningless lives. In act two, the *Ode to Bingo* mobilizes all of the women's latent energy and enthusiasm. For one brief moment, hostilities cease and they are all united in their common panegyric to the supreme stimulant of their lives. Even senile old Olivine Dubuc is overcome with excitement at the mention of the word "bingo."

The women's bingo mania gives both authors a wonderful opportunity for satirizing their cheap consumerism and materialistic attitudes. In the Tremblay play, the high point of this satire occurs with Germaine's litany of all the household goods she will be able to order, now that the entire catalogue is within reach of her unlimited greed. Highway outdoes the vulgarity of Germaine's monologue by focussing on the particular wish fantasy of one woman, Philomena:

"Myself, I'm gonna go to every bingo and I'm gonna hit every jackpot between here and Espanola and I'm gonna buy me that toilet I'm dreaming about at night..big and wide and white" (Rez Sisters, 5); and after she has won the money to make her dream come true: "...But the best, the most wonderful, my absolute most favorite part is the toilet bowl itself. First of all, it's elevated, like on a sort of..pedestal, so that it makes you feel like..the Queen..And the bowl itself-white, spirit white—is of such a shape, such an exquisitely soft, perfect oval shape that it makes you want to cry. Oh!!! and it's so comfortable you could just sit on it right up until the day you die!" (R.S., 118)

Women waxing rhapsodic over the shape of a toilet bowl or the Mickey Mouse pattern on their wallpaper obviously lack ordinary emotional, physical or spiritual fulfilment. Bingo represents the ultimate escape—more pathetic even in the case of the belles-soeurs whose rewards seem hardly worth getting worked up about ("plaster dogs, floor lamps") than for the rez sisters, who are true gamblers at heart, always expecting the big jackpot that will take them out of their misery. Neither Tremblay nor Highway chose to present an actual bingo game realistically on stage. The stylization of the *Ode to Bingo*, and surrealistic quality of THE BIGGEST BINGO IN THE WORLD clearly emphasize the preeminently psychological reality of bingo in the lives of the women.

## 2. Use of Language

For both Tremblay and Highway, the creation of a dramatic idiom represents a political statement of self-assertion and identity. Each play mirrors the language spoken by the people, rather than the literary idiom. Tremblay actually created his own idiosyncratic spelling to transcribe an oral language to the printed page. His use of *joual*, highly controversial at the time, forced

a breakthrough in Quebec dramaturgy and brought about the evolution of a new stage idiom, totally different from “literary” French. Highway’s problems in creating a dramatic idiom are obviously even more difficult than those faced by Tremblay. Like other Native writers, he finds himself trapped between the desire to express himself in his own language, which he loves and admires, and the practical need to use the language of the colonizer (“forced appropriation”) in order to have his plays produced before a wider audience. In *The Rez Sisters*, he has achieved a double compromise: small portions of the dialogue are actually written in Cree and Ojibway, with English translations in footnotes; the bulk of the dialogue however, reproduces the “village English” spoken on the reserve, an idiom whose relationship to literary English parallels the relationship of joul to literary French. Although Highway is clearly more reticent than Tremblay about abandoning “correct” grammatical structures, his choice of vocabulary and sentence patterns do convey the feeling of spoken English; his abundant use of swear words amply matches the *sacres* found in Tremblay. Tremblay discovered the poetic qualities of his own vernacular early on in his career and has defended it from the start: “Le joul est très pres de la musique, très lyrique..” (Tremblay, 1971, 48). Native writers sometimes find it difficult to dare embrace this non-literary type of language. As Maria Campbell says:

“A lot of my writing now is in very broken English. I find that I can express myself better that way. I can’t write in our language, because who would understand it? So I’ve been using the way I spoke when I was at home, rather than the way I speak today...what linguists call “village English.” It’s very beautiful...very lyrical, but it took me a long time to realize that...it’s more like oral tradition.” (Lutz, 48)

### 3. *Superrealism*

Both authors use superrealism—a grotesque extension of naturalism—verbally and as part of the action. With Tremblay, it is the combination of faulty grammar, mispronunciations, clichés, formulas, and swearwords—especially those with religious connotations, the *sacres*—which give the dialogue a superrealistic quality; in the Highway play, it is the totally uninhibited use of offensive language. To give just one example, Emily Dictionary’s outburst during the riot scene (R.S. 44):

Emily: (to Philomena). So damned bossy and pushy and sucky. You make me sick. Always wanting your own way. To Veronique. Goddamned trouble-making old crow. To Pelajia. Fuckin’ self-righteous old bitch. To Marie-Adèle. Mental problems, that’s what you got, princess. I ain’t no baby. I’m the size of a fucking

church. To Annie. You slippery little slut. Brain the size of a fuckin' pea. Fuck, man, take a Valium.

Violence, scatology and sex as part of the stage performance are the hallmarks of surrealism. Because of the absence of men in the plays under discussion, sex is not shown, although verbal references are made quite frequently. Violence on stage, however, appears prominently in both plays. In *Les Belles-soeurs*, the physical violence is mainly centered around the helpless, pathetic Olivine Dubuc. This unfortunate old lady takes a tumble down three flights of stairs in her wheelchair, an additional fall in Germaine's kitchen afterwards, and is mercilessly beaten over the head by her "saintly" daughter-in-law Thérèse. None of the other women expresses the slightest sympathy for her. General violence erupts at the end of the play, when the "sisters" finally openly admit their rage at Germaine's good luck and not only reveal all the booklets of stamps they have stolen, but start fighting for more stamps among each other like a horde of wild animals, with the old lady gleefully riding her wheelchair amidst their vicious antics.

The most striking examples of surrealism in the *Rez Sisters* occur in act one, as the women meet at the store. Philomena is shown sitting on the toilet, at the back of the store, in full view of the audience; later, she comes forward, slowly pulling her clothes back on. The riot scene that follows exceeds the violence of the riot scene in *Les Belles-soeurs*, which is fully mimed; in *The Rez Sisters*, physical aggression is matched by verbal aggression, as illustrated in the quotation mentioned earlier.

#### 4. Theatricalism

Again, the type of theatrical techniques used in the two plays are strikingly similar: both plays focus on individual characters with stylized, spotlighted monologues, and on key motifs with highly stylized scenes. In *Les Belles-soeurs*, the stylized monologues reveal the deepest concerns of the women, concerns they are unable and unwilling to verbalize and share: Yvette's obsession with her daughter's wedding and obvious craving for a closer relationship (B.S., 45); Mademoiselle Des-Neiges Verrette's secret, hopeless love for the brush salesman (B.S., 53); Lisette de Courval's snobbery and disdain for the other women (B.S., 59); Rhéauna and Angéline's obsession with illness and death, (B.S., 63ff); Angéline's admission of her only, and sinful, pleasures at the "club" (B.S., 81); and Rose's bitter denunciation of marriage and her husband's unending demand for his sexual "dues" (B.S., 101).

Highway uses stylized, spotlighted monologues in act one, spotlighted dialogues in

act two. The speeches in act one, by Annie, Marie-Adèle, and Veronique are all framed by the refrain WHEN I WIN THE BIGGEST BINGO IN THE WORLD, and express each woman's greatest dream. For Annie, it is to be able to buy records, and to sing with the band of her idol, Fritz the Katz; Marie-Adèle fantasizes about a lovely island of her own; and Veronique sees total bliss in a new kitchen stove, just like the one used by Madame Benoit on television (R.S., 35-37). Similarly, Highway uses characters isolated by spotlight in act two; however, here, in the van en route to Toronto, the women do not speak singly, but in pairs revealing themselves to each other in moments of total intimacy: Annie with Marie-Adèle, Philomena with Pelijia, Emily with Annie and Marie-Adèle. Thus, we learn about their underlying troubles, fears and anxieties, not normally mentioned: Marie-Adèle's fear of what will happen to her husband and children after her death from cancer; the trauma of Philomena's past, the white man who left her, the child she had to abandon; Emily's tragic loss of her best friend in a motorcycle accident.

Unlike the spotlit monologues and duologues, which reveal the thoughts and feelings of individual characters, the stylized scenes illustrate their collective concerns. In *Les Belles-soeurs* these take the form of choral recitations: the *Maudite vie plate* chorus in act 1, the *Ode to Bingo* in act two. In the *Maudite vie plate* recitation, by five women, a solo voice alternates with the chorus in a litany enumerating the endlessly repetitive daily chores of everyday life in a loveless family setting. The entire piece is framed by the play's leitmotif, the "maudite vie plate" refrain. "Chus tannée de mener une maudite vie plate! Une maudite vie plate! Une Maudite vie plate! Une maudite vie plate! Une maud..." (B.S., 24). The *Ode to Bingo* is similarly set in a leitmotif frame: "Moé, l'aime ça, le bingo! Moé, j'adore le bingo! Moé, y'a rien au monde que j'aime plus que le bingo!" The recitation itself is done by a chorus of four voices, with four other women shouting out bingo numbers in rhythmic counterpoint.

While Tremblay's stylized scenes operate entirely on the verbal level, Highway's are based exclusively on movement and sound. As in *Les Belles-soeurs*, each act features one major stylized scene. In act one, the superrealistic scene in the store fades into a highly theatrical, mimed finale, accompanied by sound effects:

"The seven women have this grand and ridiculous march to the band office, around the set and all over the stage area, with Pelajia leading them forward

heroically, her hammer just a-swinging in the air. Nanabush (the Trickster figure) trails merrily along in the rear of the line. They reach the “band office”—standing in one straight line square in front of the audience. The “invisible” chief “speaks”: cacophonous percussion for about seven beats, the women listening more and more incredulously. Finally, the percussion comes to a dead stop.

PELAJIA: No?

Pelajia raises her hammer to hit the “invisible” chief, Nanabush shrugs a “don’t ask me, I don’t know,” Emily fingers a “fuck you, man.” Blackout”. (R.S., 60)

A similar pattern appears in act two. Following the women’s (realistic) planning session in Pelajia’s basement, a series of highly theatrical sequences—seven “beats”—illustrates their superhuman fundraising efforts for the trip to Toronto. Musical effects accompany their frantic activities, mimed at ever accelerating speed:

“And the women start their fundraising activities with a vengeance. The drive is underlined by a wild rhythmic beat from the musician, one that gets wilder and wilder with each successive beat, though always underpinned by this persistent, almost dance-like pulse. The movement of the women covers the entire stage area, and like the music, gets wilder and wilder, until by the end it is as if we are looking at an insane eight-ring circus.....Pelajia’s basement simply dissolves into the madness of the fundraising drive.” (R.S., 70)

As a final, and obvious, parallel, the theatrical, rather than realistic, conclusions to both plays must be mentioned: Tremblay’s surrealistic rain of gold bond stamps to the tune of “O Canada,” Highway’s Trickster figure Nanabush in a triumphant dance on the roof of Pelajia’s house. Both authors have thus chosen to end their basically realistic play on a highly unrealistic finale. However, the feeling we are left with in each case is totally different. Underneath the surface parallels, the two sisters plays are poles—or rather, cultures—apart.

### **Differences**

The rain of gold bond stamps at the end of *Les Belles-soeurs* reinforces the consumerism which is being satirized throughout the play. It also serves to make a political statement: material bliss (unlimited stamps) is linked to toe-ing the patriotic party line (singing of *O Canada*). On both levels, the author’s cynicism is complete and absolute. In contrast, the appearance of the Nanabush character at the end of *The Rez Sisters*, not just dancing, but dancing “triumphantly,” points to the underlying spirituality, affirmation of life and joie de vivre which characterize the play as a whole—a far cry from the spiritual and emotional aridity of *Les Belles-soeurs*. This essential differ-

ence between the Quebecois and the Native “sisters” play can be easily demonstrated by examining the different treatment of settings, representation of characters and representation of religion and morality in the two works.

### 1. *Settings*

The obvious difference here is the single setting of Tremblay as opposed to the multiple settings of Highway. Tremblay achieves the oppressive atmosphere of his play largely through classical concentration. Not only does all the action take place within the confined space of Germaine’s kitchen; concentration of time is also used, to the point where acting time in fact parallels real time. Even the division into two acts is carefully engineered so as not to break this unity: the beginning of act two reiterates the final lines of act one, so that the linkage is complete.

Corresponding to the greater spirit of freedom in the Highway play, a variety of settings is used, both indoor and outdoor: on the roof of Pelajia’s house, in front of Marie-Adèle’s, inside Emily’s store and Pelajia’s basement; in the “van,” the bingo hall, by the “graveside.” Some of these are realistic, others, such as the van, the bingo scene and the grave scene, only indicated. Some of the transitions take the form of conventional scene changes, others are built into the action in such a way that imaginary settings are created through mime and movement on stage: the march to the store, the march to the band office, the shift from van to bingo hall and from bingo hall to Marie-Adèle’s porch and graveside. Tomson deals as freely with time as he does with space. Time zones are telescoped and crossed as he cuts from one scene to the next without transition. These technical differences in dramatic structure create a diametrically opposed “atmosphere” for each of the two plays. In, *Les Belles-soeurs* the audience is drawn into the oppressive, almost claustrophobic ambiance in which the characters conduct their lives; with *The Rez Sisters*, we feel a sense of fluidity, movement and greater freedom.

### 2. *Characters*

The essential difference between the two plays becomes even more apparent if we take a closer look at the depiction of the characters. The “sisters” of the two plays differ considerably in their attitude towards each other. Tremblay’s belles-soeurs detest each other with a vengeance; although they try hard to maintain a facade of polite behavior, their underlying hostility, envy, and aggression shows through at all times, occasionally erupting into vicious quarrels and bouts of insults. The only time they seem to be able to



act in unison is in a collective act of disloyalty as they embezzle all of Germaine's gold bond stamps. The rez sisters, too, have their often violent disagreements and their anger often flares up. However, an underlying spirit of cooperation and genuine sisterhood permeates the play. The women work together, rather than against each other, and thus manage to carry out their ambitious project of going to Toronto.

Highway has chosen not to deal with the generational conflict in his play. Tremblay, on the other hand, includes three young women to illustrate the tragic mother/daughter relationship among his belles-soeurs. The play opens with dialogue between Germaine and her daughter Linda, and the antiquated form of address they use (Linda says "vous" to her mother, Germaine "tu" to her daughter) already indicates the existence of a hierarchical relationship that can only lead to tension. Intolerance and total lack of comprehension on the part of the older generation creates resentment, rebellion and often, as in the case of Lise, despair for the younger women. Both playwrights have included a black sheep in their roster of characters. In *Les Belles-soeurs*, it is the unfortunate Pierrette, who works in a "club"; in *The Rez Sisters*, the infamous Gazelle Nataways, "who's got them legs of hers wrapped around big Joey day and night" (R.S., 7). The rez sisters look upon Gazelle with a certain amount of amused disgust; but the belles-soeurs, rejoicing in their moral superiority and Pierrette's inevitable eternal damnation, feel justified in ostracising her fully and refusing all help, even when she reveals her desperate situation. Their lack of tolerance is absolute.

A similar pattern applies in the treatment of the old and handicapped, nonagenarian Olivine Dubuc in *Les Belles-soeurs*, Zhaboonigan Peterson, the 24-year old mentally retarded adopted daughter of Veronique in *The Rez Sisters*. Tremblay's vitriolic representation of the women's heartless treatment of the old lady contrasts sharply with the rez sisters' friendly acceptance and mothering of Zhaboonigan. The belles-soeurs' uncharitable attitude is further aggravated by their hypocrisy. Although they are all exasperated by the presence of the senile old woman, only Rose, the most outspoken of the group, openly voices what they secretly think: "Est assez vieille! Est pus bonne à rien!" (B.S., 70). Meanwhile the others vie with each other in their hypocritical encouragement of Thérèse's self-indulgent martyr complex:

GERMAINE: Mon Dieu, Thérèse, que j'vous plains donc!

Des-Neiges Verrette: Vous êtes trop bonne, Thérèse!

GABRIELLE: C'est vrai, ca, vous êtes ben que trop bonne!

THÉRÈSE: Que voulez-vous, y faut ben gagner son ciel!

marie-ange: On pourra dire que vous l'avez gagné, vot'ciel, vous!

THÉRÈSE: Ah! Mais, j'me plains pas! J'me dis que le bon Dieu est bon, pis qu'y va m'aider à passer à travers!

LISETTE: C'est ben simple, vous m'émouvez jusqu'aularmes!

THÉRÈSE: Voyons donc, Madame de Courval, prenez sur vous!

DES-NEIGES VERRETTE: J'ai rien qu'une chose à vous dire, Madame Dubuc, vous êtes une sainte femme!

Nobody objects, of course, when the object of their adulation administers vigorous blows to the old woman's head, her normal method of keeping Madame Dubuc senior in line. Zhaboonigan, too, often makes a nuisance of herself; but one of the women invariably finds a way to distract and control her in a casual and friendly manner. There is little self-pity on Veronique's part, and certainly no undue praise given by the other women.

Intolerant, narrow-minded and emotionally stunted, Tremblay's women are naturally unable to form intimate relationships with each other. We learn of their real lives only through the stylized monologues. In contrast, Highway, by spotlighting not only single characters, but also pairs, emphasizes the openness and intimacy between the women.

In both plays, the consumerism of the women depicted is heavily satirized. However, even here there is a difference. In *The Rez Sisters*, crass materialism is tempered by some more humane ideals: Veronique dreams of a shiny new kitchen stove, but she also plans to use it to cook for all the motherless orphans on the reserve; Marie-Adèle's utopic private island will provide an ideal spot to bring up a happy family. In contrast, the belles-soeurs' greed is unmitigated: Germaine has no intention of sharing a single item of her windfall with anyone.

In the pursuit of their materialistic goals, the two groups of women also show essential differences. The belles-soeurs live in a state of resignation. They may curse their "maudite vie plate," but do nothing to improve their lot. They can only count on good luck to improve their fate: a windfall of gold bond stamps, or maybe a win at bingo. The rez sisters, too, set all their hopes on the chance of winning at bingo. However, once they find out about THE BIGGEST BINGO IN THE WORLD, they display enormous energy to get what they want (the fundraising drive). In fact, the author emphasizes his characters' active, resolute commitment to self-help by beginning and ending the play with the image of Pelajia, hammer in hand, repairing the roof of her house. The conclusions of the two plays also

sharply contrast the belles-soeurs' inertia with the practical, no-nonsense approach of the rez sisters. At the end of Tremblay's play, nothing has changed for his group of women. At the end of *The Rez Sisters*, a number of positive developments have taken place: Philomena has the coveted new toilet; Annie gets to sing backup with the band of Fritz the Cat; Emily is carrying a child; Véronique cooks for the widowed Eugene and his fourteen children. Just like the differences in dramatic structures, the differences in the depiction of the characters reveal the almost polar opposition in attitude between the two cultures.

### 3. Religion and Morality

Both plays depict societies which have retained just a faint echo of the profound spirituality of the past; and where winning at bingo, rather than religious ecstasy, has become the ultimate metaphysical experience. However, the way the two authors deal with this loss of spirituality is essentially different. Tremblay puts on stage the ossified remains of a defunct Catholicism to which the belles-soeurs still adhere, oblivious to the emptiness of their religious practices; novenas and rosaries at home, faithful attendance at all parish events outside. Tremblay's regular stage designer, André Brassard, captured this spirit of excessive, but spiritually bankrupt, religiosity in his stage set for the original production of *Les Belles-soeurs*: Germaine's kitchen appeared cluttered with cheap plaster saints and holy pictures, in cynical counterpoint to the less than Christian behavior of the assembled parish ladies.

In contrast, Highway's rez sisters show no interest in organized religion—other than Church-run bingo games, of course. But the author has chosen to give them a steady, if largely unrecognized, spiritual companion, Nanabush, the Trickster figure of Native mythology. Looking at the two plays under discussion, one must agree with his own basic distinction between native and non-native theatre: "The use of underlying native mythology is the distinctive feature. Native mythology is so alive, electric, passionate.....the relationship in Christian mythology is so academic by comparison...[in] native theatre that spirituality is there. It is magic" (Brask, Morgan, 132). The Nanabush figure in *The Rez Sisters* indeed conveys that sense of magic. According to the author's production notes, he is to be played by a male dancer, "modern, ballet or traditional." He appears in three guises: a white bird (joy); a black bird (death); and as the glittering bingo master (wish fulfilment). Only Zhaboonigan, the retarded girl, and Marie-Adèle, sick with cancer and close to death, have some inkling of the spirit

within the bird. When Nanabush first appears, a white seagull outside Marie-Adèle's house, the author immediately makes the connection between native mythology and native language: Marie-Adèle addresses him in Cree in the longest Native language passage of the play. Subsequently, Nanabush appears in his multiple roles. As a joyous, comic trickster, he accompanies the women on their march to the store, to the band office, and playfully joins his own antics to their frantic fundraising efforts. In a moving scene with Zhaboonigan, he proves the only confidante to whom she is able to tell the story of her traumatic childhood experiences. Full of trust, she concludes with a childlike: "Nice white birdie you" (R.S., 48). In the surrealistic bingo scene, Nanabush becomes the glitzy bingo master who, however, fails to call out the much-wanted number, B14. Nanabush as the black bird visits Marie-Adèle, and finally comes to take her away in the midst of the bingo riot:

And out of this chaos emerges the calm, silent image of Marie-Adèle waltzing romantically in the arms of the Bingo Master. The Bingo Master says "Bingo" into her ear. And the Bingo Master changes, with sudden, bird-like movements, into the nighthawk, Nanabush in dark feathers. Marie-Adèle meets Nanabush. (R.S., 103)

Nanabush, then, stands for the joyful, life-affirming spirit of Native mythology, as well as for a calm and fearless attitude to death. As Highway points out, contrasting these attitudes to the Christian ones, "One superhero is stating that we are here to suffer and the other basically says we are here to have a helluva good time...One was crucified, the other wasn't; so we have absolutely nothing to feel guilty about..." (Brask, Morgan, 134). The two plays provide a perfect illustration of these basic differences. All the women of the older generation in *Les Belles-soeurs* are deeply steeped in a sense of sin and guilt. Trying to have a bit of innocuous fun at a club brings tragic consequences for Angéline Sauvée, as she is told "mais c'est péché mortel" and "le club, mais c'est l'enfer" (B.S., 78) by her self-righteous best friend Rhéauna. Angéline's spotlight monologue reveals the full pathos of such oppressive Puritanical attitudes, as she comments on her joyless upbringing: "J'ai été élevée dans des salles paroissiales par des soeurs qui faisaient c' qu'y pouvaient mais qui connaissaient rien, les pauvres! J'ai appris à rire à cinquante-cinq ans! Comprenez-vous! J'ai appris à rire à cinquante-cinq ans!" (B.S., 81). Similarly, the belles-soeurs show total intolerance and lack of compassion for any young girl who has "fallen" from the straight and narrow path. Lise Paquette is driven to the edge of suicide by

their vicious self-righteousness, summed up by Rose, speaking for all of them: “Non, pour moé là, les filles-mères c’est des vicieuses, qui courent après les hommes” (B.S., 100). The problem does not arise in *The Rez Sisters*; even Emily Dictionary, the toughest of them all, accepts the fact of her pregnancy quite stoically.

Just as the excessively developed sense of sin and guilt leads to a total condemnation of all pleasures, it brings with it an almost hysterical fear of death and the threat of eternal damnation. This is well demonstrated in *Les Belles-soeurs* as Rhéauna and Angéline contemplate their own death on their return from the funeral parlour:

ANGÉLINE:....J’veux mourir dans mon lit...avoir le temps de me confesser...

RHÉAUNA: Pour ça, non, j’voudrais pas mourir sans me confesser! Angéline, promets-moé que tu vas faire v’nir le prêtre quand j’vas me sentir mal! Promets-le moé!

ANGÉLINE: Ben oui, ben oui, ça fait cent fois que tu me le demandes...

RHÉAUNA: J’ai tellement peur de mourir sans recevoir les derniers sacrements!

The contrast to the attitudes about death in *The Rez Sisters* is absolute. Marie-Adèle’s last words, spoken, significantly, in Cree, convey only trust and serenity:

U-wi-nuk u-wa? U-wi-nuk u-wa? Eugene? Neee. U-wi-nuk ma-a oo-ma kee-tha? Ka. Kee-tha i-chi-goo-ma so that’s who you are...at rest upon the rock...the master of the game...the game...it’s me...nee-tha...come...come...don’t be afraid...as-tum...come...to...me...ever soft wings...beautiful soft...soft...dark wings...here...take me...as-tum...as-tum...pee-na-sin...wings...here...take me...take...me...with...pee-na-sin... (Cr. S., 104);

Who are you? Who are you? Eugene? Nee. Then who are you really? Oh. It’s you, so that’s who you are...at rest upon the rock...the master of the game...the game...it’s me...me...come...come...don’t be afraid...come...come...to...me...ever soft wings...beautiful soft...soft...dark wings...here...take me...come...come...come and get me...wings here...take me...take me...with...come and get me. (Footnote translation, R.S., 104)

In conclusion, we see how Michel Tremblay and Tomson Highway, writing at similar points in the historical evolution of their society, and choosing a similar dramatic matrix, have created two totally dissimilar plays, each reflecting its own culture. Tremblay’s cynical treatment of the topic echoes Western postmodern nihilism; Highway’s idealization of characters and retention of a humanistic value system indicates a society in which hope has not yet died. Highway sums it all up in the funeral speech, given by Pelijia at Marie-Adèle’s grave:

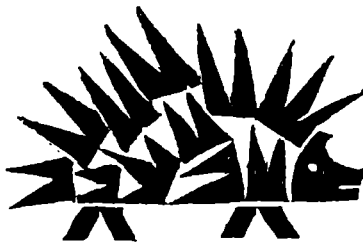
Well, sister, guess you finally hit the big jackpot. Best bingo game we've ever been to in our lives, huh? You know, life's like that, I figure. When all is said and done. Kinda silly, innit, this business of living? But. What choice do we have?...I figure we gotta make the most of it while we're here. You certainly did. And I sure as hell am giving it one good try. For you. For me. For all of us. Promise. Really. See you when that big bird finally comes for me.

#### NOTES

- 1 For an extensive discussion of superrealism in the theatre, see Renate Usmiani, *The Theatre of Frustration: SuperRealism in the Work of Franz-Xaver Kroetz and Michel Tremblay*. New York: Garland, 1990.

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## Bird in the Hand

First reading you years ago, Rilke,  
you were strange to me, aloof, a man  
speaking with angels, Orpheus  
summoning a lost Eurydice but leaving her  
in dark solitude, looking back  
to keep her there while you climb up  
and out. You were sure-footed  
but complained the paths misled:  
only intuition could be the guide.

Still you sing about a hand that needs  
to clasp another to complete itself —  
palms and lines are mirrors that hold  
reflections drawn on another hand.

The skin on my fingers splits, my wrist  
is rawly sliced and peeled, ruts gouged  
in flesh, destinations unknown — where  
is the other hand to complement this?

Still you sing about a dove flying  
to face alien terrors, searching  
for the secret shrouded in dead-ends  
of dark, daring to unshroud  
its own free-feeling self.

All I can reach for is a hand, crusted  
with dry skin, flaking, rough  
as a broken voice lifted in song,  
exploding upwards on a ragged clatter  
of wings, trying to soar, hold steady  
in buffeting currents of air  
while tethered to the substantial grave  
weight of this world's dark home.

# “The Story of Rehearsal Never Ends”

## Rehearsal, Performance, Identity in Settler Culture Drama<sup>1</sup>

**W**hile Canada's recent re-assessment of the nature of its nationhood in the 1992 referendum is one of the most widely publicized critical re-thinkings of national federations in the post-colonial world, it is not the only one. Australia's celebration of two hundred years of white occupation in 1988 also provoked re-considerations of ownership and history particularly by Aboriginal groups.<sup>2</sup> In an age of neo-imperial trans-national trade blocs, Australia has been considering whether it belongs with Europe, Asia, or, even more incredibly, North America. Recent discussions foreshadow moves to re-constitute itself as a republic, and already, Queensland has decided to strike references to the Queen from everything but the state's now ironic name. Reconfiguring nationhood is characteristic of post-colonial countries whose very existence results from imperial intrusions, and whose “independence” today can be construed as further disruption. Some arguments presented by the “Yes” lobby in the Canadian referendum debate or earlier debates about multiculturalism similarly caution citizens about the dangers of instability. Yet the alternative national constructions that Canada and Australia have been considering depict more appropriately the nature of the post-colonial world; these alternative entities and identities can produce greater regenerative possibilities than politicians seem to acknowledge.

In light of this more or less continual re-negotiation of cultural authenticity, I would like to re-situate post-colonial “identity” in a new, theatrical context. “Identity,” once the principal trope in establishing national selfhood, has been explored by novelists in particular in such texts as George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*, which uses the image of the colonial



child, or Chinua Achebe's novels about colonial Nigeria, or Raja Rao's *The Serpent and the Rope*, among many others. In these contexts, identity—often in conjunction with nationhood—becomes a crucial establishing factor (or metaphor) for a region's political, cultural, and literary independence, and often as an end in itself.

In theatrical terms, "identity" is much less focussed on completion: in virtually all cases, an actor presents an identity separate from her own. This multiplication of identities (the actor's and the character's) invests identity with immediately apparent multivalent personas that are not as inevitably discernible in other literary genres. The public nature of theatre is also conducive to taking the identity issue beyond what might otherwise remain autobiography and/or the personal to the public and the national. Since, as Keir Elam outlines in *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, everything on a stage stands for something else, it is possible to "translate" the personal actions of a character on stage to "represent", signify, and even allegorize national events.

Identity has been re-played in a particularly fruitful way by the West Indian novelist, Wilson Harris, in *The Infinite Rehearsal* (1987) which frames the identity quest in a theatrical context which imposes on the search a repetition that is as endless as the search itself. In Harris's formulation, identity is re-played as a less conclusive, less concrete concept, yet one which is perhaps, now, more useful. *The Infinite Rehearsal* is a fictional autobiography of Robin Redbreast Glass, mediated by "W.H.," chronicling a sort of play that is merely rehearsed infinitely, rather than having the desire to culminate in a "completed" performance. Rehearsal, as Harris notes, suggests incompleteness and "elusive wholeness" (7), or illusory wholeness: it alludes to a wholeness which is never present(ed). This trope which focusses on process rather than product is particularly appropriate to post-colonial literatures which frequently modify imperial requirements of "good literature." Rehearsal, not a trope or technique necessarily integral to narrative or to poetry, is central to theatre, since the performance context invests a play with both the repetition of rehearsal and the repetition of the play's run—playing the "same" play many times. Rehearsal is usually a process that is a necessary preparation for performance but superseded by what is perceived to be its more significant sequel and indeed its outcome. Rehearsal becomes a much more implicitly powerful experience than in Harris's novel, and in many post-colonial plays becomes a metaphor that remains on stage beyond the dress rehearsal. It becomes part of a process in which the endlessly deferred product is secondary.

The play experience itself is inherently conducive to the revisionist strategies that post-colonial literatures deploy: in preparing a play for production, actors and/or directors revision or “re-see” how to play a particular role, each contributing his and her own knowledge, experience, and cultural position. Harris’s trope establishes identity as a repetitive process, only ever elusively whole. It is, though, repetition *with* change. As Helen Tiffin notes, decolonization is, after all, “a process, not arrival; it invokes an ongoing dialectic between hegemonic centrist systems and peripheral subversions of them; between European or British discourses and their post-colonial dis/mantling” (17). The infinite rehearsal is not so much a counter-discourse as a continuously re-cited/re-sited one. The constant rehearsing and rewriting of the master narratives by post-colonial writers serves not to claim mastery, but to question the basis of the construction of “master.”

Many Australian and Canadian plays exploit the metaphor of theatre and rehearsal, and infinitely rehearse the construction of personal and national selfhood: they force a revision—or a re-acting—of (and to) the traditional paradigms of Canadian and Australian identity. These include Linda Griffiths and Maria Campbell’s *The Book of Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation*, Djanet Sears’s *Afrika Solo*, and Monique Mojica’s *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*; and from Australia, Louis Nowra’s *Così*, *Summer of the Aliens*, and *Radiance*. Each employs the rehearsal metaphor in their attempts to enable a performance of identity which is different from the “proscribed” national one.

Brian Edwards has pursued part of this debate in the context of national identity in postmodern fiction from Canada and Australia. Edwards argues that the desire for a national identity resembles a “dialectic” which variously “quests for unity and acknowledgments of diversity” (161). Postmodern fiction concerned with the discovery associated with national identity characteristically adopts a project of “un-naming, un-creating and un-inventing” (162). Edwards quotes from Robert Kroetsch’s novel, *Gone Indian*: “This is the consequence of the northern prairies to human definition: the diffusion of personality into a complex of possibilities rather than a concluded self” (152). A consequence of more than just the prairies, “the diffusion of personality into a complex of possibilities rather than a concluded self” is, I would suggest, a consequence of life and place in a second world post-colonial setting.<sup>3</sup> By means of the trope of rehearsal, these Canadian and Australian playwrights pursue very similar sorts of projects,

challenging the fixity of national identity to achieve particular political ends.

Interestingly, while one might expect the inclusion of New Zealand in this comparison, the bi-cultural debate there raises other issues that have not yet been played out in New Zealand theatres. The bi-cultural New Zealand context determines a different sort of identity struggle that, in its present form, has been restricted from becoming as splintered and multi-dimensional as in Canada and Australia. Maori theatre has moved to define itself in other contexts, such as both the explicit demands for land rights and justice, and the implicit desires for respect that emerge from family dramas (Potiki personal interview). Moreover, the centrality (and singularity) of the Treaty of Waitangi (1840) offers a more linear history than that found in either Australia or Canada. The finished text of the Treaty acts as a founding document that might be expected to produce a transcendent meaning.<sup>4</sup>

While such identity disagreements may yet emerge in New Zealand, this paper will examine a particular moment in two similar settler-invader cultures: Australia and Canada. The Canadian plays argue—implicitly and explicitly—against the belief that Canada’s identity, that which was “fixed” and celebrated in 1967, continues to be defined by a few well-known signifiers (such as Mounties, Indians, and the Quebecois, and forests and snow). *Afrika Solo* and *The Book of Jessica*, for instance, deny a uniform definition of culture, identity, and nationhood by subverting the traditional performative trope that posits the finished product as the desired result. They both demonstrate that the process of *becoming* theatre—rehearsal for performance—is more significant than the performance itself. *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* plays with the constructed nature of performance, and, by extension, the identity that is performed. Identity is also presented as fractured and/or plural in Nowra’s work. The Australian national identity,<sup>5</sup> traditionally figured as male, white, and realist, is increasingly being refigured. Not only has the presence of writing by “migrants” and women disrupted such a narrow definition of “Australian”; writing by Koori, Murri and Nyoongah writers has also forced a re-examination of Australian identities which, necessarily, also demands a re-consideration of the *modes* of representing different models of identity.

**A***frika Solo* provides a paradigm for the infinite rehearsal. A play about the accretion—rather than the discarding—of identities, *Afrika Solo* demonstrates the ways in which rehearsal usefully displaces

a final performance in much the same way that Janet's ethnic background refuses—even refutes—traditional signifiers of “Canadian.” Being African-Canadian in a predominantly white country causes Janet to wonder constantly who she is and can be. Unable to be *just* Canadian, she must always define herself in terms of her question, “Where do I come from?” She attempts to answer these questions by remembering and replaying her visit to Africa, and by re-enacting the television shows with which she grew up. Television, especially given its bias against people of African descent, provides no help in her search for an identity: the beautiful women were never black, and it was even a momentous day when black people were shown at all.

While Janet continues her search for a way to represent herself, the text of *Afrika Solo* also begins to problematize modes of representation. The physical script in drama is generally deemed to be less important than the performance text, but in the case of *Afrika Solo*, the scripted text becomes especially prominent. The play “begins” with epigraphs, an unusual but growing practice for drama: Sears's are from Malcolm X; the old spiritual, “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot;” and the Star Trek motto, “Beam me up, Scotty.” The pages of the text are decorated with a pattern that could be from fabric or a pot or a basket. This Adinkra pattern is, Sears notes at the beginning of the text, representative of a “restless wandering search, ‘changing one's self, playing many roles’” (ii). The putative primacy of the performance text continues to be deferred, in fact pushed off the stage altogether as an epistemological irrelevance at the same time as Janet rehearses her part to learn who she really is.

Part of Janet's rehearsal process involves adopting another name: she discovers on her travels that in Swahili Djanet means paradise, so by just adding “D,” she is able to “un-name” herself *and* to incorporate some of Africa and the West in her name. She attends to all the tasks that an actor rehearsing a role would do. She rehearses, over and over, the lines that she will say to Ben, the man she is leaving in Africa. She tries different lines, different inflections of the same line, all in an effort to “get it right”, to prepare for the “performance.” Through the course of the play, Djanet “gets dressed,” adding several lengths of cloth to her initial costume of jeans and a t-shirt at various points when it becomes necessary to alter her appearance. By the end of the play, she has completed her dressing, emerging in African Boubou and a headdress so that the “performance” on stage has been in fact the process of preparing for a performance. The “real” performance will come when the Djanet, who

has just completed her preparations for the “role” of Djanet, is ready to go “on” (in both senses). The identity that she arrives at is a hybrid form of Guyanese and Jamaican from her parents, British from her birth, Canadian from her country of residence, and the many African heritages that she has “adopted.” A passport indicates, even guarantees, cultural and national identity: Djanet holds four (Guyanese, Jamaican, British, and Canadian) and she acquires various African cultural “passports” during her journey.

She comes to the understanding that she *is* beautiful, and her African hips, lips, and hair become part of her “baggage” that she takes back to Canada to show off, as she would show a souvenir. Djanet’s bringing back what she learns in Africa is regenerative rather than appropriative: early in her journey she learns that she will not arrive at either a new self or the “completed” identity she begins searching for. The performative Djanet then concentrates on the rehearsal process. In the education/rehearsal process, she appreciates that “sometimes you look in the mirror and you sorta’—catch your own I” (93).

The play refuses performance, then, in the same way that Djanet refuses a specific identity. She finally asserts that her heritage is richly multiple: she refuses to claim just one. She adds to the picture of Canadian identities in a way that is empowering for a large number of Canadians: it is not just a personal exercise for her but a cultural lever to dislodge the stereotyped white Mountie version of “Canadian” from its perceived centrality. She succeeds in broadening the parameters of the field building up entities and identities rather than peeling away layers to find an essence or core. *Afrika Solo* does not articulate identity through the usual colonial split site of enunciation (of Imperial centre and colony); rather, it moves to the multivalent site of enunciation, all valencies of which are accounted for in the construction of Djanet’s “Canadian” cultural heritage.

**T***he Book of Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation* is more complex in background and execution, but it too resists traditional representations politically and theatrically. Combining the talents of a white actor and improviser (Griffiths), and a Métis writer and activist (Campbell), the text describes Jessica, based loosely on Campbell’s early life. The play explores some of the doubled spirit world of the Métis tradition. Jessica, a heroin-addicted call girl is surrounded by other actors who play multiple roles, including the spirits: Crow, Wolverine, Coyote, and Bear. Later,

Unicorn, signifying Jessica's white side, appears, much to the chagrin of the native spirits. Operating within very calculated transformations, as well as instant, magical ones, the play shifts from mimesis to memory, to the spirit world, to ceremony. When Jessica learns to control her spiritual powers, she understands that until now she has just been "a face with no soul" (166), and the spirits' presence in her life introduces her to a larger identity. The final ceremony of the play sees the spirits disappearing into Jessica. In the trance that Vitaline, her spiritual guide, induces, Jessica sees a figure walking towards her and she can name that figure as herself, Jessica.

The fractured nature of many of the characters becomes significant in several dimensions. At the end of the play, the varied aspects of Jessica's identity—spiritual and physical, as well as her signifiers: displaced native, activist, writer, mother—that she used to read as a "problem" combine to produce an identity that is *more* than a "whole" in the same way that the text is more than a playscript. The split personality is deceptive: it appears to be splintered, but it is actually multivalent, not less than one, but more than one. *The Book of Jessica*, more than just a play about a Métis woman, recounts the play's protracted—and often acrimonious and painful—creation of *Jessica* (and the character, Jessica), a process that both mirrors and inverts historical power struggles between whites and Métis. Issues of identity become more confusing regarding the authors: one of the authors is invited to create and act a stage identity from the life of her co-author. The continual rehearsal process generates similar multivalences that insist on re-reading stereotypic notions of white/Indian/Métis. These forced re-readings then generate revisions of national identity/ies.

Campbell and Griffiths seem mismatched from the beginning, in terms of age, aesthetics, background, and race, but the most significant difference is that of power. The history of Empire is, after all, based on the assumption of the power to represent the "other." Imperial history produces arguments about representation and identity which threaten the project and the delicate relationship between the two women. The disagreements between the women intersect with disagreements between Métis beliefs about art and white beliefs about theatrical practices: in their decision to do the play, the two women decide that Griffiths, the white woman, will play the role of the Métis woman in the first production, but that afterwards, the role will revert to a Métis or First Nations woman.<sup>6</sup> They are cognizant of the problems in such a casting decision, but they are willing to overlook the difficul-

ties in order to get the story to the stage, using Griffiths's wide experience of improvisation and creation.

The stereotypical view of "Indian" as outsider is challenged in *The Book of Jessica*. While Griffiths takes hold of the power of writing the text—indeed, her name appears first—she feels throughout the project that she is trespassing. It is she—rather than the "Indian"—who is disenfranchised. That position of not quite fitting-in<sup>7</sup> is not accorded to the Métis Campbell in the experience of *Jessica*, but to Griffiths, the white woman. Her ambivalent position, to use Homi Bhabha's term, rivals Campbell's "inverted" status as "other:" as the authority figure who possesses the answers to Griffiths's questions about authenticity, Campbell maintains a considerable amount of power within the context of the *Jessica* experience, particularly because Griffiths is afraid to offend the Métis Campbell, and hence feels powerless.

This inversion of the conventional victim position does not remain static, though: it is a constantly "switching" (78) relationship. Both women find that the *Jessica* experience forces them to find the person they had "shoved away someplace" (32). The transformations of selves and their focus on the process of performing enabled the women to explore (however reluctantly in Griffiths's case) the nature of the relationship between identity and stereotype, and the connection between personal and political. While Griffiths was adept at taking on other peoples' personalities (which created difficulties as she "took on" Campbell's), she was unable to pursue the exploration of her own off-stage self. The entire text becomes a sacred and negotiated treaty of sorts and hence the medium for cultural exchange and understanding, even if it is extracted at a cost. Campbell "shifts the focus, for the white scholar or writer, from a project of moral self-purification—demonstrating cultural sensitivity or entitlement—to one of political effectiveness" (Hoy 10).

Griffiths and Campbell discover, to their surprise, that the *Jessica* experience is not finished with the conclusion of the play's run. Just as Jessica's identity is not fixed at the end of the play—coming to know her spirits and their powers is just the beginning—the dialogue between these two women continues to evolve. *The Book of Jessica* recalls and repeats the rehearsal procedure, marking the transformations of the text, the women, and the country's race relations. The invocation that Campbell and the actors enact before the curtain rises is a blessing partly to protect the actors from the spirits, and partly to draw strength from the rehearsal process. "The repetition of the invocation accumulated power and strength each time it was

spoken. All of the actors that played Jessica now, call on the strength of the previous Jessicas, so that they, in a way, become the grandmothers of the play itself" (53). The blessing itself recalls the infinite rehearsal. Griffiths continues this metaphor as she concludes the text's first section, "Spiritual Things," by musing, "I think this is still the story of the rehearsals, the story of the rehearsals never ends..." (64). The next section, "The Red Cloth," closes similarly: Griffiths refuses to end the experience with a fairy tale story that will signify any sort of closure. There is always a "post"-script in which more is rehearsed. The relationship, the play, and the white/Métis/native dialogues will have to continue to be re-negotiated, rehearsed, and re-played.

The form of *The Book of Jessica* will not allow the play text to be an icon of a successful and completed rehearsal process. It is both playtext and record of process, but these two components will never add up to a completion. The text is hybrid, not a single, conglomerated whole.<sup>8</sup> The conflicting textual forms mirror the conflict between the two women as authors; they also highlight the contest between the different kinds of cultural power and different systems of signification: play, history, treaty, autobiography, documentary, interview, the cover graphic, native authenticity, white authority, and white guilt.

**M**onique Mojica's *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* alters the infinite rehearsal slightly to replay for the audience the "assumed" performances—assumed in both senses—of the stage Indian. Exploring the incarnations of native women in North America over the last four hundred years, the play differentiates between aspects of two contemporary women and their fragmented, historical, and imposed identities. The union at the end is not perfect, and never can be, given the manifestations of historical Indian signifiers that are layered onto these contemporary women. This dis-union, this un-invention of self, is achieved by means of explicit transformations of space, time, and characters: two actors play many roles, and the structure, set, and costumes all contribute to those transformations. The author notes in her set description that "objects and set pieces appear to be one thing but become something else; they can be turned inside-out to reveal another reality" (17). Likewise, the play reaches no smooth "theatrical" conclusions. The stage is "littered" (17) with discarded props from each of the manifestations of the two characters.

*Princess Pocahontas* depicts the various "selves" of the two women by



combining them into one “Indian” signifier. As the play opens, the 498th Miss North American Indian Beauty Pageant is about to begin, hosted by “George Pepe Flaco Columbus Cartier da Gama Smith,” (18) but his preferred name, Bob, de-signifies the conglomeration of signs that collude to create his “full” name.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the other characters combine to include all the ways in which “Indian” has conveyed meaning in popular culture. Rather than culminating in a greater signifier, these signs (in themselves significant) lose their meaning: they become a virtually undecipherable mass of empty signs, emptied by their being placed in contradiction to each other and to the Contemporary Women who must deal with them.

The beauty contest continues to introduce Princess Buttered-on-both-Sides whose musical signifiers establish all the stereotypes in one to reveal much more than just “Other.” As Barbara Christian has said, “many of us have never conceived of ourselves only as somebody’s *other*” (54); the play highlights just how the Indian Other is “other” to natives too. Daniel Francis usefully differentiates between “Native” (“The actual people”) and “Indian” (“the image of Native people held by non-Natives”) (9). This distinction is particularly appropriate: just as Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, in *Dark Side of the Dream* speak of Aboriginalism (in the same way that Said speaks of Orientalism), here we may speak of Indianism.

Considering various manifestations of the Hollywood Indian stereotype, the play confronts the constructed images of Storybook Pocahontas and the Cigar Store Squaw. In the Troubadour’s version of the story of Pocahontas, the storybook version of her life, he sings,

And so here ends the legend  
     of the Princess Pocahontas—  
 Fa la la la lay, fa la la la la LELF—  
     if you want any more, make it up yourself.  
         *chorus*  
 Heigh-ho wiggle-waggle  
     wigwam wampum,  
 roly-poly papoose tom-tom  
     tomahawk squaw. (31-2)

The obviously nonsensical chorus (filled, nevertheless, with icons of Hollywood “Indianness”) underlines the final line of the verse: that Indians will be constructed in whatever fashion whites require. *Princess Pocahontas* refuses stereotyping by ironically recombining and replaying the stereotypes to expose the constructs for the convenient, hollow, white-invented icons

that they are. The many Indianist representations available for performance in *Princess Pocahontas* can be re-used, like the bits and pieces of the set, but re-used with a critical distance that invests the performer with the cultural power. Here, then, rehearsal is slightly skewed: the rehearsed images have been replayed through several hundred years of representation.

The play also provides new roles for Contemporary Woman #1 and Contemporary Woman #2. The roles they repeatedly try to establish are designed to *begin* non-Indianist representations of native women, representations which can then be replayed in other theatrical contexts. In this context, the play's re-assessment of the place of native women in feminist debates has particular agency. Just as natives cannot be equated with the Cigar Store Squaw, nor can they be left out of International Women's Day. Contemporary Woman #1 talks about how feminism generally resists enabling all women, as individuals, to participate:

No, I didn't go to the march. (*cross to centrestage, very deliberately making footprints in sand*) So many years of trying to fit into feminist shoes. O.K., I'm trying on the shoes; but they're not the same as the shoes in the display case. The shoes I'm trying on must be crafted to fit these wide, square, brown feet. I must be able to feel the earth through their soles.

So, it's International Women's Day, and here I am. Now, I'd like you to take a good look—(*turns slowly, all the way around*) I don't want to be mistaken for a crowd of Native women. I am one. And I do not represent all Native women. I am one. (58-9)

The categorization of native women as either just native or just women continues to enforce the singular classifications of people within the national identity paradigm which institutionalizes its own specious singularity by accepting for incorporation only other singularized identities. *Princess Pocahontas* demonstrates that natives must always remain "native," not differentiated, individuated women.

With its emphasis on de-categorization—but not assimilation—the play's focus becomes a mixture of voices that "speak" graphically as well. The movement of the two women on the stage, combined with their dances and their songs suggests many voices, each with a different tune, message, and style. The text recalls Djanet Sears's graphic designs for the text of *Afrika Solo*:<sup>10</sup> the symbol in *Princess Pocahontas* is a circle containing four circles, each bearing an ear of corn. The presence of these symbols again highlights the textual process as just that—process, and a process that is in itself significant (that is, implicated in signification). The process does not have to arrive at a specific moment or site, just as the two contemporary women

know that they will not arrive at fully reconstituted selves: the transforming natures of the women and the plays are themselves the defiant, re-active, un-inventing means to challenge the fixity of identity and stereotyped assumptions of the “Indian” place within the national identity. *Princess Pocahontas* refuses the concluding moment by explaining in Spanish and English that “A nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground” (60). The hearts of native women still beat strong in representations that *they* construct. While they don’t entirely refuse the signifiers that have been thrust upon them and in fact transform them for their own purposes, they reserve the right to develop their own individual signifiers for “native” and for “woman” as well.

**C**anada’s constitutional considerations can be more immediately read into the re-defining of identity in these plays, given the recent referendum. But Canada’s specific constitutional dilemma also has resonances with wider post-colonial concerns, particularly in settler-invader cultures. Australia’s constitution was signed on 1 January 1901, precluding the meetings, debates, discussions, and referenda that Canada is still experiencing. The recent and continuing debate concerning republicanism has been couched in terms of unity, identity, and repatriating the singular headship of state. The anxiety about security that arguments of stability and unity raise has resonances with Australian theatre where there is a tentativeness, an insecurity that results more from a changing country than an inability to write plays. Few Australians still focus on the ocker and other character types that only confirmed the stereotypes established for a minority of the country’s population. Louis Nowra’s work always includes characters who are unsure who they are and where they belong: these characters, and the plays as a whole, work as devices to communicate the post-colonial un-naming and un-creating of fixed identity. While nationally, politicians strive to produce arguments about unity, security, and how strong such a country will be, Nowra’s work capitalizes on the dis-unity of the collective Australian psyche. Three of his most recently published plays, *Summer of the Aliens* (1992), *Così* (1992), and *Radiance* (1993), reproduce the rehearsal and abrogation of final performance in a way that is similar to the Canadian plays.

*Così* self-consciously uses theatre, metatheatre, and autobiography to destabilize the identity that frequently characterizes settler-invader colonies. The play describes the fictional Lewis’s directorial debut with a group of

psychiatric patients in a heavily edited version of Mozart's opera, *Così Fan Tutte*. The play-within-a-play they present miraculously works, despite disasters along the way, not the least being frayed tempers, an active pyromaniac, and many broken relationships. After the "cast" and the "director" finish up their play and say their goodbyes (and Roy, one of the patients, makes plans for the next project, *Don Giovanni*), and Lewis addresses the audience to explain what happens to him and to the patients, he says, "Time to turn out the lights" (81). This play-within-a-play repeats itself quite spectacularly: at the "end," the musician begins the play all over again. The stage directions indicate that "[t]he performance is over" (76), but as the stage lights are extinguished, Zac awakes from his drug-induced torpor, announcing to the audience, "Ladies and gentlemen, the overture to *Così Fan Tutte*!" (81). He then plays on the piano Wagner's "The Ride of the Valkyries," accompanied at full volume by a recorded orchestra. The play-within-a-play concludes, only to start all over again. The infinite rehearsals that seem even more infinite because of the varying degrees of psychosis in the patients are "concluded" by a performance that doesn't end: again, a final, definitive performance is refused on each level of the theatrical sign system.

*Così* is both autobiography and metaphor of the settler post-colonial situation. Taken initially from events in Louis Nowra's past (as he says all his plays are), Lewis's life and the play's life also have agencies of their own. Yet the life story (especially when it is combined with *Summer of the Aliens*) quickly becomes a vehicle for expressing other issues that are, in *Così*, typified by the asylum. While Peter Weiss's *Marat/Sade* exploits a "world is an asylum" metaphor, *Così*'s world is far more complex. If the post-colonial settler condition is one of being colonized while simultaneously colonizing an indigenous population, then *Così* quite appropriately depicts the ambivalence of this situation. The asylum patients, protected from the outside world because they cannot deal with the larger world, are also incarcerated to protect the world for similar reasons of "incompatibility." The multiple roles that the patients play in the creation of the play-within-a-play further broaden the signifiers for each character in *Così*. The play refuses to rest with the categorizations that initially define everyone (including those who are not patients). The play's layers become even more complex: while a time and place are specified, the play's own agency determines its larger resonances. Autobiography gives over to metaphor, but, as ever, Nowra's plays do not rest on one metaphoric level. Like *The Golden Age* (1985), the play

for which Nowra is best known, the asylum patients can be metaphoric of Aboriginal populations incarcerated to protect the white population, but they cannot be just that. However and whatever they signify, the asylum patients again question fixed identities and roles in a post-colonial setting, demonstrating even the therapeutic results of refusing limiting labels.

As the settler-invader's life is mediated, as the asylum patient's life is mediated, so is *Così Fan Tutte* also mediated, indeed heavily edited, for playing here. Partly a convenience, partly for humour, partly for the counter-discursive implications, the cut script in its re-rehearsed state becomes the trope for identity politics. Modification, re-reading, re-editing, rehearsing demonstrate the inappropriateness of a definitive version of the opera and of Australian identity/ies. No pre-determined identity is possible or assured in this play's world, as the versions of each character's self are "played out:" the roles that they choose, the roles that they are given, and the multiple selves created by the psychoses of many of the patients. The characters continually re-create "self" throughout *Così*, sometimes tragically, as Lewis's epilogue-of-sorts reveals. The performance and rehearsal metaphors replay far more than just the acted world.

The notion of split and multifarious identities is developed further in the play that immediately precedes *Così*. *Summer of the Aliens* considers Lewis at age 14, approaching adulthood one summer in the early 1960s. *Summer of the Aliens* is in part a play about growing up, and the fully-grown narrator, Lewis as an adult, stands at the edge of the stage throughout the play and watches himself: there are, then, two Lewises on stage. The adult Lewis mediates the younger man's activities for the audience: "That's me: Lewis. ... I'm waiting in the gully for the shooters to finish" (2), as his oblivious, younger self prepares to rescue spent cartridges.

Unlike many of the other plays, and indeed most other plays by Nowra, the performances in *Summer of the Aliens* are not designed to imitate a play. Rather, it imitates *play*, rehearsal of identity and self, and highlights layers of specularity both in terms of an audience watching and in the context of the conscious construction of self, and the shifting nature of identity and how performance helps to create that identity. The narrator re-evaluates his younger actions and wonders what might have happened if things had worked out differently. At one point, the narrator forces Lewis to go back and re-vise an action that he has just completed. The narrator occasionally merges with the action to help out the young Lewis, culminating in a ques-

tioning of the younger self that forces a re-evaluation of the self that both Lewises have established for themselves. Identity is not the innate trait that the young Lewis had assumed it to be. The aliens of the title live within everyone, the young Lewis decides, and this results in everyone possessing a fractured persona. Lewis learns how this fracturing begins to affect him: the play reconciles the two versions of Lewis (young and old)—not *to* each other—but to *mimicking* each other.

The young Lewis learns that the way to survive is to rehearse roles: he mimics adults as they mimic other adults, scenes from their own childhoods, and their fantasies. There is mimicry with difference here, a concept to which Nowra alludes in his introduction. The acting and en-acting of a “life” can always only be a compilation of personas, not a final, completed self. The Frankenstein activity that Nowra says he mimicked in the *writing* of the play (“I was a Teenage Alien,” x) also becomes incorporated in the *action* of the play: “Like the doctor, I have raided the graveyard of my memory and have created a monster out of the various limbs and appendages I could dig up” (x). This is a much more personal (than national) account of identity, but its place in the paradigm is nevertheless significant in that the *acting* of many personas that forms the basis of the play—both in construction of characters and in their doubled manifestations on stage—deconstructs any desire for singular representation.

Mimicry is not the only way in which to construct identity, as the “experience” of Dulcie, Lewis’s childhood friend, demonstrates. Dulcie is sent to a “reformatory” girls’ home after being blamed for sexual abuse perpetrated by her stepfather, and Lewis never sees her again. The narrator takes the opportunity to ask Dulcie what happened to her. Her response is: “I don’t know, because you don’t know” (83). This “anti-definition” of Dulcie’s character oddly recalls the Troubadour in *Princess Pocahontas* who tells the audience, “if you want any more, make it up yourself” (31). In both plays, Pocahontas and Dulcie resist quick labels or stereotypes: perhaps they are ultimately “not knowable.” The absence of specificity for Dulcie’s future (now past), and the transformability of Lewis’s past emphasize the possibility of a much more elastic definition of self that eventually helps Lewis to determine his own multivalent sense of self.

Lewis’s father leaves the family yet again, and the narrator comments that he never heard from him again. The narrator takes this opportunity to question his father onstage, as the “action” of the play is suspended for the

narrator to examine the threads of his life: "Where did you go after that?" His father's response, "Wherever you imagined I did" (72), as open as Dulcie's statement about her "future," suggests each of the several possible interpretations of self that Lewis is left with can be true. Lewis's father refuses any form of definitive identity or narration, something the doubled construction of Lewis eventually also achieves.

The narrator concludes the play by telling the audience, "Eventually Lewis and I merged. To become me, because of him" (84). Two actors still remain on the stage, however: the merging is never "perfect." The premiere of *The Summer of the Aliens*, in Melbourne, starred Louis Nowra as the narrator. Known more for his writing than his acting, Nowra's way of playing the "role" was significant in the context of this paper. He played the part as if he were recalling details, remembering his lines, rather than replaying a fluidly rehearsed part; in other words, he did not "become" the narrator or "act" his part.<sup>11</sup> Nowra's performance was less like a performance, more like the mediation of life, reality, and identity. The play cannot be a representation of the completed past if it can be interrogated like this. *Summer of the Aliens*, then, is a consideration of the possibilities of a life, presented in a form that mirrors those possibilities, and becomes, like them, conditional, mediated, and infinitely rehearsed.

Nowra's most recent play, *Radiance*, continues in this same vein of infinitely rehearsing the self. The play opens with three half sisters (Mae, Cressy, and Nona) meeting after many years to bury their mother on the central Queensland coast. The youngest, Nona, mimics the middle sister's work as an opera singer: Nona recreates *Madama Butterfly*, the role she saw Cressy perform once in Adelaide. The performance parodies opera and Puccini's story, but it also highlights Cressy's fractured identity. Skilled at playing someone else from an early age to escape the memories of her childhood, of being taken away from her mother and being sent to live in a convent in Brisbane, Cressy assumes with ease the identity of others in operatic roles.

Mae's "play acting" involves wearing her mother's wedding dress, a dress that her mother never wore, a prop for a performance that never took place. Bought on layby for the day that her lover would leave his wife and marry her, the dress remains hidden in shame until Mae discovers it. In an attempt both to exorcise the ghost of her mother and to try to feel from it who her mother was (and by implication, who she is), Mae introduces the central link between the sisters, an Irish folk song, "Who is She?" This song, a par-

ody of identity, is, the women discover, the only thing that they all learned from their mother. Mae in particular is desperate to determine who she is, while Cressy keeps trying to escape her memories and to become the other people that she embodies in her personal—as well as her performing—life. Nona, on the other hand, defines herself through the Black Prince, her father, about whom her mother spun stories. She decides that if she can only meet him, then she'll know who *she* is. She presents a variety of scenarios about how she'll meet him at a rodeo, and even make love to him, reserving the announcement of her identity until the morning after. The play concludes with the revelation that Nona's mother in fact is Cressy who was raped at age 12 by a man who was no prince; the total disintegration of everything that had defined Nona necessitates a complete reconstruction of her persona. The three all rehearse their identities and personalities in different ways that pursue the trend of *Summer of the Aliens*. The new knowledge of re-ordered kinship at the end of the play does not resolve anything since the identities that are confused and composite at the beginning of the play remain so at the end. In other words, the constant rehearsal of Cressy's playing other people, of Mae's determination to answer her question—"Who is she?"—and Nona's desire to define herself through her father are activities that intersect centrally with the rehearsal motif. The answers to all the questions that the women have about themselves are magnified by the rehearsal.

While they try to contain themselves and their identities, the uncontainable identity metaphor spills over, just as the water of the mud flats in *Radiance* engulfs the actors on the stage. In the premiere production of *Radiance* at Belvoir Street Theatre in Sydney in 1993, the stage was flooded with about five centimetres of water as the sisters walked across the wet mud flats and the lighting produced endlessly changing swirling patterns on the walls and ceiling. Brian Thomson's design appropriately conveyed the innumerable and the forever unanchored answers to the question they sing, "Who is she?"

Identity in these plays can be added to, but it does not add up to a final sum or solution. The texts insist on repetition with transformation, rejecting the notion of performance as a singular moment of presence. The "process" of re-negotiation is more important than the moment of arrival, a moment which will in fact never arrive. Rehearsed and provisional identity is, then, paradigmatic of hybrid cultures which com-



bine but don't fuse several cultures to create a new entity, but not a specific, singular one. Laura Mulvey talks about Canadian identity being political first, bringing culture and ideology to the debate secondarily (10). It seems, though, that the theatrical metaphors demonstrate implicitly the political dimensions of national identity/ies.

If the metatheatrical metaphor can become a strategy for post-colonial resistance, then infinite rehearsal is one important way of recognizing the un-fixed, malleable, changeable, transformable and transformatory nature of colonies. These unstable qualities do not de-stabilize governments or peoples; rather, they ironically re-stabilize by allowing people to recognize that they need not fit into a specific national type. The un-naming, and un-creating can be as productive as unity and singular representations were once thought to be. The entire post-colonial situation is one of concocted and re-concocted identities, which must be accommodated, not hushed up or shoved into embarrassed corners.

Tony Fry suggests that in the search for a clearer sense of the future of Australian studies, "we need to say farewell to nation (as nation state). Just as from other parts of the world nations are saying farewell to us, in their breaking up, deformings and reformings" (19). This is, I think, hasty. As long as the rhetoric of nation can be altered to recognize the continuous reforming of the components of nationalism, such a drastic measure is unnecessary. Homi Bhabha recognizes the positive possibilities within the national paradigm: "The nation reveals, in its ambivalent and vacillating representation, the ethnography of its own historicity and opens up the possibility of other narratives of the people and their difference" ("DissemiNation" 300). By embracing on such notions, and re-directing the infinite narrations of the nation, the infinite rehearsals in Australian and Canadian plays take on important political dimensions that suggest multi-valenced directions for both countries in constitutional, political, and artistic arenas.

#### NOTES

- 1 "Infinitely Rehearsing Performance and Identity: *Afrika Solo* and *The Book of Jessica*" was published in *Canadian Theatre Review* 74 (March 1993): 35-39. This paper has emerged from further consideration of many of the issues in the early paper. The title of this paper is from *The Book of Jessica* 64.
- 2 The recent announcement that the 2000 Olympic Games will be held in Sydney has created speculations that Aboriginal groups will again—understandably—use international events to embarrass the Australian government sufficiently into acting on the High Court judgment concerning land claims.

- 3 "Second world" is a concept that Alan Lawson has discussed in "A Cultural Paradigm for the Second World." In "Un/Settling Colonies," he argues that the settler-invader colonies are forever caught between the First World authority and authenticity of Europe, and the First Nations authority and authenticity of the displaced and desired indigene.
- 4 This is not to suggest that there is perfect agreement regarding the Treaty. Disagreements exist over interpretations and translations, not over the originary and/or derivative identity/ies that the document and its primacy have established.
- 5 Constructed by writers earlier in this century (such as Vance Palmer), the Australian National Tradition posits a singular literary tradition dating from the 1890s that was designed to create a positive and positivist direction for the young country. It did, however, prove to be quickly ingrained and exclusionary. See also Alan Lawson 1980, Richard White 1981, and G.A. Wilkes 1987.
- 6 This contract was later broken by Griffiths and Paul Thompson, the director of *Jessica*.
- 7 Campbell records in her book, *Halfbreed*, several such experiences about Métis people not quite fitting the clothes that they wore or the situation in which they found themselves.
- 8 Hoy seems to arrive at a similar conclusion, that the text appropriates *and* restores the health of the community, just as Campbell says art is supposed to do.
- 9 Ruby Langford's *Don't Take Your Love to Town*, an Australian Koori autobiography of sorts, begins with a similar listing of all the names by which Langford has been interpellated. The names do not, however, become emptied of signification as they do in *Princess Pocahontas*. Langford concludes, "You can think of me as Ruby Wagtail Big Noise Anderson Rangi Ando Heifer Andy Langford. How I got to be Ruby Langford. Originally from the Bundjalung people" (2).
- 10 The graphics in *Princess Pocahontas* are created with the help of Djanet Sears.
- 11 Nowra was asked not to repeat the role in the Sydney production in 1993. In an arts column with the playful headline, "Summer actors, summer not," Nowra reported that, "If I wanted to be in it, then it wasn't going on" (qtd in Jones).

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## Discomforting Gifts

**David McFadden**

*Anonymity Suite.* McClelland & Stewart, \$14.99.

**Eric Trethewey**

*Evening Knowledge.* Cleveland State UP, us \$8.00.

Reviewed by Andrew Brooks

Since 'grise' might rub the wrong way, let's just call David McFadden a major 'eminence' in Canadian literature. Over a career spanning some twenty books of poetry and prose, he has become "one of the more interesting and completely readable voices in Canadian poetry" —this from the over-cautious blurb on the back of *Anonymity Suite*, McFadden's latest book of poetry. To my mind, *Anonymity Suite* proves —if proof were required —that McFadden is as sure, intelligent and interesting a writer as any in Canada.

Al Purdy and Earle Birney come to mind as possible comparisons, although comparisons are an easy out for the reviewer, and never exact. McFadden certainly has Purdy's blunt, visceral honesty, but he's gentler, more bemused. As for Birney ... well, McFadden has some of the same musicality, an awareness of rhetorical sweep which he exploits very judiciously, occasionally jolting into rhyme.

For all its restraint—and, despite appearances to the contrary, it is remarkably restrained—this poetry is rich and rewarding. McFadden is sure enough of where he is going that he can leave a good deal of the work to the poet's best ally: the engaged mind of the reader. He does not neatly wrap

up his messages so that they may be just as tidily unwrapped. He leaves them unbundled, for the light to catch them, forming and reforming associations and oppositions to its own logic, blazing out in sudden tangents. Each reader will find here at least some echo of his/her own truth: McFadden exposes the inclusiveness of lived experience, the similarity of what human beings anywhere, in any situation, do and think and feel.

The poems seem open-ended, without apparent closure. While McFadden is plainly aware of the musical—or rhetorical—potential of language, he doesn't seem to write toward the single blazing moment of consummation, unlike many others who write—or try to write—with such a detailed and precise notion of goal or result that hit and miss are plain, a challenge every time pen is set to paper. He is honest and spare, so inclusive an observer that you often have to sort through apparent non sequiturs. "I'll Cry If I Want To" is a good example. In it, McFadden moves from a funny incident on a New Zealand bus which is prompted by pop music, to an image of shocking cruelty, a childlike vision of anthropomorphic animals and finally a reflection on the way in which foreigners see Yanks as opposed to Canadians. The ground covered and the raped shifts of setting and tone call to mind Samuel Johnson's criticism of the Metaphysical poets for yoking disparate concepts together by violence. But McFadden does not try to draw or reinforce links between the observations he offers. He just puts

them in the same place and lets the associative capacities of the reader do the work. You could come back to this stuff a hundred times and get a hundred different reactions, depending on your mood or maybe something as inconsequential as the weather or the color of the room. At the same time, the details McFadden includes, while often seeming widely dissimilar, are there because he has recognized that links can be drawn.

McFadden has a strong sense of humor, not only in what he writes about but also in how he writes about it, in often whimsical, sometimes even absurd rhymes:

If the earth started sliding into the sun  
We could hide but we couldn't run.  
But it will fall into the sun some day  
So why do we worry? Why don't we play?  
Why don't we eat at the Happy Face Cafe?  
"Sliding into the Sun"

The obvious fun he has with all of this can make McFadden seem elusive, sometimes as maddeningly playful as Coyote. But the crackling, electric leaps of wit and comedy don't mask the darker presence: death veers throughout. After a hilarious exchange on a train, "My Friends Are Dying" ends with these lines:

My friends are dying for lack of whatever  
I am blessed with plenty of:  
Nothingness, hopelessness, despair, dismay,  
And that old standby decrepitude.  
Time spirals on but it'll return  
And our dead ashes will once again burn.

Transport seems to fascinate McFadden, but there's another, more productive curiosity. He's also intrigued by numbers, symmetries and patterns. Much of it, I suspect, will make more sense to a reader better acquainted than I am with mysticism and Eastern religions such as Taoism; this means, doubtless, everybody else who reads *Anonymity Suite*.

The human thirst for pattern and symbol is the same thing as the desire to find evidence of a transcendent purpose in things. While there are times when the world

according to McFadden does seem to function according to a coherent cosmological pattern, by and large it refuses to take on the neatness of symbolism, and we're left to our own devices. The somber undertone remains an undertone. As he disdains easy closure, McFadden holds the urge for symmetry and pattern at bay with a seemingly willful randomness.

Eric Trethewey is a careful, polished writer, his rhetorical arrangement of material echoed by a strong but restrained voice. In *Evening Knowledge*, he aims at a deliberate evocation of mood and sensation, and is consistently—and very satisfyingly—successful. His preoccupation with the past and feelings of nostalgia become at times almost unbearably strong. The effect can be breathtaking, as in "Rescue," in which the poet gives us a sensitive emotional portrait of his brother. Unfortunately, no excerpt could remotely give an adequate idea of the sheer emotional power of the poem taken as a whole.

Throughout *Evening Knowledge*, Trethewey finds emotional resonance—his emotional trigger—in nature and landscape, and the voice through which these details are related fulfills its role by seeming transparent (a rhetorical maneuver in its own right). To be really effective, this kind of approach has to rely on an accurate judgment of the emotional content of what is 'objectively' observed and related, and the writer has to be direct in exploiting it. Appropriately enough, Trethewey is less overtly elusive or playful a writer than McFadden, his pacing more measured, his stress on formal discipline more explicit, and his gestures more precise within a defined, controlled territory.

McFadden is a mad skater, a hockey player at full tilt, daring the thin ice and then veering away. Trethewey is a figure skater, daring all in a smaller space, precise. Each, in his own way, knows the art and the rules of his craft inside out, and each is beautiful to watch.

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## Loving Freedom

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**Abraham Boyarsky**

*The Number Hall*. Oberon \$12.95

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**Hugh Hood**

*You'll Catch Your Death*. Porcupine's Quill \$12.95

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Reviewed by Peter Klován

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*The Number Hall* portrays the last few weeks in the life of Raphael Sontag, a seventy-seven-year-old Holocaust survivor who discovers salvation through self-sacrifice in the mean streets of a run-down neighbourhood in Montreal. The Holocaust has left Sontag with the memories of two men: one lived from 1912 to 1939 in a comfortable world of traditional Jewish values, and the other was born in 1945 after surviving a world of almost unimaginable suffering. The second man has always been without family and friends and is still tormented by his arrogant treatment of his gentle wife of almost fifty years earlier, before she and their three young children perished in a Polish ghetto.

Sontag seeks some ultimate act of atonement that will give a retroactive meaning to his decades of loneliness and self-reproach. Accordingly, he becomes convinced that just as God gave a son to Abraham in his old age, he has been given Joseph Goldbloom, a thirty-seven-year-old cocaine addict and would-be novelist estranged from his wife and daughter. Joseph is the kind of "Paralyzed Artist" Margaret Atwood discusses in *Survival*. A bit of a drip and suffering from a life-long atrophy of the soul, he has turned into a boy-man who can only slouch "defeatedly" while his exasperated wife tells Sontag, "He loves Kafka. He wants to be another Kafka, but unfortunately he only succeeded in becoming a Kakka!" Sontag's efforts to salvage this human wreckage and restore him to his family become the novel's central action.

The novel suffers from wooden dialogue and earnestly explained symbols, but suc-

ceeds in vividly creating its protagonist's inner life and building to a shattering conclusion. In the heart's peculiar contraction of time, Sontag mentally relives events of half a century ago as if they happened yesterday, so that both the pleasure of playing with his infant son and the horror of working in a crematorium are as "real" to him as his present efforts to save Joseph. The old man's reveries illustrate Alvin Rosenfield's assertion in *A Double Dying* (1980) that "one of the major functions of Holocaust literature is to register and record the enormity of human loss," while the novel's conclusion dramatizes Boyarsky's theme that there is something *beyond* loss. There is, this novel implies, a mysterious grace at work around and in us, originating from "a realm where human suffering [is] not the final word on life."

Transcendence is also a central concern in *You'll Catch Your Death*, Hugh Hood's tenth collection of stories. These stories are dazzling in their variety and range, but have a pleasing sense of unity because of the frequent appearance in them of birds, including beautiful mosaic renderings of peacocks on the walls of an Italian basilica and a pair of purloined cockatoos named Ike and Mike ("they look alike"). The narrator of "More Birds" suggest the emblematic status of this volume's dominant motif: "There needn't have been any birds at all. The Almighty though to them and in that moment [brought] them to existence, which He needn't have done. Perhaps they are the supreme expression of loving freedom."

Birds in art generally symbolize the soul or transcendence or the ability to communicate with gods or to enter into a higher state of consciousness. Hood's characters do not communicate with *gods* exactly, but surprising and unlikely forms of communication and bonding occur in many of his stories. In one story set in a small village in southern France, a middle-aged Deanna Durbin, "the adorable and idolized star of

twenty-two movie musicals," befriends her temporary next-door neighbour—the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Deanna tells the lonely old man that he's too short and too thin and is in danger of becoming like Clarabelle Cow and Horace Horsecollar, two Walt Disney characters who never appealed to the public: "They had distinctive costumes. They had *lines* ... But Ruhollah dear, they simply didn't have image." Deanna suggest that the Ayatollah pattern himself after Daffy Duck—"He had insouciance. He had *flair*." She drapes a black shawl over her friend's bony shoulders and advises him to grow his whiskers long and to practice an owl-like stare. After the now charismatic leader returns to Iran, he never forgets the attractive and enchanting woman who changed his life forever. The story ends with the Ayatollah dying, thinking of Deanna's "glorious ringing voice" and "soft plump arms."

"Deanna and the Ayatollah" is an affecting example of the unsettling mixture of moods characterizing this collection. The stories are often zany and provide engaging evidence of how well we humans can succeed in communicating with each other and with other creatures; nevertheless, the optimism this success implies is qualified by the stories' strong undercurrent of melancholy. In fact, one narrator seems to be speaking with authorial sanction when he observes, "People who know about birds don't relate well to the rest of the world." Two of the stories are set in England in Thomas Hardy country, and six stories end with the death of people or birds or both. Moreover, even the collection's title itself is a reminder of our common mortality: "We will catch our deaths."

The stories frequently refer to the movies, but the world of this collection is not that of musicals or Walt Disney, but Charles Chaplin. In *My Autobiography* (1964), Chaplin writes eloquently that "We want to live by each other's happiness-not by each

other's misery," yet he also believes that loneliness "is the theme of everyone," and that "the theme of life is conflict and pain." His contrasting beliefs help to account for the bitter-sweet quality of his films, a quality also very evident in Hood's stories. *You'll Catch Your Death* is a complex and poignant work of art attempting to recreate and comprehend the full range of human experience.

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## Systems of Value

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### Denys Delâge

*Bitter Feast: Amerindians and Europeans in Northeastern North America, 1600-64.* Translated by Jane Brierley. UBC Pr \$60.00 (hc.); \$29.95 (pb.)

### Peter Pitseolak and Dorothy Harley Eber

*People from Our Side.* McGill-Queens UP  
\$39.95/\$19.95

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Reviewed by William J. Scheick

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Denys Delâge is an economic determinist who believes that "colonial history can only be really understood in the light of a . . . world-system" of production, distribution, and consumption of goods. As presented in *Bitter Feast*, his theory features two major tenets. The first argues that in the 17th century when a country was comfortably prosperous (for example, Holland) it was eventually surpassed by a second-rank country (for example, Britain) where internal economic problems necessitated progressive transitions. The second tenet argues that the global emergence of this transitional country depended on forced emigration to geographic peripheries, which were exploited by means of unequal exchange with indigenous peoples. In North America, Delâge concludes, "this unequal exchange . . . provided the structure for the whole history of the transformation-disintegration of Amerindian societies."

Delâge is uncompromising in his assertion that colonial history can "only be really" comprehended in terms of economics; for

he allows no other agency, not even as a contributing factor, to invade his book. As a result of such exclusivity, not to mention the steady recurrence of the word *seems*, he inadvertently invites skepticism toward his thesis. Consider, for instance, his claim that in England economic depression, reorganization of the textile industry, and eviction of peasants—in the context of a population surplus—led to unemployment and poverty, the two incentives for emigration to the colonies. This is a reasonable reading, if its findings are seen as identifying *contributing factors* in the historical complex of colonization. For there indeed were other circumstances, such as religious persecution at home, that forced many economically secure colonists to emigrate.

The problem evident here, the problem of silently excising other explanations for events, is typical of Delâge's manner throughout his book. He simply ignores anything that might resist or qualify his hegemonic theory of economic determinism. For him, everything extrinsic to economic exchange is a satellite of that exchange. His book, accordingly, elides the possibility that ideas, beliefs, traditions, semiosis, geography, climate, genetics, and other non-economic features can in themselves be crucial determinants of events.

If Delâge is silent about such alternative forces, he also is evasive concerning certain implications of his statements, implications that sometimes raise doubts about their validity. On behalf of his notion of unequal exchange, for instance, Delâge declares that "the first tribes to trade with Europeans were also the first to become equipped with metal weapons, which gave them indisputable superiority over their neighbors" and "provoked something of a stampede" toward the destruction of native societies. However, if we ask whether New World history would likely have been different had all the various native societies equally received guns, we surmise that Delâge's

evocation of unequal exchange falters in this instance. It is dubious to allege that the possession of these weapons by only a few was a decisive ingredient because the inverse implication—that a wider New World distribution of European armaments would have changed the course of events—is untenable.

In fact, Delâge's use of the "basic pattern" of unequal exchange is troublesome in other ways. To cite but one more example, Delâge is certain that Amerindians were undone by seeing "a financial transaction" as "a transaction of honour," by being "subjectively satisfied with an exchange that was objectively unequal." What precisely do the words *subjectively* and *objectively* signify here? Does Delâge mean to suggest that the colonists' view was real and the natives' view was a delusion, although on other occasions he nostalgically nods toward this apparent delusion as if it had been substantial? Is not perception, especially in the issue of values (whether concerning honor or finance), always only a matter of subjectivity? In what sense, then, can we speak of objective inequality or, more to the heart of the question, of an inequality among value systems?

The problem I suggest here is not only philosophical or theoretical. It is also methodological. For Delâge relies time and again on 17th-century documents as if they presented reality, despite the fact that they were composed by representatives of "the articulate," who certainly reflect a highly subjective point of view. His study needs much more demographic evidence, hard statistics that "speak" for the inarticulate majority of the colonists. Despite such reservations, *Bitter Feast* is useful. It reminds us of the impact of economic concerns on history in general. And it offers many insights into this impact during the 17th-century in particular.

Something of this influence is recorded in *People from Our Side*, an illustrated, early



20th-century social history of the Cape Dorset Inuit. This work, which previously appeared in 1975 and 1977, documents the cultural changes inaugurated by the arrival of the Hudson Bay Company traders in 1913. Two divergent early responses to the Company's economic system may be interpreted as symptomatic of these changes: there were those who "started working for the white man" to earn "boxes full of stuff" and those who "decided to kill the white man" and take "all their possessions." The Inuit, it is clear, were participating in a very complex exchange of values.

Reporting aspects of this complexity, Pitseolak is "happy about having white man's food when [he] wants it," "about having a place to live where the heat is always the same," and about "the Eskimos [being] not so poor." Nevertheless, he concludes, "it's not happier living in today's world," were "keeping honest" is difficult. After the arrival of the Company, Pitseolak observes, "the people" got "less intelligent, less smart" until "the Eskimo way has gone." His elegy is poignant testimony less to the predestined outcome of unequal economic exchange than to the uncertain, often inexplicable interaction between different systems of value.

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## Family Snaps

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**Linda Svendsen**

*Marine Life*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux \$21.95

Reviewed by Thomas E. Blom

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At first glance, the epigraph to Linda Svendsen's *Marine Life*—"God setteth the solitary in families' PSALM 68"—praises God for providing humans with the companionship, comfort, and security of family. But Svendsen's reading of Scripture is unorthodox, even perverse: the solitary members of the lower middle-class, Vancouver family she takes as her subject

are trapped in the rubble of a "crumbling domestic empire" destroyed by forces within.

The family's empress and matriarch is June, whose job as a lounge pianist suggests the vapid decadence of her family's pretensions (it's said she's "better than Liberace"). June rules her brood by reinforcing a single maxim: family solidarity is essential to its members' survival. Alas! June's trio of husbands and her quartet of children are unable to make their desires conform to the demanding requirements of June's sentimental prescription, nor can June do so herself.

Deluded by her own myth, June fails to see that the rumblings, riots, and insurrections that plague her empire ironically find their cause in the very principle she insists will quell unrest and restore happiness.

Humorous, moving, and ultimately horrific, *Marine Life* examines the decolonization of June's family, and this consistency of theme and subject produces a book that ingeniously straddles the generic fence customarily separating short-story collections from novels. Svendsen undoubtedly derived the inspiration for her experiment in hybridization from Alice Munro's *Who Do You Think You Are?*, but in *Marine Life*, Svendsen achieves an expressive unity not found in her predecessor's work.

In *Who Do You Think You Are?*, Munro's omniscient narrator—like the omniscient narrators of all her later stories—views the world through the eyes of an artist/craftswoman. With effortless ingenuity, she interpolates and overlays multiple anecdotes to form emblematic fictions shaded by conjecture and ambiguity, interlaced with reflection and dream. But to the extent that Munro's individual stories entice us to pursue the deepest implications of their ornate configurations, we are apt to overlook the formal unity of *Who Do You Think You Are?*

Svendsen avoids this problem by creating a fascinating first-person narrator—June's youngest child, Adele Nordstrom.

Singularly devoid of artistic sensibility, Adele at best is equipped by education (she holds an M.A. in Anthropology) and vocation (she teaches ESL) to write a competent case study of her family and to articulate its grammar and syntax. Adele's objective tone, narrow range of inflection, and sardonic wit—all of which she uses to suppress emotions she cannot bear to acknowledge—allow Svendsen not only to forge a dead-pan voice appropriate to the telling of the tragi-comic history of June's dysfunctional family, but also to portray with chilling force and insight June's crippling effect on Adele herself. True, Adele's detachment protects her (as it fails to protect her sisters and her brother) from the worst effects of June's influence, but it also inhibits development of the emotional resources Adele would need to free herself from that influence. Adele sees much and sees in detail, but self-deluded by her mother's myth of family solidarity, she lacks affective understanding of the simple fact that her family is in fragments.

If a Munro story entices us to pursue the hypnotic figure in the carpet, then figuratively speaking, a Svendsen story asks us to be polite listeners as Adele talks us through a family photo album. "Who He Slept By" (Svendsen's best story) chronologically orders eight or nine snapshots of Adele's big brother, Ray: as a babe in arms; at the beach with his first girlfriend; showing off matching tattoos with his cousin Jack; drunk at Jack's wedding; on holiday in Mexico, and so on.

In less skilful hands, such a radically disjunctive structure might miss its mark (as Adele says when she shows Ray her slides of Europe: photographs don't tell the "true story"), but Svendsen repeatedly brings the reader up short with her stunning ability to create in the reader's mind an awareness of the complex drama lurking within Adele's train of banal, disjunctive observations. When Adele says of Ray, "It slowly hit me that my

brother might be an asshole," she speaks both *to* and *for* her readers: with half a mind, we listen as she natters over her family snapshots; then, the truth slowly hits us.

The disjunctive relationships between the snapshots in Svendsen's stories parallel the disjunctive relationships between *Marine Life's* separate stories, which offer portraits of other family members (Adele's sister Joyce during a breakdown; Adele's estranged father at her wedding), or group shots of family activities (a drunken Boxing Day party, a vacation in Florida). Yet through this wayward assembly of superficially unrelated pictures, one theme emerges clearly, and this theme, which universalizes the plight of June's family, compels our care and sympathy: the irresolvable conflict between the motive force of sexuality, which individuates, and family, the institution society constructs to subdue and legitimate sexuality.

When one of Ray's roster of girlfriends enthusiastically concludes that "marriage as an institution really works," Ray's response is "Humbug." Ray is right. Libidinally attached to one another, restless June and her restless serial husbands as well as June's restless children and their sexual partners find themselves variously paralysed by irresolution (unwilling to stay, undetermined to go), or trapped in living nightmares, or shattered by the explosive devices they set to free themselves. Typically, when one partner's attention wanders, the other partner succumbs to jealousy and rage. The disabling and ultimately tragic effect of the conflict between June's romantic, imperial myth of family solidarity and the reality of the disruptive force of human sexuality becomes clear as we watch Adele first let jealousy destroy her marriage to a kind and decent man, next relinquish custody of her two children to her ex-husband, and then obtusely fail to recognize the warning signs of the horror that erupts at the end of the book. The moral responsibility for that

horror is June's.

Brilliantly conceived and executed, Linda Svendsen's *Marine Life* is not really a collection of short stories. Rather, it is a novel that achieves its meaning by appropriating the form of the short-story collection. Adele Nordstrom's fragmented account of her fragmented reality makes her post-nuclear family a telling synecdoche for a Canada still suffering through decolonization.

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## Frictions

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**Rhea Tregebov**

*Frictions II: Stories by Women*. Second Story Press  
\$14.95

**Harold Rhenisch**

*Out of the Interior: The Lost Country*.  
Cacnadadada \$12.95

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Reviewed by Petra Fachinger

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*Frictions II*, a sequel to *Frictions: Stories by Women* (1989), includes a collection of twenty-two stories by contemporary Canadian women from various cultural backgrounds. In her introduction to the earlier anthology Tregebov stresses the ability of women writers "to imagine a different world—namely *our* world, the living experience of women's lives" as "a potent tool for change." In *Frictions II*, as in the previous anthology, the criterion for the selection of the stories is women's authentic representation of the female subject. Women's ability to see them-selves "as different from the male standard" has, according to Tregebov, helped them to acknowledge differences between their own "sexuality, class, race, ethnicity, [and] age" and recognize them as influences on the writing self.

Tregebov sees female subjectivity manifested in the stories as "ground[ed] in the physical." "Physical" stands here not for a celebration of the plural nature of female sexuality and writing—none of the twenty-

two stories is overtly concerned with the politics of a "feminine" textuality—but refers to women's confrontation with the more sordid and painful side of life: frictions in the literal and metaphorical sense. These include male violence, sexual harassment, child molestation, racial discrimination, pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, aging and the inability to come to terms with the sexual attraction for another woman. While most of the stories adopt traditional fictional models, Elise Levine's "(Girl's Own) Horse Stories," Pauline Peter's "Hair," Anne Campbell's "An Important Person" and Clare Braux' "Cartoons" are more experimental in form and wrestle more openly with the politics of representation. As diverse as the stories are with regard to setting—several take place outside of Canada—, point of view—three are told from a male perspective—and their characters' social backgrounds, they can be grouped together by certain themes.

A theme running through all of the stories is the female characters' experience of isolation and alienation from family and society and of being outsiders of some sort. Most of the women in the stories attempt to escape their victimization or to change the circumstances that keep them imprisoned. The majority of the stories are also concerned not only with personal identity but also with the Other woman. Although one of the collection's strengths is the diversity of perspectives, one may ask why Tregebov chose to include stories by Claire Braux, Marina Endicott, Claire Harris, Suniti Namjoshi, Susan Perly, Helen Rosta and Gertrude Story in both anthologies instead of making room for other writers. It is vital, however, that feminist presses continue to publish works by women as they remain underrepresented in Canadian anthologies.

Harold Rhenisch's *Out of the Interior: The Lost Country* blurs the genres of autobiography, biography, poetry, fiction and docu-

mentary. Like other autobiographer/poets such as George Bowering, Robert Bringhurst and Robert Kroetsch, Rhenisch links writing the self to writing place. His urge to write the country is sustained by a loss that manifests itself for him in three ways: the demise of the old orchard culture, his personal loss of a naive perception of the land, and the potential loss of the Interior's history as a result of "our [sic] inability to speak of our [sic] own history." In more than a hundred prose poems, Rhenisch both eulogizes the "lost country" and attempts to come to terms with what it means to be the son of a German immigrant. His Canada, he writes in the Prologue, is "a unique world, part Okanagan, part Germany, and part transcendent vision." With this vision he aims to "re-enter the land" through language.

Rhenisch's struggle, however, seems to be less with the "real Okanagan's" defacement by land-speculation and urbanization than with his father's alienation from the land. Having lost his childhood to Nazi Germany, Rhenisch's father was not able to find peace in the orchards of his adopted country. Rhenisch contrasts his father's obsession to subjugate the land, which is nourished by his endorsement of the Nazi doctrine "Liberation through Work," with an almost mystical (re)unification with the earth—a term which loses its evocative power through overuse in the book. At its best, Rhenisch's poetic language is reminiscent of the poetry of Theodore Roethke with whom he shares a belief in the immanence of spirit in nature as well as an acknowledgment of nature's dark side.

Although Rhenisch breaks creatively with the conventional forms of the genre, he does not question the unity of the autobiographical self. Rhenisch may be called a "nostalgic" writer in the way that Janice Doane and Devon Hodges use the term, a writer whose perception of the world is informed by oppositions: of present and past, reality and image, dream and truth,

male and female, nature and culture, etc. Thus Rhenisch pits the "real" against a "re-colonized" Okanagan, the wild against the domesticated, the outdoor world of men against the "cramped" indoor existence of women, "the hieratic veneer of European civilization" against "the old gods of earth and river," and his father's "wordlessness" and misconceptions against his power over language and his vision. Towards the end of the book where he describes breaking away from his father's way of life he concludes: "And in a way, that was my childhood, my family, against the backdrop of a wild, impressionable land. This is where I learned the truth: where a man can see an opening, he takes it; there is no right. Here in Canada it was a child's—my father's—image of Hitler's cultural Darwinism that I lived."

*Out of the Interior: The Lost Country* is a male book written in a male language. Not only is the world which Rhenisch describes a world in which women are cut off from the land, but he also uses a language ('enter' is a word repeated almost as excessively as 'earth,' 'power' and 'gods') that seems to be unaware of its sexist overtones. Unlike the contributors to *Frictions II: Stories by Women*, Rhenisch conslanguage is a place of authority and control.



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## Ferocious Authenticity

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Paul I. Hjartarson and Douglas O.

Spettigue, eds.

*Baroness Elsa*. Oberon \$29.95

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Jennifer Waelti-Walters

*Feminist Novelists of the Belle Epoque*.

Indiana UP US\$35.00

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Reviewed by John Xiros Cooper

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For scholars of literary modernism in the Atlantic world, the latter part of the twentieth century has become a very exciting time and will continue to be so for the next few decades. A fuller and clearer picture is emerging of the crucial decades from about 1890 to the Second World War when the discursive history of the West shifted into a new imaginative register. Although there has been a considerable interest in the so-called 'major' figures of modernism for a long time — Joyce, Eliot, Woolf, Pound, Faulkner, Gide and others — it is only in the last two decades that readers and scholars have begun to re-assess the work and impact of the lesser known writers and personalities of the period.

Gertrude Stein, HD, Djuna Barnes, to name only three important early modernists, have only now begun to receive the sort of attention they deserve. And this attention has brought to light not only the character of their artistic achievements, but an appreciation of them as explorers of new styles of life. We are learning that the dynamic subculture loosely labelled the *avant garde* from say about mid-nineteenth century Paris to the mid-twentieth century, not only revised the artistic practises of modernity, but amended modern notions of personhood, gender, relationship, and community as well. Certainly the *avant garde* functioned as a laboratory of art, but it was also, and perhaps even more profoundly, a laboratory for the remapping of being itself.

Paul Hjartarson and Douglas Spettigue

have not unearthed a great work of art in their edition of the autobiography of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, *Baroness Elsa*, but they have put before us a very fascinating life. They have done modernist scholarship a great service in bringing out this episode of self-fashioning by an extraordinary woman, who was, by turns, first wife of Felix Paul Greve, AKA Frederick Philip Grove, the "mother of Dada," the putative model for Djuna Barnes's "Robin Vote" in *Nightwood*, and welfare recipient in the post-Imperial Berlin of George Grosz and company.

But let me say, before we too quickly dismiss the Baroness as a prose stylist, that the writing in the memoir is very powerful and bracing. Her fragmented (can I say 'cubist?') phrasing, written in English as her second language, and her virtuoso use of dashes for punctuation, create a prose texture which is uniquely her own and which in the course of the memoir she employs with increasing precision and effect. Apart from my immigrant mother, she is the only other person I know about whose verbal style one might say that she writes in 'broken English' and mean by the term a kind of very high praise.

In Canada, *Baroness Elsa* will be of immediate interest to readers of Grove because of the light her story casts on FPG's European years. Whether her 'light' is any more illuminating than Grove's own in *In Search of Myself* (1946) is a question that the editors try to steer clear of, except for one important proviso. In a lifetime of tracking down the Grove facts as FPG himself retails them, they have found that most of them are fanciful, self-serving inventions. In Elsa's book the opposite is largely true, at least for the 'facts' they have been able to check.

They remark on her honesty and integrity, an honesty "to the point of self-destruction" (14). And my own impression is that the editors are right. The Baroness again and again when considering the

behavior of FPG, or of others, always seems acutely tuned to the difference between words and actions, between appearances and reality. It is in this respect that her life is imbued with the spirit of modernity, pervaded by a consciousness of the fissure between the world as a public sphere of masks, routines, and clichés, and an existence which is ferociously authentic: "Felix hated me for my truthfulness — that yet was the very thing he respected in me — as long as he had not to fear it himself. It was the quality that first aroused his interest — then his respect — then his love. *Because it was scarce!*" (author's emphasis 115).

This is also, I suspect, the quality which interested Djuna Barnes in the exotic Baroness, whom Barnes had known in the heyday of Greenwich Village in Manhattan, before following the movable feast to Paris in the Twenties. Barnes, in fact, is particularly central to the 'autobiography' as it was partly composed by Elsa in the course of a long correspondence between the two women. Many readers of Barnes will also be interested in *Baroness Elsa* because there is some reason to believe, according to Lynn De Vore and Robert Reiss at least, that the Baroness provided Barnes with the model for the enigmatic Robin Vote in *Nightwood*. The editors do not seem entirely convinced by this identification and I concur with them. The American sculptor Thelma Wood is probably a better bet.

Feminists will be interested in *Baroness Elsa* for the story it tells about gender and female sexuality in early modern times, especially in the revisions of sexual and gender conventions in the face of the patriarchal traditions of Europe. And it is this aspect of the emergence of the modern temperament that gives Jennifer Waelti-Walter's *Feminist Novelists of the Belle Époque* its primary interest. These are novelists who "trace women's escape from the constraints of the nineteenth century and their emergence into the twentieth century

as autonomous beings with values and concerns that we share today." In other words, she sees these writers as our own precursors which makes the story she has tell that much more relevant to our own situation.

For Waelti-Walters the novels of these early feminist authors are acutely political in helping to subvert a French bourgeois culture that is particularly fixed in patriarchal habits of thought and social regulation. Women in the France of the Belle Époque are either "dolls, housekeepers, or prostitutes" complains one feminist reformer of the period. Professor Waelti-Walters helps us see French society and French women from another angle of vision, one that strips away the male discourse that obscures them.

Most of the women discussed in the book will be unfamiliar to all those who are not specialists in French literature at the turn of the century, except, of course, for the most celebrated of them, the divine Colette. Marcelle Tinayre, Lucy Delarue-Mardus, Renée d'Ulmes, Simone Bodève, Camille Marbo, and Camille Pert, and a number of others make up the group that the book tries to comprehend. It is a very interesting and important story and as an introduction to this body of work and to the relevant social history of modern France, this is an excellent account.

But it is essentially a straight thematic study which examines the ways these novelists enacted the most pressing social and personal issues affecting the position and role of women in France at the time. One cannot accuse the author of leading the reader into that vast and sometimes unnavigable continent called contemporary feminist theory. Some readers will be irritated by this omission, others relieved. Your reaction, one way or the other, will probably depend on how old you are.

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## Auto/Biographical Fictions

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**Carol Shields**

*The Stone Diaries*. Random House. \$26.50 cl.

Reviewed by Margery Fee

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*The Stone Diaries* begins: "My mother's name was Mercy Stone Goodwill." Daisy Goodwill Flett appears to be telling the story of her life, beginning with the day of her birth, a birth which almost immediately leads to her mother's death. That this is a novel about the limitations of biography and autobiography is a point made in almost every review and publisher's summary of this novel, reinforced by the book's use of photographs, the family tree on the endpapers, the title, format and many direct comments on the subject. However, *The Stone Diaries* is, one must point out, a work of fiction, neither autobiography or biography (or it could not have been nominated for a Booker Prize or have won the Governor General's Award for Fiction!) Significantly, the book contains no photograph of Daisy herself, only of her relatives, husbands and friends. And in a sense, the narrative figures Daisy as a hole in a complex social network. Lying delirious with pneumonia at the age of 11, Daisy realizes that the world is going on without her and concludes "that if she was going to hold on to her life at all, she would have to rescue it by a primary act of imagination, supplementing, modifying, summoning up the necessary connections, conjuring the pastoral or heroic or whatever . . . getting the details wrong occasionally, exaggerating or lying outright . . .

Thus, the narration itself is highlighted. The reader quickly realizes that Daisy, the ostensible narrator, could only have been present in the first scene in the novel in the most vestigial way, as a bloodied bundle squeezed out by a woman who may never

have realized she was pregnant. "Blood and ignorance, what can be shaped from blood and ignorance" asks the narrator. What can we know even of ourselves, let alone the impenetrable mysteries posed by lovers, spouses, parents and children, despite the closest of biological and emotional ties? There is no "thyself" to know, even in retrospect. Thus it is ironic that Daisy's description of the time just preceding her own birth, an account of her young, overweight mother making Malvern Pudding on a sticky summer day, is one of the most sensual and striking in the novel, filled with images of heat, fruit, cream, flesh and sex. This memorable, convincing and detailed part of the narrative, given the narrator's position, is thus highlighted as doubly fictional, an emphasis both autobiography and biography avoid. The novel veers between adopting autobiographical conventions and violating them; for example, the first-person narrator is sometimes clearly Daisy the autobiographer and yet also shifts to the third-person omniscience typical of the novel or biography. Yet despite this omniscience, which allows access to the inner thoughts of others (for example, the reader shares Daisy's father's thoughts as he dies), Daisy herself is oddly lacking in introspection and the third person narrator rarely recounts her thoughts. She apparently retains the reticence typical of the autobiographer about personal matters, voicing few negative opinions of family or friends and mentioning sex only briefly. Further, the novel is filled with passages that read like interviews conducted after her death with her friends and family.

The reader is challenged to discover a position Daisy could have taken to narrate such an account and ultimately it appears that the account is, in fact, a kind of fantasy she has during her long decline into death after a heart attack at 80: "she shuts her eyes . . . regarding something infinitely complex printed on the thin skin of her

eyelids, a secret, a dream." Daisy has certainly had the time to fill in most of the "dark voids and unbridgable gaps" that are supposedly intrinsic to autobiography. In fact, she clearly has not produced an autobiography at all, but a fiction that mimics some of the conventions of autobiography and violates others. Daisy's stonemason father builds an intricately carved tower as a memorial to her mother; Daisy dreams a memorial for herself: "Stone is how she finally sees herself, her living cells replaced by the insentience of mineral depositions. . . . She lies, in her last dreams, flat on her back on a thick slab, as hugely imposing as the bishops and saints she'd seen years earlier in the great pink cathedral of Kirkwall. . . ."

Although *The Stone Diaries* does highlight the limitations of life writing—currently a fairly fashionable project—it far more interestingly problematizes the split between the central character's life and her narrative voice. Unlike Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*, where Hagar's account of her life from the perspective of old age conveys the effect of complete authenticity, Daisy and her narrative voice seem to be jarringly disparate. The Daisy we read about appears far too unselfconscious, far too unanalytic, to produce the fascinating narrative that we are reading, even in the context of a kind of deathbed conversion from dullness to brilliance. Her son Warren's speculations on her life underscore the problem. Apropos of a university essay Daisy wrote in 1926 on the struggle for Italian independence he asks:

Where did it go, my mother's intellectual ease and energy? . . . When I think about my mother's essay on Camillo Cavour, I can't help feeling cheated, as if there's some wily subversion going on, a glittering joke locked in a box and buried underground. And then I think: if I feel cheated, how much more cheated she must feel. She must be in mourning for the squandering of herself. Something, someone, cut off her head, yanked out her tongue.

The narrative technique makes up, in a way, for the squandering of Daisy's intellectual, imaginative and spiritual self in middle-class domesticity; Daisy gets her intellectual ease back, but only as a glittering joke in the failing body of an old woman who has no real audience for her reclaimed life. The degree of her oppression is the difference between what her narrative proves she can think and what others saw of her. The reader, like her children, never sees anything but the domestic Daisy; only the reader hears the voice of the liberated Daisy. From a feminist perspective, Daisy's life can be figured as a triumph, but such a perspective cannot disguise its terrible limitations.

Nonetheless, feminism scarcely affected Daisy; what this text does is allow her to reveal the beauties and contributions of a life spent in nurturing men, children and plants. Domesticity is the heart of this novel; surprising a husband with a new recipe, counting pillow cases, producing a marvellous garden, these are the important feats, the memorable feats. Not to mention giving birth to the children and creating for them a peaceful home. Daisy's one venture into paid employment, the gardening column she writes for nine years, pales into insignificance by comparison. Domesticity is never rejected, but the text makes it clear what Daisy's generation missed. It is the next generation, exemplified by Daisy's elder daughter Alice, divorcée, mother of three, grandmother of three, failed novelist and noted Chekhov scholar, who will begin to overcome the patriarchal prohibition against women who combine a domestic life with an intellectual and spiritual one. Alice has been able to see her life as something "she's making . . . up as she goes along" rather than a fixed pattern laid out by convention, *Good Housekeeping*, *McCall's* and *The Canadian Home Companion*.



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## First Nations Culture

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### Gordon Brotherston

*Book of the Fourth World: Reading the Native Americas through their Literature.* Cambridge UP, n.p.

### Janet Catherine Berlo, ed.

*The Early Years of Native American Art History: The Politics of Scholarship and Collecting.* U of Washington P and UBC Press, \$36.95 cl.

### Julia P. Averkieva and Mark A. Sherman.

*Kwakiutl String Figures.* UBC Press, \$39.95 cl.

Reviewed by Margery Fee

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I once thought that the term “Fourth World” had been coined by George Manuel, a Canadian First Nations leader, in his book *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality* (1974). However, Gordon Brotherston’s *Book of the Fourth World* reveals that the expression is far older, deriving from a wide-spread convention in indigenous accounts that four other worlds inhere in this one.

Brotherston also speaks of the four worlds as Asia, Europe and Africa, and points out that of these worlds, “America is the only one . . . to have undergone thorough dispossession.” Brotherston’s project is to begin the process of repossession, grounding his argument for title to land and the right to self-government in the “texts through which over time its peoples have represented themselves.” Brotherston has been publishing on this subject since the early 1970s: this book is based on years of research in cultures of two continents over many centuries. The result is an ambitious work that is not easy reading, despite its many coloured plates and line drawings. Often both the names of the peoples and the texts under consideration are unfamiliar, as are their languages and even their scripts. Nonetheless, many of the Fourth World conceptions of time, space, and mythology are shared across long distances and this is one of Brotherston’s main foci: he is constantly pointing out similarities in

texts separated in both time and space, but linked by trade routes, old empires, and the memory of texts and minds. The account, although devoting most space to the cultures of Mesoamerica (the Mayan *Chilam Balam Books*, the *Popul Vuh* and Aztec narratives), also deals with Turtle Island (the Navajo *Dine bahane*, Iroquoian accounts, Cherokee narratives), and South America (for example, Guaman Poma’s 1,179 page illustrated “letter” to Philip III of Spain and the Tupi-Guarani *Ayvu rapyta*).

The material with which Brotherston is working has been relegated to obscurity by the European ideology that represented conquered people as without script, writing, literature, and thus, without the self-consciousness required for both history and civilization. Thus scrolls (Algonkin), knotted strings or *quipu* (Inca), dry paintings (Navajo), and screenfold books (Mesoamerica), not to mention a wide range of writing and translation by indigenous scholars in their own languages post-Conquest, were ignored even by those, like Claude Lévi-Strauss, who became noted as experts in the cultures of the region. Brotherston works through Jacques Derrida’s argument against Lévi-Strauss in *Of Grammatology*, and goes beyond it to show how the European belief that the phonetic alphabet was at the evolutionary pinnacle of scripts meant that Europeans dealing with indigeneous texts could not read them properly. Nor could they understand the Indian point of view—that the phonetic script was impoverished in comparison to their writing systems.

Few readers outside the discipline of New World anthropology will read the whole book, which descends into complex specialist detail at many points. However, literary scholars and those venturing into a consideration of the issue of orality in contemporary indigenous writing will find the last chapter, on translations into indigeneous languages, of particular interest. In

translations of the Bible the Garden of Eden is figured as the source of maize and the other agricultural products that were only one of the advanced contributions of the New World to the Old. Translations of Aesop show additions made by the translator that reflect the resources of the local rhetorical tradition and differences between European and Nahuatl attitudes to animals. The Arabian Nights story of Tawaddud is reconfigured in a way that displays Mayan interest in astronomy and in riddles, used in shamanic initiations.

The book's epilogue shows how modern writers, such as Miguel Angel Asturias, Wilson Harris, and Ernesto Cardenal, have used the ancient traditions to fuel a literature of resistance. Brotherston only briefly touches on the problems of appropriation at this point, but does conclude by saying that those who use these stories must remember that they come from "people very much alive in and to their environment, whose resources and energy are quite specific," a literature which "through its very brilliance and magic . . . constantly warns against the exhaustion of that energy from within and from without." This book might be compared to one that attempts to cover all of European literature in one volume: highly condensed, intensely suggestive, it maps an area where the serious work of restitutive scholarship that it exemplifies has only begun.

*The Early Years of Native American Art History* is a collection of six articles on how European ideas and demands impinged on some of the arts of the Haida, the Zuni, the Salish, the Yurok-Karok, and Washoe between 1875 and 1941. Dealers, anthropologists, museum directors, and collectors all affected the production and distribution of Native art, which became, for several middlemen, a highly lucrative business. Salvage anthropologists regarded aboriginal cultures as rapidly losing their authenticity through contact with European

culture—thus, the great collections formed at the turn of the century became the touchstone for subsequent exhibitions, whose curators rarely examined the sources of the collection too closely or discussed the exhibits with the living representatives of the culture (presumably, because they were irremediably contaminated by white culture, less in touch with their authentic past than the curators who, after all, had access to its supposedly finest handiwork). Hence, as Diana Fane's paper reveals, the major Zuni collection of The Brooklyn Museum reveals as much about two white men, the collector, R. Stewart Culin, and Frank Hamilton Cushing, who lived with the Zuni, single-handedly (or so he felt) attempting to preserve a dying culture as it does about the Zuni. After Cushing died in 1900, Culin took over, part of a wave of competitive collectors who scavenged for ever more sacred material artifacts, thus depleting or attempting to deplete the cultures they were ostensibly preserving of their most precious objects, in order that generations of immigrants and bored schoolchildren could be toured past objects torn out of their living context. As Fane notes, however, Culin did not "find a Zuni heritage, he created one from an odd assortment of discards, heirlooms and replicas." Ironically, his own documentation reveals that the masks he collected were commissioned: "In all the years Culin collected in Zuni he was not able to purchase a single mask that had actually been used in a ceremony. Obviously, the Zuni were effectively preserving their own artistic heritage."

Two of the articles show how individual artists, highly creative and original, the Wahoe basket-weaver Louisa Keyser and the Haida carver Charles Edenshaw, were seen as representative of their whole cultural tradition. Once their work was canonized, these traditions became fossilized, as subsequent works were judged against

theirs. The methodology behind early monographs on Salish basketry and Yurok-Karok basketry is explored in two papers that record a transition to thinking about craftspeople as individual artists, rather than as conduits for a tradition. Finally the 1941 exhibit, "Indian Art of the United States" held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York is analysed as representative of a growing tendency to see Native art as art, rather than simply as ethnographic material. The author of this paper, W. Jackson Rushing, notes the complicated mix of motives that drove René d'Harnoncourt, the exhibit's designer. As General Manager of the Department of the Interior's Indian Arts and Crafts Board, he genuinely sought (and achieved) a revaluation of Indian art and artists and new markets for their work. As a nationalist at a particularly troubled time in history, he also provided a non-European source for cultural rejuvenation, or as Rushing puts it, he "appropriated and used" Native artworks "as emblems of the nation-state itself." Not only does this book reconceptualize the relations between Native artists and the surrounding culture and set Native art into its often-ignored material context, but also it provides fascinating pictures of the lives and motivations of the people involved in making and distributing the art.

In *Kwakiutl String Figures*, Mark A. Sherman, a biochemist and string figure scholar, has completed and brought to publication the description of 112 string figures and tricks of the Kwakiutl of Vancouver Island. These were collected in 1930 during one of Franz Boas' expeditions by the Russian ethnographer Julia Averkieva (1907-1980). The result is the most comprehensive collection ever published from a single aboriginal nation.

Sherman provides an introduction that recounts the vicissitudes of Julia Averkieva's life, gives the history of the manuscript and explains his minor revisions of and addi-

tions to her work. Averkieva's original introduction follows, and then the figures themselves, each with a clear drawing, step-by-step instructions, sometimes a related story or myth, and information on whether the figure is found elsewhere.

Although the reader can use this book to learn new figures (it's compatible, for example with the method used by Camilla Gyski in her popular books for children on the subject), its anthropological ramifications—explained in appendices by Sherman—are also fascinating. String figures relate to the major cultural concerns of the group that produces them and also provide evidence of cultural diffusion. Kwakiutl figures and Inuit figures are often strikingly similar: these two groups may share a common ancestry or the figures may have been transmitted by slaves taken from different groups along the Pacific Coast or during the process of coastal trade. The book concludes with a short appendix of drawings illustrating figures from other cultures that are similar to those in the Kwakiutl collection, a detailed bibliography of string figure research world wide, and an index.

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## Transformations

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### Don Coles

*Forests of the Medieval World*. Porcupine's Quill  
\$9.95

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### Anne Carson

*Short Talks*. Brick \$10.95

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Reviewed by Alexander M. Forbes

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In *Forests of the Medieval World*, Don Coles records ordered transformations. In these transformations, human beings, as individuals and as members of society, grow toward the achievement of a potential within themselves: there is an "honourable link" between the past and the future ("Basketball Player and Friends"). Aristotle

is never mentioned in *Forests of the Medieval World*, but he does not need to be, for nothing medieval can grow without him. For Coles, the ideas of potentiality and entelechy, introduced by Aristotle, remain important concepts for understanding the growth of human beings. People develop as forests do, from previously encoded seeds.

In "Remembering Henty," Coles identifies the contribution of unconscious promptings to the unfolding of potential pattern: "they're gesturing in a direction I might never have looked / without them"; it is "inside, of course, this room of the immortal images, / which even before I can guess who they are / stir, and wake" and "bear me home." Also important are external causes, which cooperate with internal ones to shape any given outcome. The speaker, in his youth, "faced a world full of images" which would eventually help to "fill" him.

Internal and external causes again cooperate in "Princesse Lointaine," as a man "taps the adjectives and verbs of love" onto a computer screen. The words "infiltrate / The green and faintly glowing ground"—"Arriving not from below / Or either side or above" but "as if the've been sown here long ago, / These tiny, darkfaced seeds of self." These seeds have had "to wait / During quite a few years," but behind the words on "the verdurous screen" is the presence of the one to whom the love poem is written: the immediate "cause" of love, and of the green growth of the poem on the screen.

Both external and internal factors can, of course, make outcomes unpredictable. The poems of Coles have long been associated with photography, and in "Basketball Player and Friends" a photograph suggests the complexity of transformation. The faces in the picture await "what's coming": the "still-unmet intimate faces of their long lives." The faces fail, however, to understand where they are going; the photograph shows its subjects "watching" with their

"unprophetic eyes." And external and internal factors can also hinder growth as well as promote it. In "I Walk by this Shore," every "face shows / something beyond what it will / ever reach." Although "the becoming-something" is everywhere in evidence ("those adventures, which we were sure / were waiting for us, really / happened" and "We have all become / something"), everyone in the poem decides, nevertheless, "to go in": "it must have / been as far as any of us / wanted to come."

Whether potential is realised or checked, there is always a releasing of emotion, and Coles draws upon this emotion. In "I Walk by this Shore," the landscape itself is invested with emotion as Coles elicits, in an expressionist impulse, the "hidden extensions" between human "cries" and nature. A similar impulse is felt in the title poem of the collection, when images of medieval forests express the speaker's fears.

The expressionist tendencies of such poems achieve their own fulfilment in the conclusion of the collection, "The Edvard Munch Poems." (It is important to stress "tendencies" here, for just as Munch did not systematically "anticipate" expressionism, Coles is not a thoroughgoing post-expressionist.) In depicting the ways in which the unfolding, or the suppressing, of encoded patterns is capable of generating the strongest emotional effects, these poems not only extend earlier poems, but offer an important critical analysis of Munch.

Most of the poems are based (as their titles indicate) upon Munch's paintings, although some are based upon his diaries. In "Sick Child" Coles shows Munch reflecting upon his obsessive repainting of Sophie, the sister whose death haunted him. Munch recalls her unfinished pattern, as she "haemorrhaged all the images" she "meant to grow towards." "Summer Evening by the Lake" shows Munch driven, aesthetically and emotionally, by an arche-

typal influence: the anima, projected as “the unknown woman I long for.” And the girl who is the subject of “Puberty” is “one who is only a little part of the idea / she will become.” Her “incompleteness” flows towards the speaker, like “the outflowings / of art.”

Anne Carson, in *Short Talks*, is also intensely interested in transformations. Carson’s relationship to Aristotle is, however, different from that of Coles. “Aristotle talks about probability and necessity, but . . . what good is a story that does not contain poison dragons” (“Introduction”). If the transformations of Coles owe much to Aristotle, those of Carson owe more to the unexpected (although not undetermined) metamorphoses of surrealist poetry, and to the not dissimilar metamorphoses of Ovid and of Kafka.

At times, Carson does come close to Coles. Trout (usually) complete the encoded life cycles of their species (“Short Talk On Trout”); matter has “its forms” (“Short Talk On the End”). In other poems, however, any similarities to Coles are counterbalanced by significant differences. While a “Short Talk On The Youth At Night” is, for example, reminiscent of Coles (and of Munch) in its expressionist “outflowings,” its description of a scream, which lies “in the middle of the city” and gazes back “with its heat and rosepools of flesh” at the youth who is “driven around” it, ultimately owes more to surrealist transformation than expressionist. Similarly, it is Ovid, rather than Aristotle, who is responsible for the transformation of Brigitte Bardot into a Circe figure (in “Short Talk On Brigitte Bardot”), and Kafka who is responsible for his own transformation into a confined and muted being (in “Short Talk on Rectification”).

If *Short Talks* transforms its subjects, it also transforms the prose paragraphs which comprise it. In Carson’s hands the prose paragraph sometimes becomes a prose

poem (“Short Talk On Autism”), and sometimes an essay (“short Talk On The Rules Of Perspective”). Significant transformations regularly occur, as well, within the paragraphs, so that what begins as conceptualist stage direction can become, for example, short story (“Short Talk On Housing”). Stories infiltrate most of the paragraphs, in fact, whatever form they take, and these stories themselves take several forms: many are surrealist narratives (“Short Talk On Hopes,” for example), but others are realist (“Short Talk On Disappointments In Music”) or postmodernist (“Short Talk On Ovid”). And the stories that are told usually prove, furthermore, to be “parables and paradoxes,” whether explicitly Kafkaesque or not. At every level, the *Short Talks* record unexpected transformations.

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## Social Histories

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**Bettina Bradbury, ed.**

*Canadian Family History: Selected Readings.*  
Copp Clark Pitman. \$19.95

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**Margaret Conrad, Alvin Finkel,  
and Cornelius Jaenen**

*History of the Canadian Peoples: Beginnings to 1867. Vol. 1.* Copp Clark Pitman. \$28.95

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**Alvin Finkel and Margaret Conrad,  
with Veronica Strong-Boag**

*History of the Canadian Peoples: 1867 to the Present. Vol. 2.* Copp Clark Pitman. \$28.95

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Reviewed by Bryan N.S. Gooch

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While neither Bettina Bradbury’s collection of essays on family life in Canada nor the two substantial volumes (over 600 pp. each) of *History of the Canadian Peoples* fall within the area of creative prose, they do take their place in a realm dominated by poetry, drama, and fiction—social history. And in the sense that they bring us closer to ourselves, to a sense of where we have come from, these books have a useful contribution to make to a wide readership.

The subtitle of Bradbury's *Canadian Family History: Selected Readings* needs to be taken seriously. This is not a comprehensive study but a rather broad-ranging anthology of some seventeen essays on topics related to the nature of the family unit. While the overall organisation of the volume tends to be chronological, there is necessarily some movement away from this given that the essays are ordered within six subsections, that is, papers dealing with New France, native peoples and "occupiers," rural and maritime life, division of work within urban families, "marriage law and marriage rituals," and "families and the state" (the last offering one piece on marriage and sexual morality in the period from 1890 to 1914 and a second on Quebec families from 1945 to 1955 and the issue of family allowances, and so on). Each essay—and many of the writers have developed significant individual reputations, for instance, Chad Gaffield, Gérard Boucher, Yves Landry, Meg Luxton, and Bradbury herself—is extensively documented, and appended to the book is a short bibliography listing selected titles under various headings, bibliographies and historiographical essays, journals, non-Canadian monographs, and collections of articles and documents. Thus, while the essays themselves may seem to be somewhat narrowly focused, for example, Suzanne Morton's "The June Bride as the Working-Class Bride: Getting Married in a Halifax Working-Class Neighbourhood in the 1920s," or Meg Luxton's "Two Hands for the Clock: Changing Patterns in the Gendered Division of Labour in the Home" (which deals with research in 1981 in Flin Flon), the thorough notes and the final bibliography serve to take the reader well beyond the specific boundaries set by title and topic and to suggest additional avenues of reading and exploration. And while one could well see this volume falling neatly into the textbook category, its attraction is far

broader than that and ought to command the attention of many readers who simply wish to bolster their understanding of Canadian domestic patterns. That in itself is a laudable exercise for many reasons, not the least of which is that one can never really have too much background against which to set the more obviously purely creative works which have emerged over the years.

The rather more inclusive two-volume *History of the Canadian Peoples* (the dividing point is 1867) can—and should—be read beyond the classroom for the same reasons, although it displays more acutely the nature and style of a text—focusing on significant events and issues—for the use of students embarked on a course in Canadian history. The approach to the material is familiar in many ways; the pre-colonial and colonial years still get relatively briefer treatment than the period since Confederation, and one can yearn for more detail in the text, especially with respect to the French and English regimes in the New World. However, the book rather pointedly tries to amend the picture vis-à-vis native peoples, racial differences, and gender bias (including treatment of women in the workplace and in the home); the portrait of some administrators, employers, and husbands seems less than flattering, and certain readers, no doubt, will still want to believe that white, male members of previous generations were not, in the large majority, characterised by a lack of virtue, charity, and equity. Nevertheless, it is important to realise the difficulties and privations under which many of the founders of present-day Canada laboured; it is all too easy to take our modern world and its comforts and technologies for granted and not consider the toll in deprivation and disease paid for, along the way, very largely by the underprivileged. And that is not to say that the present age has any excuse for self-righteous complacency.

The historical narrative is, as would be expected, basically chronological, and is presented with illustrations (some rather familiar, of course) and maps. However, there is a certain to-and-froishness about it necessitated by the way in which broad topics, for example, trade, politics, and so on, are looked at one by one; hence, at times, a certain sense of *déjà vu* is the result. The presentation of facts is clear and impressive, but I would have preferred a more fluid arrangement and the employment of marginal notes as necessary. The placing of an “historiographical” or “scholarly” debate at the end of each chapter is helpful, but even more useful are the careful notes and the extensive additional sources, arranged by topic.

Both these works are useful contributions to an understanding of how we have evolved as a nation, albeit one with divisions and disparities. There is much here for a goodly range of readers, and even if neither book has very much to say about the arts, each one has a good deal to say about the social and other issues which provide the basis and context for cultural expression.

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## Mad Tea-Parties

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**M.A.C. Farrant**

*Raw Material*. Arsenal Pulp Press, n.p.

**Sasenarine Persaud**

*The Ghost of Bellow's Man*. Peepal Tree, £4.95

Reviewed by Jeanette Lynes

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These works offer strikingly different responses to fragmentation in contemporary culture. Somewhat reminiscent in form of Atwood's *Good Bones*, the thirty “fictions” in *Raw Material* — written by Marion Alice Coburn under the pseudonym M.A.C. Farrant — immerse us in a postmodern mad tea-party. In the spirit of Carroll's world where, as the Cheshire Cat

reminds us, everyone is “mad,” Farrant's suburban landscape of “late 20th century mess” is characterized by a psychosis predicated on and encoded in middle-class convention. With considerable control and deadpan humour, she fractures the “wide suburban sea[‘s]” mundane surface, exposing the absurdist, apocalyptic subtext of that world. Malevolence lurks beneath prosaic surfaces, like the “Stealth Bomber” under the sheets in the first piece.

Farrant's narratives typically juxtapose a “naive” perspective exhibiting an at least residual faith in surfaces, against a more knowing, ironic voice cognizant of the empty signifiers of contemporary culture. This Emily-Post-meets-David-Lynch approach is exemplified in “Etiquette,” where the narrator wonders “what would Emily Post have said if your host tells your hostess to fuck off in the middle of the meal?” The narrator concludes that “it's clear there's a subtext of manners and perhaps its time to re-organize the laws of etiquette along dadaist lines.”

Farrant achieves this dadaist “re-organization” (or disruption) of cultural codes through unusual juxtapositions and spatial distortions. The dinner party constitutes one such site of “re-organization.” In “Saucers,” the narrator blithely mixes a “hearty stew” of dogfood, sawdust, dish-soap, and so on for guests who “growl like dogs at the unknown.” Spatial distortions abound in *Raw Material*, like the airport under the bedsheets and the “lady who eats Penitentiaries.” Farrant's suburban prison of capitalist culture is manifested in one of the collection's strongest pieces, “The Two Gentle Ladies from K-Mart” where the narrator is incarcerated by “chance,” Kafkaesque style, “like some fabulous insect” in the store's basement.

In depicting suburban mediocrity and environmental pillage, Farrant draws from a range of sources: the fantasy literature of Kafka and Carroll, the formal experiments

of Gertrude Stein, the metafiction of Donald Barthelme, and popular culture. Given its tongue-in-cheek, disruptive quality, avoidance of linear plot, and orientation towards fabulation and dark humour, Farrant's writing recalls, at times, the work of Leon Rooke and George Bowering. At its least inspired moments, *Raw Material* may strike us as something we have heard before. At its best, Farrant's representation of a late twentieth-century wasteland provides a carefully honed, fresh perspective. She works best with one-liners, like "Who are all these dead people at the foot of my bed?" The cumulative effect of her one-liners and deftly modulated "fictions" makes, on the whole, for an engaging read.

Although its title makes reference to Saul Bellow's writing, Sasenarine Persaud's *The Ghost of Bellow's Man* evokes, if anything, a post-colonial portrait of the artist as an angry young man. Set in 1982, sixteen years after Guyanese independence in 1966, Persaud presents, in a mode which merges diary and novel, the story of Raj, teacher, Hindu activist and writer. Raj's story documents his increasing disillusionment with the corrupt government of his country, and the factionalism within the "miserably fragmented [Hindu] community." This disillusionment is registered in Raj's ambivalence towards women, his attempt to spearhead a demonstration when chairs are placed in the temple, and his questioning, throughout most of the novel, of the value of writing.

The "crisis of emptiness" Simon During associates with post-colonial societies aptly characterizes Persaud's *kunstlerroman*. From its outset, the novel resounds with negation ("no," "nobody," "nothing," and so on) and hollowness as layers of pretense are peeled away, exposing the chaos Raj experiences at the core of his society. This process of exposure is painful, forcing Raj to confront his own complicity in the "racialist thinking," the "coloured thinking implanted by community and educa-

tion...Was no language, no expression colourless?"

Despite the disclaimer that *The Ghost of Bellow's Man* is "fiction," and that "any resemblance to any persons or situations is purely coincidental," it seems likely that Persaud's "PNP" leader, "Fox Burton," is based on Guyana's PNC (People's National Congress) leader, Forbes Burnham. Similarly, the assassination of Persaud's "Dr. William Ruddy" of the "Working Class Association" resembles Guyana's Working People's Alliance and its leader Walter Rodney, assassinated in 1980. These parallels are hardly surprising, given Persaud's Guyanese origins and a depth of bitter disillusionment in the novel that could only be derived from direct experience.

The rage of Persaud's protagonist is compelling only up to a point, however. Dangling Bellowesque style, Raj is caught in contradictions: between his participation in the doublespeak of what he sees as a fraudulent system on the one hand, and, on the other, his disgust with that system; between his romantic self-image as rebel and under-recognized artist and his self-denigrating paralysis. Raj's artist's ego is sometimes overblown and tiresome, and his attitude towards women verges on misogyny. There are limits to how far we can sympathize with, or even care about, Raj's moral indignation expressed, at times, as dogmatic superiority: "Since the British left, since independence, there had been a fall in moral standards... They were destroying decency."

The metafictional dimension of *Bellow's Man* is intriguing; by the novel's end, we realize that the "diary" Raj has been composing and we have been reading is, in fact, *The Ghost of Bellow's Man*. In a Joycean epiphany, Raj, deciding against burning his manuscripts, discovers the potential value of writing: "the diary...had started a very uncomfortable process...Maybe as a writer he would always be like a ghost, rattling the



chains, trying to get the attention of a heedless world." The novel ends with imminent "rejuvenating and colourless rain." Now that Raj has grasped the artist's high moral vocation of "reminding the world of its misdeeds and cruelties" he will, we are to believe, be able to confront his own prejudices and "tell the truth." But somehow this ending seems perfunctory and not quite convincing. The Raj we take away from this novel seems less like a trail-blazing Stephen Deadalus than a post-colonial Prufrock wondering, "do I dare?"

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## Laugh, Cry, Grow

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**Rita Much, ed.**

*New Canadian Drama* 6. Borealis P n.p.

**Drew Hayden Taylor**

*Someday*. Fifth House \$10.95

Reviewed by Judith Zivanovic

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The consciousness-raising performances of collective theatre have generally been considered more significant than the literary value of the texts. Indeed the vast majority of these collective creations have never been published. The publication of two plays emanating from the collective Nightwood Theatre in *New Canadian Drama* 6 runs counter to this history, yet reminds us that performance must be seriously considered in evaluation of such scripts. At the same time, we recognize Drew Hayden Taylor's play *Someday*, though not a collective creation, as a representative of "consciousness-raising" theatre.

The anthologized plays are *Hooligans* by Mary Vingoe and Jan Kudelka and *Pope Joan* by Banuta Rubess. The former was created through the work of the feminist collective; the latter was commissioned from one of its members. Language is a vital component in each. Still, as Mary Vingoe cautions, *Hooligans*, as produced, was "extremely visual . . . nonlinear and imagis-

tic." Co-author Kudelka invites the producer to change scenes, "juggling them to your own pleasure." This emphasis on imagination and visualization provides a valuable mind-set for the reading of both plays.

"Hooligans" is reasonably typical of much collective work—a compilation of cuttings from the writings of other authors, whether newspapers, letters, or journals, intertwined with transitional material; yet the transitional materials are "performance poems" specifically written for the characters. The play examines male-female relationships, especially those involving persons who strive in some heroic way—exemplified by geographic explorer Robert Falcon Scott, interacting with dancer Isadora Duncan, sculptor Katherine Burke, theatre designer Gordon Craig, and poet Sergei Esenin, who explore in the reaches of their art.

Vingoe and Kudelka provide effective character-centered humor, particularly in Duncan's interaction with Craig and Esenin in Russia. Duncan acts as interpreter during Craig's first meeting with Stanislavsky about the designs for *Hamlet*. Craig proposes to cover the stage with cloth "from which only the actors' heads will emerge" and to use his infamous screens. Isadora: "My Craig envisions elaborate costumes and a simple set." Readers who enjoy literature scripts and do not object to a lack of plot, will find intriguing characters, ideas, and poetic language to occupy them very pleasantly as readers; even more pleasantly, one can assume, if the script is in the hands of an imaginative director and designer.

The story of *Pope Joan* is told by Joan through short monologues and unfolding action. The scenes provide a black-comic look at the young woman who follows her ravingly-mad monk father in his fruitless attempts to convert barbarians or Romans to the church. Joan would like to become a priest and work her way to pope, garnering a fortune through which she could keep her

father comfortable. Her father, Reg, however, is convinced that this could not possibly be his road to success for "criminals, lunatics, animals and girls don't become popes, cardinals, bishops, priests or anything. Just blessed virgins." Not finding the latter comforting nor the former daunting, Joan proceeds to become male and pope.

The script abounds with lively dialogue, some very funny and some falling "farically flat." The handling of the subject matter is consistent in this boisterousness, lending itself clearly to a rapid "Keystone Cops" rendering of the lines and for movement among the short scenes. Rubess demonstrates a facility for the pun, especially through Brother Frumentius—a Malaprop with a difference. For instance, Brother Frumentius tells the Mother Superior, "I have pissed my pants," meaning he is "relieved" and he tells Joan, "I am an embryo," noting he has just begun a project.

Structurally, the play is somewhat less successful. Joan spends more time as a woman than as a man and pope. We do not see her behaving exactly as a man in situations; she simply tells us that is what she has done. In fact her argument that her leadership style is exactly like a man's is used to convince Frumentius that she has indeed *become a man*. The theme, which resonates most strongly, demonstrates that Joan had to become a man in order to gain and maintain her position. Clearly, the playwright wants her audience to admit that the situation prevails today—though the play is set in Medieval times, there are sufficient anachronisms (she spills ink and cries, "Like Jackson Pollock.") to make sure we are to see the parallels.

Drew Hayden Taylor dedicates his short two-act play, *Someday*, "To all the people who are looking, and all the people who are waiting." This dedication relates significantly to Taylor's characters, especially his focal character, Anne. Taylor cares and obviously wants us too to care about his

characters. The universal theme is what is truly important in life, but *Someday* has a unique quality as Taylor achieves a goal beyond empathy to consciousness-raising. In the telling of his story Taylor speaks as a member of the Ojibway community about members of that community, but he does so in a manner which permits anyone who has been a parent or a child to understand the heart-wrenching story he tells. A remarkable stroke of luck, winning a lottery, permits the impoverished Anne to search for her daughter, who was taken away from her by social services thirty-five years earlier. This story, which has unfolded to national public outcry is brought to the human level of one woman, who has lost, but never given up hope of finding, her first-born daughter. The outcome suggests that best-intentioned actions cannot right such a major and far-reaching wrong.

The story is simple; the outcome is not surprising. This play will not overwhelm its readers or audience with emotion, but it will engage them through realistic dialogue, action and characters, perhaps prompting a new level of understanding. This modest capacity to enhance awareness, which includes wit and humor with its serious message, will likely provide *Someday* with greater success than more strident attempts.

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## Pain & Character

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**Margaret Gibson**

*Sweet Poison*. Harper Collins \$22.95

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**Hugh Hood**

*Be Sure to Close Your Eyes*. Anansi \$24.95

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Reviewed by Barbara Kerslake

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Margaret Gibson has been busy struggling, suffering and living for the past fifteen years. After the publication of two acclaimed story collections, *The Butterfly Ward* (1976), and *Considering Her Condition* (1978), nothing had been heard

from her until the fall of 1993, when Harper Collins brought out *Sweet Poison* under the Phyllis Bruce Imprint.

This is a collection of seven short stories, each one told from the perspective of a different woman. They are of various ages, social backgrounds, family situations; some have been poisoned, others are taking poison or perhaps dishing it out, each in a different way. Poison is for pain. It can take the form of pills, nicotine, caffeine, alcohol, drugs, sex, always captivating by its sweetness. For each of these women it eases the pain of being wrong, being unheard, unrecognized, of being harmfully loved, of being “rescued” and then exploited, of being isolated, left out, unrescued, betrayed.

Each of these women is seen in her own particular cultural and social setting, often feeling imprisoned and powerless to escape. Most of the stories are set in or around Toronto; there is no mistaking the effect of the bleak urban environment and the harsh climate on the psyche. Moments of crisis seem to occur frequently in fall or winter. Lack of light, icy wind, and dampness add to the emotional isolation. The hurt, the recoiling and the pain of the characters are as unflinchingly observed as are the colours, the architecture and the isolation of their surroundings.

Most of these women are desperate in their inability to communicate with those around them, and it is Margaret Gibson’s great gift to understand their mental and emotional pain and to make us feel it. She creates for us a new reality; with each story we enter a different world. If we are willing to be with these women in their anguish, we cannot possibly maintain our own composure, but they will help us to see clearly what is really going on. These are insights we all need.

This is masterful writing, involving all of the senses, but the visual imagination is very powerful and seems, to quote the father in the first story “almost limitless”.

We see exactly what the characters see, with such intensity, because that is where the emotional charge resides. The writing is seemingly effortless, and we come away from it with a sense of great clarity. This is the art of distillation.

*Sweet Poison* is clearly an important book, chosen by Phyllis Bruce, a senior editor with Harper & Collins, as the first work of fiction in the series of books issued under her imprint.

Having shown such great courage in her writing, Margaret Gibson has provided a powerful antidote to smugness.

Hugh Hood’s novel may be historical fiction, but it seems closer to fictional history. The author is obviously excited by our own history and moved by the desire to have us share in this excitement. The people he introduces us to seem really to have existed. The wealth of specific details, geography, architecture, local and family history, the developments of institutions, trends in taste and culture, all combine to give the impression of authenticity. At the same time, a gripping story unfolds, with moments of high drama, suspense, tragedy and mystery. The story is told in the voice-over of an omniscient narrator who has so much to tell us, so many things that he wants us to reflect on, that he deliberately interrupts the story every now and then to give a dissertation about such things as the development of North American popular music and jazz, the shamanic nature of the true artist, the physics of kissing....

*Be Sure to Close Your Eyes* relates the early life of May-Beth Sleaford, the daughter of the visionary and inventive Professor Sleaford of King City, a man of genius and spiritual inspiration. The story opens in 1906, with the image of a half-built tower, from which a brick is dropped, narrowly missing May-Beth, then a small child. She draws the picture of an angel with that broken brick. Leaving the tower unfinished, Professor Sleaford moves his family to a

village in Saskatchewan. Eventually a number of towers spring up on the prairie, as he continues his quest to build the perfect automatic feeder for cattle barnbound in the terrible Canadian winters.

In the early 1920s, May-Beth meets Petter Arnesson, the son of the local blacksmith and a legendary cornetist. His music inspires her artistic talent, and they form a deep relationship. The story moves along through the details of daily life where they live, highlighted by a few extraordinary, almost "surreal" incidents, described in limpid prose.

This is rich and fascinating social and cultural history. The one thing that seems lacking is much detail about the lives of women. May-Beth's mother is a shadowy figure. There are discourses on the girls' school attended by May-Beth, and on the training of nurses in the large hospitals of Toronto, but the everyday events that push the story along are usually guided by the ambitions and dreams of the male characters—Professor Sleaford, Petter, and Earl Codrington, the man she eventually marries. This was undoubtedly the way life was in the period of this story.

The people in this book are unusual, accomplished, possessing "character". May-Beth is delightful, strong and fearless, with an ear open to the universe. Tragedy strikes her life, and she is terribly wounded, but recovers with the help of wise mentors and the man who later becomes her husband. Inspiration is a recurrent thread in the lives of these people.

*Be Sure to Close Your Eyes* is the ninth novel in a series called "The New Age", and there will be further novels about some of the same characters. Here we have the story of May-Beth's early life and first artistic development. At the end of the book, she is just beginning to come into her own; we suspect she may one day become a great artist. The year is 1929, just before the Great Depression. I would love to know what happens next.

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## Interrogating the Past

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**Veronica Strong-Boag  
& Anita Clair Fellman, eds.**

*Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History.* Copp Clark Pitman n.p.

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**Natalie Zemon Davis & Arlette Farge, eds.**

*A History of Women in the West III. Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes.* Harvard UP \$29.95

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Reviewed by Dorothy F. Lane

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Both of these books begin with the recognition that in the writing of history many people and events remain in the shadows—that history itself is "a contested terrain and is always in the process of being remade." While these studies attempt to bring the experiences of women into a clearer focus, they also contend that this refocusing must be an ongoing struggle with perhaps only limited success. The most constructive enterprise of the feminist historian is to expose the past to continuous and rigorous interrogation and debate. Through the structures and organizations of these books—one focusing almost entirely on Europe, and the other on Canada—the editors also acknowledge the limitations of their studies, and yet still manage to provide fairly useful, if incomplete, "rethinkings" of history. The summarizing introductions to specific articles or chapters would make the books effective for use in a classroom or discussion-group setting.

The third volume of Belknap Press's series, *A History of Women in the West*, examines the experiences of women during the Renaissance and Enlightenment in Europe. It begins by explaining that the series does not look at women as "object[s] of history," but that it focuses instead on the various places and roles of women, and on women's relationships with men. The scope and presentation of this volume are impressive: chapters are arranged in sections that examine subjects such as daily

life, representations of gender, and women's dissidence. There is also one particularly intriguing section titled simply "Intermezzo," which consists of an article by Francoise Borin on the iconography of women. In this article, Borin explains that the text gives "precedence to the image," and indeed the images that she presents could initiate many lively discussions. In addition, chapters such as Evelyn Berriot-Salvadore's "The Discourse of Medicine and Science" and Sara F. Matthews Grieco's "The Body, Appearance, and Sexuality" provide thorough accounts of historical attitudes towards the body and reproduction.

Other chapters are less successful, some because they attempt to cover too much ground, and others because they assume a universality which ignores experience outside of Europe. For instance, Jean-Paul Desai's chapter is an unfocused account of gender representation in literature—an extremely broad topic—which shifts its discussion from literary texts, to theatre, to documents on ethics. It concludes with an analysis of three testimonies by European writers, including an account of James Boswell's attention to women of the lower classes, and especially to prostitutes. Boswell, Desai states, was "able to give [these women] back a modicum of humanity and, by an odd twist of fate, to restore the dignity these lowly women were so long denied." The underlying assumption in Desai's chapter that any man might be able to "restore" the dignity and humanity of a woman by paying for her sexual favours is certainly problematic.

Despite these difficulties, the book's inclusion of a number of writers and foci still provides us with a kaleidoscope of European women's lives. Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman adopt a similar approach in preparing their own study, *Rethinking Canada*. This volume suggests—although does not, in the end,

deliver—a more comprehensive interrogation of the past. In its introduction, for instance, the editors explain that the fable of the "two founding nations" disregards the importance not only of women, but also of other nations and ethnic groups, geographical areas outside Ontario and Quebec, people of colour, and the working classes. At the same time, although the introduction acknowledges that there are tensions between women of different social groups and classes, it also argues that women's lives "resemble each [other] as much or more than they resemble those of the men with whom they are closely associated." This overall tendency to blur the realities of class and colour in examining women's lives underlies articles such as those by Jean Barman and by Lykke de la Cour and Rose Sheinin. While Barman suggests the negative consequences of cultural segregation in "Separate and Unequal: Indian and White Girls at All Hallows School, 1884-1920," de la Cour and Sheinin conclude, in "The Ontario Medical College for Women, 1883-1906," that having separate medical colleges for women and men may actually have been beneficial to women's education.

As with *A History of Women*, the collection is uneven since some articles are insightful and well-researched, and others less so. The editors of *Rethinking Canada*, describe the difficulty of providing a comprehensive study of women's history when relying on submitted articles. They simply could not find, they explain, more articles on "the struggles among women of different races, ethnic groups, and classes;" they also maintain that they are still waiting for more material that expresses the experiences of women of colour from their own perspective. The editors of *A History of Women* similarly acknowledge that they focus exclusively on Europe, and yet they do not explain their use of the work of mostly European and American, not other non-European or Canadian, historians.

Finally, then, these are useful studies of women's history that can be employed to initiate the interrogation of the past from a feminist perspective, but their investigations should not be considered definitive.

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## Compte-rendus

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**Maurice Lemire**

*Formation de l'Imaginaire Littéraire au Québec, 1764-1867.* L'Hexagone, \$24.95

*Le Romantisme au Canada* (sous la direction de Maurice Lemire), Les Cahiers du C.R.E.L.I.Q., Nuit Blanche, Editeur, \$24.95

Reviewed by Dominique Perron

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On sait tout ce que l'on doit à Maurice Lemire dans le champs des études sur les premières manifestations de la littérature québécoise, sans compter la direction de l'immense *Dictionnaire des Oeuvres Littéraires du Québec*. La lecture de la *Formation de l'Imaginaire Littéraire au Québec 1764-1867* ne peut que confirmer le statut de ce chercheur, qui a été d'ailleurs un pionnier dans son domaine: nous avons ici un ouvrage qui sera dorénavant incontournable pour quiconque s'intéressera aux toutes premières manifestations de la littérature québécoise, tout comme d'ailleurs à certaines applications de la mythocritique.

Chacun des chapitres se consacre à une thématique particulière (la territorialité, l'exil, le statut de l'amérindien, la culture populaire) au sein desquels se déploie cet appareil mythocritique qui s'inspire de Durand, d'Eliade et de Northop Frye. Cependant l'attention du lecteur, d'ailleurs toujours soutenue, est plus particulièrement séduite par l'Introduction et le premier chapitre intitulé "Le cosmos québécois". Cette introduction expose les paradigmes qui ont présidé à cette "nouvelle cosmogonie" issue des nécessités plus spécifiquement canadiennes de l'adaptation à un monde nouveau, et du rapport imaginaire des individus au territoire nord-

américain, rapport manifesté par le discours métaphorique (entendre "littéraire"). De même, après avoir mentionné les implications idéologiques de la création au Canada Français, sous le Régime Britannique, d'une "pseudo-bourgeoisie" productrice de discours sociaux et de ce discours métaphorique, Lemire établit bien les grandes lignes de fonctionnement de la littérature québécoise qui émergera de ces discours sociaux ou qui leur en sera redevable, par une remarque simple mais qui mérite d'être toujours rappelée à l'esprit: "L'oeuvre d'art placée en médiation entre dominants et dominés exerce un rôle de réconciliation pour rendre acceptable une réalité déchirante, ou encore de catharsis pour éliminer le mal et rétablir la santé de l'organisme social." Toutes les réflexions qui vont suivre sur imaginaire littéraire dans cet ouvrage illustreront de façon très convainquante cette règle.

Cette thèse globale est d'ailleurs articulée avec plus de spécificité dans le chapitre intitulé "Le Cosmos Québécois", qui examine de plus près les conditions de création d'une dialectique entre culture d'élite et culture populaire au Canada, dialectique qui tire son origine d'un rapport singulier des premiers Canadiens aux territoires offerts par le Nouveau-Monde. Lemire explique bien le passage du stade d'une Amérique perçue dans l'indétermination et "sans principe d'organisation" à celui d'une obligation historique pour les Canadiens d'après la Rébellion de 1837 de pouvoir opposer "l'ici à l'ailleurs" et à percevoir le territoire extérieur à la Laurentie comme étant une terre d'exil. En somme, et les chapitres suivants vont s'employer à mieux en examiner toutes les facettes, l'hypothèse générale que Lemire nous soumet est celle de l'élaboration d'une tentative d'orientation de l'imagination collective assumée par la plupart des écrivains de l'élite bourgeoise, dont le nationalisme du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle a été la manifestation idéologique la plus

marquée. Et cela, à l'encontre probable des réalités sociales et historiques qui composaient le réel québécois de cette période.

La réunion des Actes du Colloque sur le romantisme au Canada se présente comme un complément et un élargissement, peut-être involontaires, à *La Formation de l'Imaginaire au Québec, 1764-1867*, mais certes tout aussi passionnant. Il est vrai que la variété et le nombre des présentations ici réunies, qui ont comme dénominateur commun d'approfondir un point touchant une manifestation particulière du romantisme dans l'institution littéraire québécoise du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, limite une évaluation globale des Actes. En même temps, cette variété oblige inévitablement à ne devoir mentionner que communications qui paraissent le plus caractéristiques dans leur démarche.

La thèse de Maurice Lemire, lequel présente et dirige la publication des Actes, est que la sensibilité romantique telle qu'elle s'est exprimée en Europe à partir de 1820 environ, ne correspondait pas exactement à la réceptivité spécifique du Canada français du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, et donc ne s'est pas inscrite de la même façon dans le littéraire. Cette hypothèse semble particulièrement bien étayée si l'on renvoie à l'orientation qui préside aux analyses de *La Formation de l'Imaginaire littéraire au Québec*. Cependant, les participants au Colloque, n'ont pas tous choisi d'exploiter ou d'illustrer systématiquement cette veine. Si toutes les communications sans exception sont remarquables par la grille de lecture auxquelles on a recours (Roy, Robert, Rajotte) ou par la connaissance des mécanismes institutionnels de la littérature québécoise qu'ils analysent (Brunet, Cambron) comme par l'érudition qu'ils déploient (Lemire, Rousseau, Wyczynski), certaines attirent plutôt l'attention avec des lectures inattendues et fort stimulantes sur les rapports entre l'émergence des nationalismes européens, liés au romantisme, leur mani-

festation tant dans le nationalisme canadien-français du siècle précédent que dans le nationalisme contemporain (Pierrssens, Kröller). Enfin, il faudrait mentionner la lecture enlevante que Laurent Mailhot nous livre des "Dernières Lettres d'un Condamné" de Michel Chevalier de Lorimier, entreprise d'ailleurs déjà en soi romantique, au sens commun du terme.

Quoiqu'il en soit, le recueil *Le romantisme au Canada* témoigne de l'ampleur, de la qualité, de la vitalité et de la variété des recherches en cours sur la littérature québécoise du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, et cela, tant Canada Anglais qu'au Québec. Et en plus de donner une bonne indication de l'état de la recherche, beaucoup de ces articles s'efforcent au passage sinon de carrément détruire certains "mythes et mensonges romantiques" du moins de bien mettre en relief la complexité des enjeux portés par les institutions littéraires de l'époque comme d'éclairer des zones d'ombres qui rendent encore parfois difficiles l'appréhension des glissements singuliers qui président à l'émergence d'un courant littéraire.

Même pour un chercheur que ses intérêts ne conduisent guère vers cette période de la littérature québécoise, et à plus forte raison pour le chercheur qui s'y intéresse, *Le Romantisme au Canada* et *La Formation de l'Imaginaire littéraire au Québec 1764-1867*, constituent deux ouvrages qui non seulement deviendront des références mais qui s'avèrent aussi passionnants à lire, ce qui est, faut-il l'avouer, plutôt rares dans ce genre de travail. Que les auteurs en soient remerciés et félicités.



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## Murder & Mayhem

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**Jacqueline Dumas**

*The Last Sigh*. Fifth House \$14.95

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**Susan Swan**

*The Wives of Bath*. Random House \$26.00

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Reviewed by Jill Franks

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*The Last Sigh* is what I heaved as I put down this book after my final bout with it. The last sigh was the deepest, as the ending did not tie up the frayed ends of subplot, nor did the theme announce itself with clarity, an occasion I'd been hoping for throughout my reading. *The Last Sigh's* problem is that it wants to be too many things: a critique of Spanish national character while at the same time a gibe at Canadians' identity crisis; an exposition on Spain's history and a potboiler detective novel; an indirect comment on the difficulty of being female in both patriarchal cultures (Canada's and Spain's) while at the same time an imitation (without difference) of one of the most sexist literary genres, the murder-thriller; a journey of personal discovery and a newsstand porn text. This litany of literary styles may suggest a clever postmodern pastiche to those unfamiliar with the novel, but the term "postmodern" implies conscious manipulation of our received notions of literariness, an impression Dumas's book fails to convey. Rather, her parody of the drugstore novel or mystery-thriller seems not fully intentional. How should we read these lines of her protagonist, who is considering a marriage proposal from a Spaniard whom she distrusts and whose mother presses his marriage suit for him?

What is holding you back? [asks the mother]

It's my loins, thought Eva, but why should I pay attention to them? It's not as if they haven't misled me before.

This reference to her misleading loins is a gross understatement, as she has recently

escaped within the proverbial inch of her life from a murder attempt by a villainous American man whose pornographic fantasies she had whole-heartedly fulfilled just a few evenings earlier. Her "loins" have indeed led her to disaster, but she trivializes her sexuality as well as the trauma induced by the murder attempt when she cribs diction from Harlequin to explain them.

Some readers, however, will be attracted by Dumas's practice of replicating vulgar stereotypes, because the precocious imp of parody can occasionally be detected as she peers around the edge of that sacred wall of the "feminist, multicultural Canadian text." The colorful character of Isabella Flowers, whose single novel about obsessive passion won her Canada's top literary award and catapulted her into a life of debauchery abroad that caused "frissons of scandal back home," is ingeniously drawn. Her bold speeches, though usually occasioned by overconsumption of cocktails, indicates that at least one character in this book is not indecisive nor afraid to make her value judgments known to others. My favorite is her diatribe against "the Canadian national character":

We're a population of rejects, of fearful inward-looking people who have taught our children to distrust expressed emotion or thought. A country that conceals all of its nastiness inside idyllic haystacks. . . . A nation that requires one to lick the back side of a foreign queen in order to post a letter. One in which being nice is considered a virtue rather than a lack of moral courage.

Perhaps if Dumas's narrative had a little more of that moral courage with which Bella is overendowed, the reader's last sigh would be heaved in appreciation rather than frustration over a tale that raises classic questions about sex, violence, and their relation to each other without suggesting a moral or esthetic viewpoint from which to deal with them.



Although she tackles similar issues of gender identity, murder, mayhem, and personal growth, Susan Swan in *The Wives of Bath* may make us shudder, but never sigh in boredom or despair. Her narrative is always engaging, often suspenseful, and never patently derivative of the gothic or murder-mystery genres, although elements of both are here. Where Dumas's pastiche is awkward and obvious, Swan's mixing of genres is deft and subtle. Her descent into the macabre events occurring in the boiler room of a girls' school dormitory on a blizzard-ridden February night of 1964 is not a sinking towards sensationalism or melodrama. In fact, the voices of her young characters suggest that melodrama is more commonly the construction of an adult psyche than a child's.

Swan has created a young character—Mouse Bradford—whose unsentimental realism, honesty and ability to cut through the hypocrisies of a grown-up world by calling things what they are, rival Holden Caulfield's, the prototypical male voice of disillusioned youth in contemporary literature. Mouse is particularly honest about the difficulties of her life: her father is emotionally inaccessible, her stepmother is a drunk without much natural sympathy for her charge, Mouse herself is a lonely hunchback whose “best friend” is John F. Kennedy, whom she only knows from news broadcasts but whom she adulates for his masculine heroism. Mouse's primary identifications throughout the book are with men, boys, and a girlfriend who thinks she is a boy, but the hard lesson Mouse learns through the shocking experiences she undergoes at school is that “although being a girl is the most difficult thing on God's green earth, it's not half-bad once you get the hang of it.” In accepting her gender, her physical handicap and her intelligence as part of an essential, and essentially good self, she is finally able to make a positive identification with the females surrounding

her while at the same time retaining her wonderful androgyny.

Swan has a powerful grasp of the subtleties of gender construction, of the deep desire in many girls to “be boys” because of their perception that boys enjoy greater freedom, and of the ways in which adolescents work out (or work on) problems of gender-identity without consciously understanding what they are, or the ramifications of the choices they may make. Although the activities in this novel are unusual and unexpected, the thought patterns and emotions of the young narrator are strikingly familiar to anyone who has grown up with a sense of aloneness and resistance to “the way things are.”

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## Demographic Dominion(s)

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**Mary Burns**

*Centre/Center.* Talonbooks \$15.95

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**Marlis Wesseler**

*Life Skills.* Coteau \$12.95

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Reviewed by Mark Cochrane

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Mary Burns's second book-length fiction, *Centre/Center*, resembles a novel experimenting with point-of-view but advertises itself as three interconnected novellas, “panels” in a “triptych,” set at ten-year intervals between 1969 and 1989. Different protagonists are foregrounded in consecutive panels, while Burns's prose, a vivid and detail-laden naturalism, remains consistently graceful and accessible, occasionally grasping after larger conceits without disrupting a feeling-centred mimeticist surface. This volume respects, almost to a fault, its characters and the sensory routines of their daily lives. Yet Burns's adroitness with mood and gesture, even with the bodily self-relations of male characters, is the essential substance that carries this book, moment by moment, over a thematic

terrain mined with clichés and journalism, Oliver Stone and market saturation.

The first novella, "Moonwake," opens in the summer of 1969. Eileen Breen travels back and forth between California youth culture and her Illinois hometown. Early midwestern canal builders, breakers of the continent, are falsely contrasted with the technological imperialism represented by the war in Vietnam and the impending moon landing. Eileen's prime-time family drama is balanced by a cast of acid-trippers and draft-dodgers on the beaches north of Berkeley. Dissatisfied with both the patriotism of her family and the self-ratifying anger of radicals who are "against things all the time," Eileen decides, after a night chanting to the moon, to "borrow" a truck from her boyfriend and drive an objector up to Canada—that marginal wilderness of pacifist innocence, where different spellings create differing meanings.

The second novella, "Buster," focuses on Eileen's brother, Bobby, a Vietnam vet wintering over 1978-79 with his partner, Linda, in a remote lake-cabin in the B.C. interior, and making provisions there for the arrival of their baby. Burns exposes here a man wounded by loss and disillusionment with family, country and community. Bobby's eagerness to share in the empowerment of Linda's homebirth is coupled with a faithless anxiety, an old-order masculinity shaken by the alterity of pregnancy. The birthing sequence is a triumph for Burns's method, her patient registry of homespun mechanics and bodily being. Bobby's failure to perform in the labour as planned, and Linda's postpartum forgiveness, lead him to a recognition of "the myth of the perfect father. But this time he was the father and he knew the truth."

The third novella, "Centre/Center," introduces a first-person narrator in the character of Tranquility (as in, *Sea of*). Tranquility is daughter to Nick, Eileen's ex-boyfriend of 1969, and Pamela, enigmatic

beach waif, twirling in motley draperies, who manifests briefly at the end of "Moonwake" only to disappear after Tran's first birthday. At the age of nineteen, Tranquility undertakes a solo driving odyssey from Vancouver to Oregon in search of her natural mother, her *arche*, the sixties.

The figure of Tranquility is calculated to contain a twentysomething critique of sixties mythologies, and the cover-blurb rather hastily congratulates her, and the book itself, for "deconstructing" them. But Tranquility's quest is just more Boomer narcissism, a generation idolizing itself in the mirrored lenses of its underclass of children. The critique of hegemonic narratives, even West-Coast progressive ones by disillusioned American ex-pats, functions here as a duplicitous excuse for rehashing them. From the first sentence of "Moonwake"—"Eileen turned twenty in 1969"—Burns reasserts her generation's imperative to monopolize contemporary North American culture with its discourses, and Talonbooks, disappointingly enough, is her underwriter. Despite tracing a sixties legacy, Burns's book is patently not about the Women's Movement. Likewise, Marlis Wesseler's *Life Skills* generally eschews a feminist political language. But this collection of thirteen short stories is generously populated by women who remain woman-identified even as they operate inside patriarchal parameters. For all its heterosexual assumptions, Wesseler's fiction scarcely thinks masculine experience at all, and that is the most interesting, subversive thing about a book that is otherwise formally unambitious.

Wesseler's younger women avoid hetero-commitments and her older characters live in denial of their husbands' "unforgivables." Marriage here is frequently a patchwork of compromises, silences and latent violences. The protagonist of the first story must overlook the anti-Semitism of her

husband and his relatives in Berlin.

Another woman, who fantasizes “stuffing [her husband] down the elevator shaft at the Sask Power Building,” reaches the disturbing conclusion that she must keep her emotional outbursts in check, to avoid giving her husband an “excuse” to abuse her. Several of Wesseler’s narrators extend monologues of self-rationale, short on dramatics and long on exposition. Such confessions feel almost epistolary. And although they often end abruptly—in the middle of the second act, their energies unexploited—at their best Wesseler’s variations on the sketch can catch you with your emphasis in the wrong place. Many of these women recall smatterings of reading from incomplete undergraduate educations. A college drop-out, travelling in Mexico on her student loan, recites cryptic Heidegger and debates the sexism of Western philosophy’s false-generic pronouns. This woman is exceptional in *Life Skills*, however, for her awareness, as a First World traveller, of the personal and cultural baggage she carries.

Numerous stories are set near Regina, grounded in prairie locales and capital-city sensibilities. Accordingly, Wesseler’s prose is plainly literate, conversational but not demotic, and flat—not the highbrow, mannered flat of American minimalists, but flat like cafeteria talk among office workers. Troubling biases pervade such a white, white-collar vision. “Why don’t you face the fact that you’re middle class?” one woman asks. “That you like listening to jazz and going to the art gallery once in a while.” This failure to face up is highlighted (unintentionally, I suspect) by the travel vignettes that exoticize place without analysing power.

In the title story, the generations come together at a family reunion where ex-flower children, now middle-aged parents finished with global travelling, buffer with nostalgia the surprise of their own mediocrity. References to sixties music, *The*

*Prophet* and the Kennedys, abundant in *Centre/Center*, are echoed here. But it is Aunt Signe, a relative who is always getting things wrong, who remarks to Wesseler’s final protagonist: “Yes dear I know, the hippie days are over, touch wood.”

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## Caged Presences

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**James Reaney**

*Performance Poems.* Moonstone Press n.p.

**John Cage**

*I-VI.* Harvard UP us\$34.95

**George Steiner**

*Real Presences.* Chicago UP n.p.

Reviewed by Richard Cavell

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The poems that Reaney has collected here cry out for performance: unremittingly prosaic, they refuse to stand alone, both in the sense that they require completion through voicing, and that some of them are structurally incomplete, thus challenging the reader, as Reaney notes, ‘to expand their patterns into larger works with [their] own local reference.’ This last point is crucial for Reaney: region is to nation, here, what speaking is to writing.

Structured as a calendar, and accompanied by Reaney’s drawings, the book proceeds through seasons of poetry reminiscent of the Frygian tetrad; Reaney’s categories include March/Melos, June/Poetics and September/Mythos. There are poems on swearing, poems from other works by Reaney, some shivaree music, a poem against Free Trade and one about podiatry, and some catalogue poems given to the readers to complete. December’s offering presents itself as a ‘summa,’ but it is typical of the book’s poetics that this is followed by another poem.

‘Summa’ is a word which more readily comes to mind upon encountering John Cage’s Charles Eliot Norton lectures, an impression sadly enforced by Cage’s death

in August of 1992. The volume is a hefty 452 oversized pages, and its neologistic subtitle is likewise expansive:

'MethodStructureIntentionDisciplineNotationIndeterminacyInterpenetrationImitationDevotionCircumstancesVariableStructureNonunderstandingContingencyInconsistencyPerformance.' Yet to open the book is immediately to counter the impression that this volume was meant to be definitive. Except for an introduction of six pages and a concluding 'source text' (comprised of quotations from 'oracular' texts by McLuhan, Wittgenstein, Cage himself, Thoreau, L.C. Beckett, Buckminster Fuller, and others, as well as from the *New York Times*) of 31 pages, the book is constructed as a 'mesostic,' where the vertical line predominates over the horizontal, spelling a word by chance through the use of a computerized *I Ching*. At the bottom of each page is a running commentary of three horizontal lines, which records questions asked of Cage at seminars following his readings, and his responses to them. This construction is further complicated by the inclusion of two audio cassettes, one of which has Cage reading the fourth mesostic (utterly haunting by virtue of Cage's use of breath stops); the other reproduces one of the seminars ('I understand that some of you may have questions' says Cage, to echoing laughter). And there are reproductions throughout the volume of prints produced by yet other chance operations from a negative of one of Cage's scores.

As one of those many artists who came under the prodigious influence of Marshall McLuhan, Cage was formally concerned with the orality/literacy dynamic, which he reconfigured in his own work as the interplay of sound and silence. His use of source texts as 'oracles' of indeterminacy was meant to bring 'orality' (which, like McLuhan, he associated with non-linearity) out of the silence of writing. (Thus the

paradox of a musician who was paradigmatically concerned with language.) Yet, for all that these lectures were produced by a series of chance operations, what impressed Cage (as he states in response to one of the seminar questions) was recurrence, patterns—an expert on mushrooms, what intrigued him was how they so often grow in rings.

Cage's concern with silence and chance are sure signs, for George Steiner (for whom signs are always sure), of the 'deafness' and 'absurdity' of an aesthetic which has broken the contract between language and meaning, sound and sense. Writing in his most apocalyptic tone, Steiner warns us that to break this contract is to deprive ourselves of that least 'deconstructible' of words, 'hope,' for it is nothing less than God's presence that makes 'real' communication possible, and, make no mistake about it, by 'real' he means transcendent. No matter, either, the death of God: 'We must read *as if*,' for 'the stakes are theological.' And if this contract implies a contest between Man—and, make no mistake about it, he means *man*—and God, so be it. Who can help but notice 'a masculine primacy in the creation of great fictive forms'? It is men who wage the creative battle with that other Creator; women, meanwhile, tend to 'the biological capacity for procreation.'

A criticism, then, that does not assume that it can transcend itself—let alone its object—is not real, and deconstruction is, *par excellence*, such a criticism. Only art, for Steiner, can answer to art; the only real criticism of a piece of music is its execution; of a poem, its recitation by 'joyous memory.' The proliferation of criticism, theses, journalism is 'totally ephemeral.' And how did this superfetation come about? Through 'the expansionism of the academic-critical vision ... from the canonic to the contemporary.'

This is the nub of Steiner's argument:

criticism must avoid the contemporary. From this follows his attack on those who question the institution of the canon, whereby the 'axioms of the transcendent ... are invested in the overnight.' Indeed, some universities have even proposed courses in 'black women novelists of the early 1980s' (such as Nobel laureate Toni Morrison?). Some go even further, inviting the 'living writer [or] composer ... into the academy' (such as John Cage?). Don't they understand that all this rubbing of shoulders will undermine the 'mystery' of art? Those who can 'elucidate' art are and have always been only 'a handful.'

To break the contract between language and meaning is to accept the deconstructionist position that discourse cannot transcend itself, that signs lead only to further signs. For Steiner, this position is untenable. He too, like Cage, is in love with silence, which, for him, means the termination of discourse, when 'the aesthetic will ... no longer have logic or necessity.' But listen to Cage's silence: 'It was at Harvard not quite forty years ago that I went into an anechoic chamber not expecting in that silent room to hear two sounds: one high, my nervous system in operation, one low, my blood in circulation. The reason I did not expect to hear those two sounds was that they were set into vibration without any intention on my part.'




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## Published Private Lives

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**Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston,**  
eds.

*The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery.*  
*Volume III: 1921-1929.* Oxford UP, \$29.95.

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**Elfreida Read**

*Fresh Lettuce & New Faces.* Oberon Press, \$12.95.

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Reviewed by Klaus Peter Stich

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Both books provide fresh air to Canadian social and literary history through the personal accounts of writers of vastly different backgrounds and life experiences:

Montgomery, who knew what it meant to be firmly rooted in Prince Edward Island and relatively at home in smalltown Ontario as a Presbyterian minister's wife, while at the same time being no stranger to emotional abuse and loneliness; Read, who experienced complete uprootedness, unrelatedness and life-threatening disease after emigrating from the International Settlement in Shanghai to Vancouver in 1947.

The third volume of Montgomery's journals covers the final years in Leaskdale, Ontario, and the move to a new parish for her husband, Ewan Macdonald, in Norval, Ontario. The *angel-in-the-manse* is forty-six years old in 1921 and increasingly tempted, for good reason, to become more like a *tiger-in-the-house*, which happens to be the title of a book she has read about house-cats and which book is mentioned near the beginning of the volume. Her fondness of cats is appropriately tinged by their symbolic pre-patriarchal connections, since her domestic life is becoming difficult to endure. "There is nothing like perseverance," begins the second entry, and elsewhere she quotes with bitter self-reflection Emily Dickinson's poem (#536) about the heart's defeat by pain. She finds considerable spiritual sustenance in Emerson's transcendentalism (as did Dickinson) and in its later versions as manifest in Carman's poetry and, of course, in her own kindred

responses to the beauty of nature. Moreover, Montgomery finds solace in the fiction of women writers like George Eliot, in psychological literature and, appropriately, in her curiosity about her many “symbolical dreams.” Her most consistent and effective self-therapy for the “constant ache of loneliness” is, however, her keeping a journal. Here she can talk quite freely about her husband — his periods of mental illness, his growing disregard of his family, his disparagement of his wife for her literary success — and about smalltown life, the politics leading to the formation of the United Church, her writing career, and diverse other matters. Here she is able to buffer her anguished private self, and it quickly becomes apparent how, in the words of the journal editors, this volume contributes “a powerful counter-narrative” to her life-celebrating novels of the 1920s.

Volume III follows the format of the preceding two; it comes with a useful historical and textual introduction, editorial notes, a concise list of all deletions, and a reader-friendly index. The deletions concern mainly repetitiveness and similar redundancies; they have been made for “the general reader.” For the scholarly reader, the editors provide helpful information on the deleted material and on their editorial procedure as well as Montgomery’s own editorial design. She would apparently shape particularly her later journals with the possibility of eventual publication in mind. That is to say, Montgomery would not naively tell the unveiled truth; instead, she would accentuate a “narrative flow” which Rubio and Waterston have effectively preserved. One is reminded, in this context, of May Sarton’s numerous published journals, in which she demands of herself objectivity about “seizing events on the wing.” Such objectivity implies a manner of distancing and editorial sensitivity that also helped Montgomery guide the journal-keeping process into a story of her life. This attrac-

tive and expertly edited third volume of Montgomery’s *Selected Journals*, in addition to her complete handwritten journals, notebooks and scrapbooks at the University of Guelph, will substantially invigorate the scholarly study of her life and work. On its own, Volume III in paperback would be a strong text to add to Canadian studies and literature courses.

Read’s personal narrative does not appear to draw on journal entries but on memory and a group of personal letters written during her early years in Vancouver. From the perspective of the 1990s, with Canada being more than a little consumptive in terms of its political and economic health, Read looks back to the immediate post-war era when the country’s national vitality never seemed in doubt and when immigrants like herself would quickly become infected by that vitality. Yet those golden days, too, had their tensions between “rufflers” (e.g. Canadian communists and social experimenters), “heavyweights” (mostly mainstream conservatives) and newcomers not sure how to fit in with the confusion and uncertainty of Canada’s freshness.

On the one hand, Read’s retrospective focuses on multi-cultural aspects. As a Magyar-Estonian brought up among Russian émigrés in Shanghai where she married an Englishman, she reflects on her life as a visible outsider in China and an invisible one in Canada. On the other hand, her retrospective underlines her deep-rooted sense of self-reliance and survival which lets her overcome not only social adversities but also acute tuberculosis. In a way, TB — from her having contracted it in Shanghai to being cured from it in Vancouver and being reminded of it again by the current increase in the occurrence of the disease — becomes a conceit that shapes both the actual book and Read’s central image of Canada as a place where one can still breathe as well as concoct fresh air for meaningful living.

Read's narrative voice, similar to Montgomery's, is controlled, lively and engaging. It also has an occasional *ruffling* edge that she lets us attribute partly to the vestiges of her Magyar roots and partly to her sense of "virtue in unrootedness." The latter is responsible for her curiosity about the process of living, about the alchemy behind "fresh lettuce and new faces" as well as old, familiar ones.

In complementary ways, Read's retrospective, which is a sequel to her three-volume memoirs, *Days of Wonder*, and Montgomery's multi-volume *Selected Journals* underline the prospects of creative lives beginning again as stories worth reading.

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## Postcards from Home

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### Editors of *Islands Magazine*

*Islands: a Treasury of Contemporary Travel Writing*. Capra n.p.

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### Carol Shields

*Coming to Canada*. Carleton UP \$10.95

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Reviewed by Anne Rayner

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According to the conventions of literary travel-writing, travel ignites insight; the genre demands moments of enlightenment as well as the capacity to make the foreign palpable.

The twenty-nine essays collected in *Islands: a Treasury of Contemporary Travel Writing* were originally published in the travel magazine *Islands* over the ten years following its launch in 1981. Collected together and removed from the context of lush photography and advertisements for luxury holidays, the essays slide across generic borders from popular tour guide to literary travel writing. The editors presumably intend this translation: the "treasury" of the subtitle connotes not only value but the treasure of Stevenson's island, while "contemporary" places these essays on a continuum in the specifically literary tradi-

tion to which *Treasure Island* belongs.

For the most part, the transposition works, though the balance between factual background material and personal experience is handled with varying degrees of skill and stylistic appropriateness. Herbert Gold's sociopolitical account of colour lines in Martinique bulges with information and analysis, but never quite describes a place to visit. Jessica Maxwell composes a sensuous, exuberant ballad to Ireland shaded with a minor key political counterpoint. She careens joyously through Irish dialogue, just as she was whirled through the Irish countryside, where "colours rushed and blurred around our car windows. Toasted colours. Treacle colours. Mauve and hay, chartreuse and cream. Peach dust, burnt rose, powdered tea, pale lizard." Pico Iyer glories in the romantic images of tropical retreat that Cuba offers him: "Dolled-up señoritas looked at me with the sly intimacy of long-lost friends, rum-husky men invited me into their lives." Iyer amasses deliberate clichés in a florid, overwritten style well-suited to a Cuba that still satisfies the island desires of North American culture, ironically precisely because of its communist isolation. *Islands* is not a treasury of contemplative musings: its collective gaze, languorous rather than penetrating, yields a comfortable charm rather than startling insight.

For Carol Shields, travel is unnecessary, even irrelevant, to insight. Like her fiction, the poems in *Coming to Canada* explore a poetics of suburbia, the articulation of that which is so familiar as to evade conscious awareness. The motif of travel implied by the collection's title and the cartographic background of the cover design is misleading: Shields' poetry has little to do with the geographically or culturally foreign, the crossing of national boundaries, emigration, or any other kind of movement through space. The orientation of Shields' gaze emerges not in the title poem but in a

short piece, significantly entitled "Confession," from the "New Poems" section:

An anxious twitch of the nerves  
is all I get  
from sunsets, meadows, birds  
and all that

Mountains go flat  
on me and trees fall

but time's tenanted chronicle  
fills me full.

Despite being the most autobiographical of Shields' work, the twenty-four poem "Coming to Canada" sequence, while personal and chronological (many titles include dates), still seems anonymous. None of these poems can be considered narrative, nor can the sequence be assembled into narrative. Shields is fascinated not with chronicle (even her own), but with isolated moments that reflect the *effect* of time.

Editor Christopher Levenson has framed poems selected from Shields' two previous volumes of poetry, *Others* (1972) and *Intersect* (1974), between the "Coming to Canada" sequence and thirty-three new poems, and prefaced the whole with his introduction. This introduction catalogues themes rather than analysing poetics:

Shields' scope and obsessions are so sharply defined and intense as to obliterate poetics, especially given her understated style.

Levenson does mention the best element of Shields' poetics: she manipulates line breaks to bring close to the surface the rhyme schemes of colloquial, colourless discourse, so that rhymes and half-rhymes emerge in irregular, complex patterns. In the earlier poems, her attempts at bold extended figures and startling imagery rarely succeed; in "A Friend of Ours Who Knits," for instance, this heavy-handed strategy betrays a straining for effect that sabotages the poem. Often too, Shields flattens a poem with a last stanza that unnecessarily and baldly restates the point, smothering the suggestive under the declarative.

In the final "New Poems" section, Shields meditates on seasons and aging, especially the bitter awareness the first occasions of the second. Her voice is stronger in these recent poems, both harsher and more elegant, though no more personal or confessional. *Coming to Canada* is a premature retrospective, but the passage of time has replaced the occasional banalities of Shields' earlier work with a tighter, darker, more urgent significance.



Booklets for survivors,  
families, partners and  
professionals about

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## Sam Selvon, 1923-1994

Claire Harris

Sam dead. Sam Selvon, he dead, yes. An' is born the man born only in 1923, so he just seventy. He gone home to Trinidad for visit, little business an' thing, next you know he dead. He dead wrap in he language. In what Selvon call "the rhythm an' lilt" he use to make he own version of Trini-talk. An' is giving this brand o' English the authority of narration, an' is seeing in he gut that a man is how an' what he talk, that is so you pull you world 'round you shoulder, all this is what make Selvon a bossman in the Caribbean literary revival what begin in Britain in the fifties.

Sam. Sam Selvon, he do so many things, an' do them mostly with grace an' courage an' he real self on he lips. He begin writing in Trinidad while he working as wireless operator for the Royal Navy. Was during the war, an' he tell me heself he start with poetry.

Sam: "Girl, I start so too, but is why you don't stop with that chupidness an' write a novel? You can't live on poetry you know?"

Me: "Look man, novels go on for ever."

Sam: "Girl, you siddown an' write it. Stop when you done."

But that was much later. Then, he try journalism for the *Trinidad Guardian*, till restless for the great world, he gone up to Britain in 1950 like thousands an' thousands others. Is up there in London he meet up with all them from those other islands—Brathwaite, Lamming, Salkey,

Wilson Harris, Mittelholzer, Naipaul. As he say heself they meeting "not as islanders but as black immigrants" what writing. An' he get serious about novels, an' he take he place. He write ten in all. Was Moses in *The Lonely Londoners* what make Sam Selvon name. Everybody, everybody, even critic, recognize that this Moses was a true-true character what take London an' make it he own. He an' he friends, "the boys liming in Moses room" an' their "oldtalk" an' "kiff-kiff at a joke" make a London, you could touch, with its smells, its snail adjustment, an' the crack-up, mamaguy lives of Black Britons. In 1975, there follow *Moses Ascending*, an' in 1983 *Moses Migrating*. By that time Sam Selvon tongue firm in he cheek, an' was for him to write Sam Selvon tongue firm in he cheek, an' was for him to write he doubleness an' for reader to find out. Like Moses, he migrate. An' he come here, to Canada, in 1978, too.

Is an amazing thing. Sam Selvon one of the few what write about that racially, culturally mix-up place that Trinidad is, like is a racially, culturally mix-up place. He mainly East Indian, but he write a slice of real creole culture. Everybody jam side by side in his books. A rare thing: he inscribing a version of we culture without pretence or curry-favor. Now is to let Selvon say in he own words why he come to Canada. But first try an' imagine for this gentle, sensitive, gregarious man, this man what never try to bamboozle anybody with the 'author business', what it must have been like in Enoch Powell's Britain, all his

writer friends gone home. He spend half he life in Britain, an' it was time to get back to the West. If not to the source of he language, to a place which seem nearer home. "There is a new world feeling (in Alberta, Canada,) whereas living in Britain was an old world feeling. So this is really what I went over there to try and get into. And living in Canada which is a developing country, I feel almost part of, going along with the development, whereas in England I felt there was already so much tradition established here, that I was imposing on it, where as in Canada I feel I am actually helping to build it." (Interview with Susheila Nasta, for the BBC April 1984. Printed in *Wasafiri*, Spring 1985.)

Sam dead. Sam Selvon. But before that, he work as writer-in-residence at the University of Calgary, the University of Alberta, the University of Victoria, an' a few other places too. He also work as janitor at the University of Calgary. All the while he writing plays, essays, reviews, short stories, beginning a new book (unfinished) to add to he collection since from *A Brighter Sun* (1952). To add to the television plays he write in Britain, to the radio plays he write here, to *Pressure* (1978) what was the first black feature film make in Britain. All the while he traveling, picking up prizes, honorary doctorate, Guggenheim Fellowships. All what go with a writer what change something, so can't really ever dead. So Sam dead, this Spring 1994, in Trinidad. Sam Selvon, he dead, yes. But he work so important to this Americas, he living still. Living in the books he leave, and in his children. Living in all them new 'nation-language' writers what flooding out of the Caribbean. In all them what young, an' black or brown or white come out of the islands to make home in Britain, in Canada, in the United States, an' putting worlds, language in the mouth, in the veins of the work like Sam Selvon. In them he living still.

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## Thomas H. Raddall, 1923-1994

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Gwendolyn Davies

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At the conclusion of his 1976 memoir, *In My Time*, Thomas H. Raddall noted that he had received many honours in his writing career but none more important to him than the words of Bob Chandler, the man who sold him lobsters at Moose Harbour, Nova Scotia. "Tom," Bob told him, "I'm not much of a hand for talking and I don't rightly know how to say this, but I am proud of you and proud to know you, because you write about our own people and our own country, and you live here and you're one of us." "I would like that," added Raddall, "carved on my tombstone."

When Thomas H. Raddall died at his home in Liverpool, Nova Scotia, on April 1, 1994, at the age of ninety, he was still a central presence in his "own country" and among "his own people." In recent years, a library, an annual fiction prize, a provincial park, and Acadia University's biennial conference on Atlantic literature have all been established in Nova Scotia in his honour. As long as his health permitted, he continued to receive students and aspiring writers in his Liverpool home.

Although deeply attached to Nova Scotia, Raddall had, in fact, been born in Hythe, England. His father, a British army officer, was posted to Halifax in 1910 and was killed at the front in 1918. The young Raddall survived first-hand experience of the 1917 Halifax Explosion and later was to incorporate it, his life as a wireless operator at sea and on Sable Island, and his love of history and the outdoors into what he saw as three definite phases of his literary career: first, the short stories; secondly, histories and historical novels; and thirdly, the "contemporary novel" (epitomized by *The Nymph and the Lamp*, published in 1950).<sup>2</sup> Throughout this development, Raddall

noted in a letter to Wilfrid Eggleston in 1951, "my central theme remains what is has always been, the struggle, the humor, the passion of life as I have seen and studied (and lived) it in Canada's Atlantic provinces. Even my costume pieces were largely tales of real people in this environment, brought to life from the documents and traditions of their time."<sup>3</sup> Told with what John Buchan once described as a "rare gift" for "swift, spare, clean-limbed narrative,"<sup>4</sup> and informed by meticulous research, Raddall's eleven novels, seven histories, and five collections of short stories earned him an international readership. By 1976, his sales had exceeded two-and-a-half million copies and his books had been translated into languages as varied as Finnish, Dutch, German, and Danish.

The winner of three Governor-General's awards, a member of the Royal Society, an Officer of the Order of Canada, the recipient of numerous honorary degrees, and the subject of two books by Alan R. Young, the unpretentious Raddall nonetheless valued more than anything the appreciation of individual readers, who, like Theodore Roosevelt, embraced his fiction "with the keenest enjoyment."<sup>5</sup> When Dalhousie professor Malcolm Ross reviewed *In My Time* in 1977, he noted that Raddall's work had given Canadians "an imaginative hold on our beginnings as a people, an insight into the first fashioning of an identity, an insight which may do much to sustain us whenever that identity is put to the test."<sup>6</sup> For a writer who always endeavoured to write "something that was of permanent value,"<sup>7</sup> there could be no greater tribute.

1 Thomas H. Raddall, *In My Time. A Memoir*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976, 356

2 Thomas Raddall to Wilfrid Eggleston, Wilfrid Eggleston Papers, 26 March 1951, MG 30, D282, Vol. 23, File: "Thomas Raddall, 1943-1975," National Archives of Canada.

3 *Ibid.*

4 "Tweedsmuir," "Foreword" in *The Pied Piper of*

*Dipper Creek and Other Tales* by Thomas H. Raddall. Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1939, v. Also quoted in Alan R. Young, ed., *Time and Place: The Life and Works of Thomas H. Raddall*. Fredericton: Acadiensis, 1991, 28.

5 Colin Henderson, "From Pioneer to Patriarch," *Atlantic Insight* (June 1989): 15.

6 Alan R. Young, "Thomas H. Raddall and the Canadian Critics" in Alan R. Young, ed., *Time and Place*, 36-37.

7 "Thomas Raddall," *Eastwood*. The Newsletter of the Writers' Federation of Nova Scotia (May/June 1994): 12.



Canadian artists galore flocked to the Paris studios following the 1878 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia; favourites were Colarossi's and Julian's, the latter so popular with Canadian artists that Sara Jeannette Duncan used it as a setting in her novel *A Daughter of Today* (1894). At its best, John Milner's *The Studios of Paris: The Capital of Art in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Yale, n.p.) evokes the ambiance of these studios and the city beyond, describes their working conditions, and illustrates the whole with superb photographs and reproductions. Towards the end the book deteriorates into a shapeless list of dates and places, but the overall result is still impressive. More coherently presented is *Paris 1889: American Artists at the Universal Exposition* (Abrams, US \$67.00). A particularly noteworthy contribution to this collection is Albert Boime's energetic denunciation of racism and social prejudice at this (and other) world expositions, but the other essays also offer valuable documentation of the politicking and cultural warfare that influenced the placement and selection of prize-winning paintings. The Universal Expositions of 1855 and 1867 figure prominently in Patricia Mainardi's *Art and Politics of the Second Empire* (Yale UP, US \$19.95) which explores the ways in which Napoleon III's régime used artists'

visions for its own purposes. Mainardi's comparisons of fashionable and not-so-fashionable artists are instructive, as are her analyses of public response to the paintings. Margret Kampmeyer-Käding's *Paris unter dem zweiten Kaiserreich* (Hitzeroth, n.p.) presents an excellent analysis of Haussmann's Paris as it was discussed in the press and depicted in descriptive and satirical lithographs. The book shows for instance how Haussmann's work redefined a building like Notre Dame Cathedral by depriving it of its parish and positing it as national (and nationalist) monument instead. Kampmeyer-Käding is also excellent in her comments on tropes used to legitimize the demolitions of old Paris neighbourhoods: these were described as inevitable developments in the cycle of life rather than willful destructions, the new buildings representing the flowering of a new era. As the voluminous satirical literature provoked by the demolitions demonstrates, however, not everybody was taken in. Much in this book bears an uncanny resemblance to contemporary environmentalist debates. Debora L. Silverman's *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (U of California, US \$39.95) suggests that the 1900 World Exposition presented a culmination of French *art nouveau* but also a prophecy of "a broader twentieth-century metamorphic consciousness." Silverman spends much attention on Rodin's *Hells of Gates* as a work of art in which such tendencies are especially apparent. On the whole, the book brings together, in an exemplary fashion, such seemingly disparate areas as sociology, psychology, and the arts, and it is always careful to make its conclusions specific to the context from which they emerge.

World expositions are also at the centre of two books on Chicago, Ross Miller's *American Apocalypse: The Great Fire and the Myth of Chicago* (U of Chicago P, n.p.)

and James Gilbert's *Perfect Cities: Chicago's Utopias of 1898* (U of Chicago P, n.p.). Both books use archival materials to describe important moments in Chicago's history. At the same time, they expand their analyses to include national developments of sometimes mythic proportions. Gilbert focuses on the juxtaposition of high and popular culture at the Columbian Exposition, on Pullman's workers' utopia and its tragic failure, and on Moody's evangelical utopia. Miller dwells on both literary and historical evidence, convincingly showing how the Great Fire tapped into contemporary obsessions with past catastrophes and impending ones; the image of Pompeii looms large, made even more poignant by the insubstantial but always pretentious looking building materials used in hammering a frontier town like Chicago together. E.-M. K.



A key figure of American Orientalism is Lafcadio Hearn, a mysterious 19th-century figure who—born in Greece, brought up by relatives in Ireland—settled in the United States to become one of its most prolific *feuilleton* writers, before he moved to Japan, married a Japanese woman, and finally became a Japanese citizen: "he is truly a household name ... in Japan where, as Koizumi Yakuma ... he is known to all segments of Japanese society, and is honoured as an adopted son." Jonathan Cott's *Wandering Ghost: The Odyssey of Lafcadio Hearn* (Knopf, n.p.) sets out to give a fuller picture of Hearn's life and literary work than has so far been available. The result is a curious mixture between biography and anthology, as Cott interrupts his narrative with generous excerpts from Hearn's writing, ranging from his Cincinnati journalism to his New Orleans sketches and finally his work on Japan. In each case Cott sketches in the cultural background that

would have shaped Hearn's perceptions and he comments well on his connections to the literary *décadence*. Many of these comments however are too brief to do justice to the lengthy quotations, and a more thorough analysis will be needed. However, given that Hearn's work is not easily accessible, this book will be a welcome introduction indeed. Purple as Hearn's writing sometimes is, it is much more enjoyable than the impenetrable prose of Lisa Lowe's *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (Cornell UP, n.p.) which stifles Montagu, Montesquieu, Flaubert, Forster, Kristeva and Barthes in passages such as these: "In this sense this book is a consideration of the unevenness of knowledge formations—the nonequivalence of various orientalisms in French and British culture, and the incommensurability within specific orientalisms, of different narratives that concurrently challenge or corroborate the power of orientalism—in order to suggest, ultimately, that a critical acknowledgement of non-correspondence, incommensurability, and multiplicity is necessary in effective contestations of colonial domination." After 200 pages or so of this, one needs to recover. A good place is David Burton's *The Raj at Table: A Culinary History of the British in India* (Faber & Faber, n.p.) which presents an effective indictment of colonialism while offering some good recipes at the same time. An equally lucid book is Zohreh T. Sullivan's *Narratives of Empire: The Fictions of Rudyard Kipling* (Cambridge UP, n.p.) The book is as thoroughly researched as Lowe's but infinitely more persuasive. Concentrating on the "familial metaphor," Sullivan analyses Kipling's early fiction about India and his autobiography, carefully puzzling out the contradictions in his stance. Sullivan actually seems to like the books presented here, a rare occurrence in recent criticism. Derek Waller's *The Pundits: British Exploration of Tibet &*

*Central Asia* (UP of Kentucky, n.p.) documents the training and work of native Indians in "exploration beyond the Himalaya into the high plateau of Tibet," an undertaking forbidden to Europeans. Other recent publications relevant to the study of orientalism and focusing on individual authors are M. D. Allen's study *The Medievalism of Lawrence of Arabia* (Penn State UP, US \$28.50) and Luther S. Luedtke's *Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Romance of the Orient* (Indiana UP, n.p.). E.-M. K.



One of the better collections of travel criticism recently to appear is *Temperamental Journeys: Essays on the Modern Literature of Travel*, ed. Michael Kowalewski (U of Georgia P, n.p.). The introduction is somewhat indifferent and the pieces by Butor and Fussell superfluous because available elsewhere, but there are some solidly researched and well-written pieces here that make the book worthwhile. Particularly noteworthy is the emphasis on travel within the United States (especially Nancy Cook, David Espey, Robert von Hallberg, and Terry Caesar). The authors consider poetry as well as prose and trace connections between American travel writing and mainstream literature. The book comes with "Travel Writing Since 1900: A Selective Chronology" and "Travel Writing Since 1900: A Selective Bibliography." The editor would have been better advised to concentrate on American and British sources because all sections but these are so selective as to be distorting.

From Rodopi comes *Literature and Travel*, ed. Michael Hanne. The essays collected here are mostly concerned with travel as a theme rather than with travel writing proper. As is usual in an anthology, the pieces are of uneven quality. Thus, an article which can claim in 1993 that "the basic thematic question in Canadian litera-

ture is that of survival," will be of limited usefulness, while Dennis Porter's reflections on "Modernism and the Dream of Travel" are worth having, as are Joseph Farrell's on Gabriele d'Annunzio and Lauro de Bosis. Admirers of A.M. Klein's *The Second Scroll* will enjoy Abdel Kebir Khatibi's essay "A Colonial Labyrinth" in *Post/Colonial Conditions: Exiles, Migrations and Nomadisms*, a two-volume special issue of *Yale French Studies* "devoted to questions of identity and modernity in France and the French-speaking areas of North and West Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean, Vietnam, and the Indian Ocean." German travellers' impressions of Italy, particularly during the 18th century, have already been the subject of much research. *Deutsches Italienbild und italienisches Deutschlandbild im 18. Jahrhundert*, eds. Klaus Heitmann und Teodoro Scamardi (Niemeyer, n.p.) attempts to right the balance by also presenting Italians' views of Germany and Austria. Like other projects in "imagology" this one too claims to be a contribution to cross-cultural understanding, but typically fails to follow up its research with specific recommendations. A very thorough book is Petra Raymond's impossibly entitled *Von der Landschaft im Kopf zur Landschaft aus Sprache: Die Romantisierung der Alpen in den Reisesschilderungen und die Literarisierung des Gebirges in der Erzählprosa der Goethezeit* (Niemeyer, n.p.). It painstakingly and readably documents literary responses to the Alps, the philosophical and esthetic concepts which informed them, and the canonical travel itineraries that were developed as a consequence. A more modest, but still very interesting essay is Sabine Krebber's *Der Spaziergang in der Kunst: Eine Untersuchung des Motives in der Kunst des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts* (Peter Lang, n.p.), which investigates the iconographic, cultural, and social implications of "taking a

stroll." Like other similarly unassuming essays, Krebber's piece provides the unexpected pleasure of illuminating the obvious. Two anthologies provide ample illustration of Krebber's observations: Arthur G. Adams's *The Hudson River in Literature* (Fordham, n.p.), first published in 1980, contains generous selections from well-known authors such as Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman and a host of lesser-known ones. Kurt Ortseifen, Winfrid Herget, and Holger Lamm have compiled *Picturesque in the Highest Degree: Americans on the Rhine* (Narr, n.p.), a book which makes a good companion to Adams's collection, given the similarities, often evoked by new world travellers in Europe, between Hudson and Rhine. *Abroad in America: Literary Discoverers of the New World from the Past 500 Years* (Continuum, US 21.95) assembles texts ranging from Nordic explorers to Nikita Krushchev. The section dealing with contemporary travellers is the most eclectic and interesting, quoting not only writers but also GI brides, politicians, actors, designers, and others. One shudders reading Arnold Schwarzenegger on "Western philosophy, the philosophy of success": "The Eastern philosophy is passive, which I believe in maybe three percent of the time, and the ninety-seven percent is Western, conquering and going on. It's a beautiful philosophy, and America should keep it up."

Historian Jack Simmons's *The Victorian Railway* (Thames and Hudson, n.p.) is a 400-page tome featuring many illustrations which heaps together all there is to know about the subject, from the etymology of railway terminology in Britain (with special comments on Welsh derivatives), the Continent, and the United States, to literary uses of the railway and its impact on developments in tourism. There is also a great deal of technical information (structures and machinery), discussions of speed,

telecommunications and publications. Much of the material has been rehearsed elsewhere, but few books on the subject are this comprehensive and enjoyable to read. Like Adams's *The Hudson River in Literature*, Shaun O'Connell's *Imagining Boston: A Literary Landscape* (Beacon, n.p.) focuses on a specific region. The book presents a thorough overview of the subject, sometimes scolding authors for not evoking Boston as well as others when doing so was perhaps not the writers' primary concern. About Anne Sexton's poems O'Connell writes that they "like Plath's, lack Lowell's rich, local, specific density and his familial and historical frames of reference... Only rarely does she place her poems outside the psyche or beyond the complexities of family or love relations." Which may have been precisely the point.

Eighteenth-century travellers stumbled through the wilds, a "Claude glass" firmly held to one eye. The brownish tints of the landscape tableaux commonly associated with Claude Lorrain make one forget the brilliancy of the originals. Helen Langdon's *Claude Lorrain* (Phaidon, n.p.) corrects the

stereotype with superb colour reproductions and an astute text. Langdon asserts that Lorrain's innovations in light perception paralleled those of Impressionism. One contemporary admirer described a painting "in which one can truly recognize how the sun, risen for some two hours above the horizon, dissipates the nebulous air... the sun plays over the grounds in all parts and lights up the grass, bushes, and trees almost as in life." Surely one of the most beautiful books to have appeared in recent years is *Gardens in Provence* (Flammarion, n.p.). The text is by Louisa Jones ("English Canadian by birth and university professor of literature by training"), and the photographs by Vincent Motte who has previously published images of the Provençal landscape in *Paysages de terrasses*. Quoting Durrell, Daudet, Ford Madox Ford, and Mistral, Louisa Jones documents the fascination which this "refuge space" continues to hold for its many visitors. The photographs are luminous and delicate and even the book jacket conveys the brownish-red of Provençal soil and the soothing blue of the lavender "pools."

E.-M.K.



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## Last Page

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Travel books and autobiographies often overlap, as in Rona Murray's *Journey Back to Peshawar* (Sono Nis, n.p.), which couples the author's travels back to the place of her own childhood in India with her contemporary observations on child marriage and ravishment. The South African writer Breyten Breytenbach's *Return to Paradise* (Harcourt Brace, \$22.95) tells of the eloquence of desire that leads one to revisit places enjoyed in the past, but also of the superficiality of any return. J.C.S. Dumont d'Urville's *The New Zealanders*, trans. Carol Legge (Victoria UP, n.p.), represents a different kind of return; Dumont d'Urville was an early French traveller to the South Pacific (influenced by Cook), whose 19th-century, highly stylized novel about Maori life being on the point of change is here translated into English for the first time. Less autobiographical than deliberately observing, Jack Hodgins' *Over Forty in Broken Hill*, his wonderfully comic account of escapades in the Australian interior, has been released in a handsome Australian edition (U Queensland P, A\$19.95). An edited version of Margaret Laurence's *A Tree for Poverty*, her translation of Somali poems and tales, has also been released (ECW, \$16.00). And Yaffa Claire Draznin's edition of the letters between Olive Schreiner and Havelock Ellis, *My Other Self* (Peter Lang, \$79.95), represents yet another encounter with personal lives; Schreiner, the South African feminist novelist, and Ellis, the English sexologist, conducted an amorous correspondence between 1884 and 1920—the book provides, for those who wish the experience, the opportunity to eavesdrop.

Another recent batch of books to arrive on the editorial desk are collections of poems, some new, some old. M.C. Erler's edition of the *Poems* of Robert Copland (U Toronto P, \$60.00) collects the work of a

writer who flourished in England between 1505 and 1546. W.H. Shurr's *New Poems* of Emily Dickinson (Scholarly Book Service, U North Carolina P, \$27.95; pa \$14.50) is an edited transcript of nearly 500 "poems" that have almost all been transcribed into stanzaic format out of prose sequences in Dickinson's letters; many, to my ear, remain, alas, prosaic. Clement Semmler's edition of *The Penguin Banjo Patterson* (Penguin, A\$14.95) reissues "The Man from Snowy River" and other ballads that refuse to die. And Martin Duwell and R.M.W. Dixon's *Little Eva at Moonlight Creek and other Aboriginal song poems* (U Queensland P, A\$14.95) brings together topical songs (the title poem tells of the crash of a U.S. bomber in 1942), spiritual journeys, and humorous and sacred songs—mainly from Central Australia and the Northwest Coast—with commentary.

New poems include volumes of discovery, both of self and place, and include Brian Turner's *Beyond* (John McIndoe, NZ\$16.95) and Geoff Cochrane's urban *Aztec Noon* (Victoria UP, n.p.). Bruce Beaver's *Anima and other poems* (U Queensland P, A\$14.95) records (in sestina and other verse forms) a revelatory trip to New Zealand. Gary Catalano's *Selected Poems 1973-1992* (U Queensland P, n.p.) prefers the form of the prose poem, seeking evocation through detail. Andrew Johnston's *How to Talk* (Victoria UP, n.p.) uses idiom laconically, as proverb and guide, as in a competition between clichés for significance and meaning. Damien Wilkins' *The Idlers* (Victoria UP, n.p.) contains a wry section called "The Orthodontist as a Boy." John Tranter's *At the Florida* (U Queensland P, A\$16.95) moves at the end into a wonderful sequence that breaks repeatedly into prose form: recurrently an "objective" dissatisfaction with the world breaks here into an associative reverie, an alternative viewpoint, a check on the first reaction: the poetry derives from the power of the interruption.



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ASSOCIATION FOR CANADIAN STUDIES  
ASSOCIATION D'ÉTUDES CANADIENNES

**VOYAGES:  
REAL AND IMAGINARY,  
PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE**

This work is a collection of selected papers from the 1993 Conference of the Association for Canadian Studies. It comprises a diverse range of subjects pertaining to the voyage theme and its presentation in historical works, in literature of the imagination, and in accounts of lived experience.

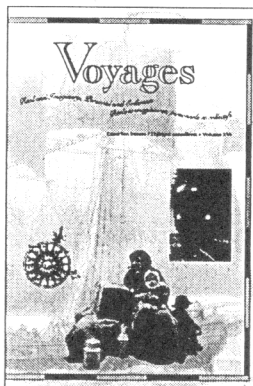
**The voyage in history** examines the voyage theme through studies of the deportation of the Acadians, the theological, philosophical and historical climate in France at the time of the explorations in the New World, the typology of 19th century French Canadian journey narratives, and the factual history of emigration.

**The voyage in literature of the imagination** includes articles on the work of Marian Engel, Alain Grandbois, Margaret Laurence, Monique LaRue, Rudy Wiebe, Brian Fawcett, John Steffler, as well as on fictionalized accounts of immigrant and ethnic experience. Another article deals with the theme of escape in English Canadian film.

**The voyage as lived experience** chronicles the legendary life of Albert Johnson, and describes life in a Shubenacadie (Nova Scotia) boarding school for Native children, is an account of getaway plots and escapes.

*Voyages: Real and Imaginary, Personal and Collective*, by James de Finney, Mike Gasher, Jean Cléo Godin, Lucie Guillemette, Cornelius Jaenen, Angelika Maeser Lemieux, Roger Martin, Marilyn Millward, Tamara Palmer Sailer, Pierre Rajotte, Christl Verduyn, Jeanne Yardley, *Canadian Issues, Volume XVI, Montreal*. Edited by John Lennox, Lucie Lequin, Michèle Lacombe and Allen Seager, Association of Canadian Studies, 200 pages, \$15 (free to members)

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**VOYAGES:  
RÉELS ET IMAGINAIRES,  
PERSONNELS ET COLLECTIFS**

Cet ouvrage, qui révèle la grande diversité des sujets reliés au thème du voyage, est un recueil de certaines communications présentées lors du congrès de l'Association d'études canadiennes de 1993. Ces articles traitent du voyage tel que présenté dans la littérature de création, les expériences vécues et l'histoire.

**L'aspect historique du voyage** : on étudie la déportation des Acadiens, le contexte théologique, philosophique et historique qui prévalait en France lors des explorations du Nouveau Monde, la typologie des récits de voyage canadiens-français au XIXe siècle et le fait historique de l'émigration.

**Le voyage et la littérature de création** : on explore la place du thème du voyage dans l'oeuvre de Marian Engel, Alain Grandbois, Margaret Laurence, Monique LaRue, Rudy Wiebe, Brian Fawcett, John Steffler, ainsi que dans des ouvrages de fiction portant sur l'expérience immigrante.

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