

Canadian Literature

A Quarterly of Criticism and Review

Summer 1995

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145

De Mille's
Utopian
Fantasy

The University of British Columbia Medal for Biography, 1994

Donald Harman Akenson

Conor: A Biography of Conor Cruise O'Brien

(Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994)

The medal for 1994 goes to Donald Harman Akenson, for his well-paced biography of the Irish diplomat and political commentator, Conor Cruise O'Brien. The biography offers absorbing insights into the politics of Ireland and the politics of the United Nations, especially during the troubling years of the Congolese wars.

Combined with the biography is a useful and informative companion volume, a selective anthology of some of O'Brien's writings on culture and social history.

The Western Literature Association 30th Annual Conference

Coast Plaza Hotel at Stanley Park, Vancouver, B.C. Canada
11 - 14 October 1995

Proposals for papers on all aspects of western writing are welcome.
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Columbia, 397 - 1873 East Mall, Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z1

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A Quarterly of Criticism and Review

Number 145, Summer 1995

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George Woodcock 1912-1995

George Woodcock died at his home, late on a Saturday evening, January 28, 1995. He was 82. The world lost an articulate social observer, a prodigious writer (the author of some 150 books), a historian and scriptwriter and biographer and poet. *Canadian Literature* lost its founding editor. I, and many others, lost a friend.

Several of us gathered the next week for a private wake. We grieved, and told ourselves we were not grieving for this man but celebrating having had the opportunity to know him. We told stories, and recollected the person that we knew. George had become a public figure (he had five honorary degrees, and as recently as 1994 he had been feted with a symposium and a large civic reception); but we recalled the man who loved cats and mountain walks, the man who mixed the best martini we'd ever tasted, the witty teller of anecdotes, the eloquent conversationalist who could talk with equal ease about ancient cultures and historical figures, modern politics and contemporary art. His friend Tony Phillips read "Seeing Free," from his last book of poems, *The Cherry Tree on Cherry Street*: "Friends, do not weep for me!/ Keep your eyes clear and bold/ and let the wake go on/ and wake the night/ to see my spirit free."

He had premonitions of death. But they did not slow him down; only his weakening heart did that. He still kept a journal, and sat long hours—he used to write all night, when the world was quiet—at a small portable Olympia typewriter, composing. As a project "for his old age," he recently declared, he had decided to retranslate Proust, and he did finish *Swann's*

Way, the first volume of *In Search of Time Lost*. He had also just completed the first draft of his first novel; and more besides. Letters to friends. And he had so many friends: George Orwell, Margaret Laurence, Julian Symons (all now gone); Al Purdy, Peggy Atwood, Pat Grosskurth, Doug Fetherling. Doris and Jack Shadbolt. David Watmough. Toni Onley. It's impossible to name them all. Us all. The world respected him; his friends loved him.

The public details of George Woodcock's life are, of course, well known. Born in Winnipeg on May 8, 1912, to parents of Welsh stock, he grew up in Shropshire when his family, who had not been successful in Canada, returned to England. He completed grammar school in 1928, and had no further formal academic training. He worked as a railway clerk in London during the 1930s, for 30 shillings a week. An aspiring poet, he also came to know a number of England's leading writers of the time, including Herbert Read and Aldous Huxley, about whom he later wrote. But he resisted the conventional political solutions of both the left and the right, and by the 1940s—by this time a friend of Orwell and Marie-Louise Berneri, and a committed pacifist and champion of philosophical anarchism—he was seeking a new place to live. Canada offered the prospect of freedom. So George and his wife Ingeborg emigrated to Sooke, on Vancouver Island. They were hoping to live a Tolstoyan ideal, somewhat on the model of the Doukhobours; but the stony ground resisted being turned into a market garden. And living as a professional writer in Canada in the 1950s offered no obvious alternative.

A chance to teach at the University of Washington was curtailed when in 1955 (as with so many other Canadians who openly espoused freedom of expression) George Woodcock was prevented by McCarthyite paranoia from re-entering the United States. It was then, despite his ongoing questioning of the powers of institutions, that he joined the faculty at U.B.C., taught a course in "European literature in translation," and (using his own name or sometimes his transparent pseudonym "Anthony Appenzell") wrote a small library of articles and books: *Anarchism* (1962), *Faces of India* (1964), *The Rejection of Politics* (1972), *Gabriel Dumont* (1975), *Caves in the Desert* (1988), *British Columbia* (1990), and literally scores of others—books on Thomas Merton and the British in the Far East, the Doukhobours and the myths of history, Kropotkin, the South Seas, and Canadian writers and writing. In 1959, when the University of B.C. began to publish *Canadian Literature*, he became its founding editor, a post he held till 1977, and he

helped to turn the study of Canadian culture from a marginal activity into an act of creative necessity, an engagement with the values of the future and the past.

In 1994 he accepted the freedom of the city of Vancouver, though he had earlier refused the “state honour” of the Order of Canada. The fine distinction he made here was true to his libertarian philosophy. For he believed that individual liberty always takes precedence over state authority. Because he identified cities (as distinct from nation-states) with civil rights and civil freedoms, he regarded the city’s award as the “gift of my neighbours”—not as a sign of eminence, that is, but as an affirmation of human equality. It was a philosophy he tried to live practically as well as in theory, and his own acts of generosity repeatedly affirmed human dignity. With his wife, he set up the Tibetan Refugee Aid Society, the Canada-India Village Aid Society, the Woodcock emergency fund for artists, and the Woodcock Trust. He worked tirelessly not just to recognize problems but also to resolve them.

Personally, I learned from him a lot about editing and a lot about Canadian writing. Every quarter, in the mid-1960s, Donald Stephens or I (Don was Associate Editor of *Canadian Literature* when I joined the magazine’s staff) would sit with George and prepare the paste-up for the next issue; the Woodcocks’ dining-room table would be littered with numbered articles and cookie crumbs, and scissored galleys marked with coffee stains. We’d talk about new books and rediscovered authors, about journal design and the directions of literary criticism, about what mattered in politics and literature and why we separately thought so. Technology has long since altered how the pages of *Canadian Literature* are designed, and many new books have appeared and rediscoveries been made since 1965. Happily, such changes never robbed us of opportunities for conversation. Nor did time ever rob George of his commitment to other people.

While writing these words, I have been reading the third volume of George’s autobiography, and I realize that through his books he is still talking to the world. He wrote not to produce final answers but to be in conversation, and these are *Walking Through the Valley*’s closing words:

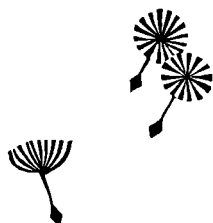
I find myself aged and invalid, yet still dedicated to the writing that has sustained me and been my life; resigned, yet even to my own surprise careless about time and what can be done within it, and ready to depart as soon as my life loses meaning for me, which is not yet.

Still, I doubt if I shall be writing much more about my life.... I consider myself to have been on the whole a fortunate being in a fortunate time and place, though I

have tried never to let that blind me to the wretchedness of others. I have hoped for humanity and like many others have seen the realization of my hopes indefinitely postponed, so that I should feel sad beyond measure as I end this account. Inexplicably, I do not feel sad. That Possible on the far edge of Impossibility still stirs my imagination, and the growing consciousness of political and environmental realities among ordinary people offers at least a chance that humanity might save itself and other beings and the planet most of all.

It is a quiet bequest, and a generous one, and as always, an affirmation of what it means truly to be free. w.N.

ED. NOTE: George Woodcock's last reviews for *Canadian Literature* appear on pp. 165-66.



Looking Back to 1994

Start with the fiction. One of the striking moments of critical practice in 1994 came with the announcement of the lists of finalists for the two chief English-language fiction prizes: the Governor-General's Award, which subsequently went to Rudy Wiebe, and the newly-established Giller Award, which went to Moyez Vassanji. The two lists of "best books" were completely different. Not a single title overlapped. There were reasons, of course. Atwood's *Robber Bride*, a late 1993 publication, was a legitimate candidate for the two-G's award but not for the one. Alice Munro's *Open Secrets* likewise, not because of the date but because Munro was one of the Giller judges. But the differences also indicate how a judging committee's "political" priorities profoundly affect estimates of "best." The Giller committee was interested in technical consistency, and while predisposed, it seems, to the illusions of realism, was happy with any convention provided

it was carried through to book's end. The GG's committee seemed to be more concerned with politically fashionable subjects. I personally was more persuaded by the Giller list, though I like the Wiebe, the Atwood, the Munro. And there were interesting 1994 publications that didn't get to either list. History might deem us all wrong.

One of the problems I have (it's not mine alone) is that I can't read everything, and estimates of accomplishment, comparative by nature, depend always on the particularity of the selection group. Of fictions that I did read, among those that missed the two prize lists, I would single out the following as well worth reading. Makeda Silvera's *Her Head a Village* collects eleven stories about Caribbean-Toronto connections; Silvera's style works to create the experience she foregrounds in her title story: the need to resist Western categories ("feminism," here) as "national" Third World subjects, and the need to write Third World consciousness through traditional forms, such as story-telling. Oakland Ross's *Guerilla Beach*, a journalist's fictions about South American violence, provided some provocative moments; as did Douglas Fetherling's *The File on Arthur Moss*, in which a reporter in Vietnam finds that political and cultural clichés are inseparable from the technology that produced them. Six more: Robertson Davies' *The Cunning Man*, with its repeated negotiations between sin and sainthood, sexuality and power, companionability and rigid form ("Do you need books in order to think?" it disingenuously asks, while keeping wealth close at hand in the narrative, and women in service roles); Patricia Robertson's fantasies in *City of Orphans*; William Lynch's cinematic *Parksville*, a Greek Tragedy on Vancouver Island, dealing with the masks that modern people wear; Lola Lemire Tostevin's *Frog Moon*, with its chorus convention, trying to come to terms with mother and mother-tongue, the relation between inheritance (social, gendered) and mode of thought (the impact of form); K.D. Miller's *A Litany in Time of Plague*, which juxtaposes linked stories about life's extreme moments (a 7-year-old, wanting questions answered, is drawn to, and avoids, a child molester; a gay man, dying, reflects on the nature of love and religion; a young woman theatre student takes lovers for the sake of experiment); and George Bowering's 21 metatextually playful takes on "narrating life" in *The Rain Barrel*.

Another Bowering book, *Shoot!*, is a novel about the 19th-century McLean gang in the author's Okanagan home territory; a characteristic Bowering disquisition on history and literary convention, this book entertainingly

takes on the Establishment by both subject and method: “Canadian history is mainly written by schoolteachers who know a lot about the Government. If an individual with a gun shows up, he had better be an American or else.” Paul Yee’s *Breakaway*, a young-adult tale about a Chinese-Canadian soccer-playing youth in Depression Vancouver, also takes a historical moment as the basis for social narrative; Yee’s point is to expose the cultural construction of racism and to reaffirm the necessity of self-esteem. Frances Itani’s *Man Without Face* probes the inheritance of racism in another way; the filmic-interview format that closes this book recalls the expulsion/relocation of Japanese-Canadians during World War II—but it highlights feelings of impotence and shame by focussing on a mother’s last statement; she is not preoccupied with past injustices, but fearful of something worse: afraid of seeing her own face in a documentary reconstruction of the past, and of being shamed again and again.

Technical experiment took other writers in more abstract directions. David Gurr’s *Arcadia We\$t*, with a deliberately American context (Elvis and Thomas Jefferson), is a kind of dialogue between “Author” (“the death of”) and Machine (“reader-friendly”). Susan Swan’s *The Wives of Bath* discovers madness and violence in a “Ladies College” and puts history on trial. And Brian Fawcett’s *Gender Wars* couples a fiction (about a sexual liaison) with a non-fiction disquisition on heterosexuality and the social construction of sexual behaviour; the fiction occupies the top of the page, the non-fiction the lower portion, and the two together constitute a kind of interface between experience and social dialectic (“creativity does not happen in a vacuum”).

Still other fictions suffered from the awful ordinariness that sometimes inhibits style or conception. I was disappointed by Florence McNeil’s *Breathing Each Other’s Air*, Susan Haley’s *How to Start a Charter Airline*, Ann Copeland’s *Strange Bodies on a Stranger Shore*, Joe Rosenblatt’s *Beds & Consenting Dreamers*, Diane Schoemperlen’s *In the Language of Love*, Sky Lee’s *Bellydancer*, Anne Cameron’s *DeeJay & Betty*. These are good writers; and this is flaccid writing. Where does the problem come from? The pressure to publish? The failure of editing? The intricacies of small-press (or large-press) financing?

Some translations were of more interest, though many were violent: Roch Carrier’s *The End*, a moody account of suicide; Jean Lemieux’s *Red Moon*, about Catholic school and violent murder; Anne Hébert’s *Burden of*

Dreams, about passion and irresponsibility in Paris; Ronald Lavallée's *Tchipayuk or The Way of the Wolf*, a Franco-Manitoban fiction about the Métis Rebellion, and about a "mutual rebuff, two ancient cultures turning their backs to one another, refusing to see each other" (Lavallée is a novelist who deserves to be much more widely known); and Michel Tremblay's *The First Quarter of the Moon*, another in the life-fictions of the author's protagonist, who, just prior to adolescence, finds he has to come to terms with creativity (the illusions of fiction) as well as intelligence (the illusions of fact). And reprints, which frequently indicate an overlap between market demand and social cause, included some of Hugh Hood's stories, Matt Cohen's selected stories, and four books by early women writers: Georgina Sime's *Our Little Life*, Joanna Wood's *The Untempered Wind*, Sara Jeannette Duncan's *Cousin Cinderella*, and Rosanna Leprohon's *Armand Durand*; the introductions to the Sime and Wood volumes, by Jane Watt and Klay Dyer respectively, mark the arrival on the Canadian critical scene of two striking new voices: their careful scholarship sets a high standard for their generation's re-encounter with cultural history. Another reprint, George Godwin's 1929 novel *The Eternal Forest* (the new edition comes with an elaborate apparatus), reveals some the problems that face an editor who wishes to reassess the past. The narrative here is of interest—a *cheechako* Englishman emigrates to the Fraser Valley, only to discover he is ill-suited to pioneering, but meanwhile jots down pen-portraits of his multicultural neighbours, and reflects on the appeal of the "eternal" forest and the offensiveness of real estate dealers. It is, indeed, possibly the "first" Fraser Valley novel, and it provides a fascinating glimpse of early settler B.C. Its sociological interest may even extend to its historically authentic use of the language of racial stereotypes (though the editor has, he says, removed some epithets). But many 1994 readers will find it rough going.

Back, then, to some of 1994's short-listed prize finalists: Eliza Clark's *What You Need*, Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*, Steve Weiner's *The Museum of Love*, Rudy Wiebe's *A Discovery of Strangers*, M.G. Vassanji's *The Book of Secrets*, Alice Munro's *Open Secrets*. All deal with the role of the unknowable in people's lives. Vassanji's book traces the appeal of imperial culture in East Africa, drawing out the finally indeterminate "secrets" of a 1913 diary in order to examine the barrenness of faith in false authorities. Selvadurai's linked stories (not to my mind as technically accomplished as they might be) tell of a gay boy growing up in Sri Lanka; the technique of "overhear-

ing” the family secrets gets to be a bit laboured, though the details of wealth and race relations are effective, and lead to the narrative point: that empty Old School values do not serve people well during a time of change. The lively satiric prose of Clark’s book takes a man, separated from his wife, into the U.S. South, and through a series of exotic and illusory adventures, till he discovers his capacity to accept his aloneness. Weiner’s hallucinogenic tale of a gay francophone boy growing up into the world of dream takes its central character on a quest for meaning in a world he must unravel to recognize: the contrary character of his parents (prison guard and visionary), the contrary pulls of sibling, friend, environment, and concept (towards love, towards death)—these become mobile figures in a visionary quest. Quest also informs Wiebe’s narrative, which is based on the Franklin Expedition accounts of 1819-1922 (specifically the journal of Robert Hood); this novel reconstructs, in the rivalry between two Englishmen over a young Native woman, the tension between Native expectations and Imperial presumptions. What informs power? the novel asks, and does not always find comprehensible answers. And Munro’s *Open Secrets* (which, if I had been asked, would have been my selection for the year’s fiction prize-winner: it is just plain extraordinary in its insight into human behaviour, and its craft) takes the reader on other kinds of quest, through six stories—into Albanian history, into ghostly fantasy, into science-fiction, into literary and social convention in short—in order to examine how people, in the name of being open, always tell partial stories. The paradox of the title is that it promises answers and hides them at the same time; uncertainty is all. Yet the stories invite the reader repeatedly into narrative, to discover again and again the limits to what we can ever know, satisfying not through plot and closure but through the intricacies of revelation.

One of the recurrent motifs of the year’s fiction involved the open declaration of a character’s gay or lesbian nature, an insistence on the priority of honesty and self-esteem over the biases of ignorant convention. Selvadurai, Miller, Cameron, Weiner, Tremblay: all consider sympathetically the inside world of the person shaped as a social outsider. As in fiction, so in poetry and drama. Bryden MacDonald’s play *Whale Riding Weather*, for example, examines with searing understanding the mixed emotions that accompany the breakup of a gay partnership. John Barton’s *Designs from the Interior*, a set of poems constructed around a landscape metaphor—childhood (suburban delivery), city (patriarchy), hinterland (ecology)—examines how the

growth of an adequate language for self-definition is also a struggle to make “difference” not a demeaning category. Such insights go far to changing public attitudes, despite the persistence of bias (presumably based on some sort of fear) in some sectors of society. The high-profile 1994 court case involving a gay/lesbian bookstore’s suit against Canada Customs discrimination, and the slow move of the federal government towards reform of equal-rights legislation, were further signs of social change.

Other 1994 dramas of note included Sally Clark’s *Life Without Instruction*, based on the life of the Renaissance artist Artemisia Gentileschi; Wendy Lill’s *All Fall Down*, about the evil of malevolence that corrupts innocents and turns innuendo into evidence, in a 20th-century daycare witchhunt; James Reaney’s adaptation of *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*, in an edition that comes with lots of commentary on staging; and Michael Hollingsworth’s *The History of the Village of the Small Huts*, parts 1-8, which begins with the sound of drums and ends with Mackenzie King’s head and an A-bomb explosion superimposed—in between are melodramatic, farcical, and parodic versions of Canada’s historical “greats,” including Laval and Bond Head: this is a play mostly about male preoccupations with self and violence towards women, and about the value systems in the Canada that permits both. A related book, of enormous use to drama commentators, is John Ball and Richard Plant’s *Bibliography of Theatre History in Canada: The Beginnings through 1984*, a massive enumerative survey of actors, festivals, playwrights, theses, and performances.

To survey the year’s poetry in a short compass is next to impossible, and it is tempting to say that and nothing more. But at least a dozen or so books ask to be acknowledged directly. There were noteworthy books by Ludwig Zeller and A.F. Moritz, Bert Almon, Travis Lane, Philip Stratford, Erin Mouré, Roo Borson, Al Purdy, and a wonderful selection of poems by bp Nichol, *An H in the Heart: A Reader*, edited by George Bowering and Michael Ondaatje.

Ralph Gustafson asked what a thinker can think about, in *Tracks in the Snow*, and answered: the universe, music, surrounds, and “objectivity.” It’s in many ways a guide to other poetic accomplishments of the year. Gary Geddes’s *Girl by the Water* reflected on sexuality and the violence of action and language, on rural and family life and the desperate actions that have the flavour of inventiveness, and on human failure and (nevertheless) continuity. George Woodcock’s last volume of poetry, *The Cherry Tree on Cherry*

Street, meditated quietly on place, literary influences, and impending death, as did the moving lines that close the third volume of his autobiography, *Walking Through the Valley*. Jay Ruzesky's *Painting the Yellow House Blue* achieved an effective tone that permitted pop culture to acquire resonance. Aaron Bushkowsky's *Ed and Mabel go the Moon* is another work I found arresting; it reveals fragments in the relationship of a married couple whose life is tied to a prairie farm, and it ends with the anti-poetic, phlegmatic crankiness that is the stuff of poetry in a lot of "ordinary" lives: "the way we built/ the god-damn thing up/ was some chore/ when i think about it." Bushkowsky's success is that he asks readers to think about it, and to find the thinking worthwhile. (David Carpenter's essays in *Writing Home* celebrate the same informal voice; they praise real life over jargon, humour over deadly earnestness, accessibility over ill-directed piety.) Steven Heigh-ton's continuing development suggests that he is one of the most accomplished of younger Canadian writers, someone to keep reading, and seriously; his collection called *The Ecstasy of Skeptics* looked at places and events, Australia and Nagasaki, and at the body-as-text and "the bitter half-lit boroughs of the seeing." John Pass's poetry also continues to grow, and *Radical Innocence* examined the body/spirit duality by reflecting on the double pull of sex and religion. Eric Trethewey's *The Long Road Home*, though sometimes marked by a kind of throwaway sentimentalism, probed the character of caring as well; sequences on violence and departure, on recovering connectedness, and on irony (the most effective section of the book) led to a series of reflections on the way dispossession and the quest for validation alike create uncertainty. P.K. Page's *Hologram: A Book of Glosas* is a technical tour-de-force, poetry seen—through, and then beyond—the lines of others. Christopher Dewdney's *Demon Pond* continued this now-established poet's continuing enquiry into the relation between nature, dream, introspection, and the word. Keith Maillard's first venture into poetry, *Dementia Americana*, is another striking accomplishment: a revivification of iambic pentameter in a narrative about American relationships, it tells of doors with threats behind them, of people who rely on guns rather than recognition for security, and of the American sickness that leads to an ongoing war between reality and memory, happiness and fear.

I am less attracted to Page's children's texts than to her poetry (*The Goat that Flew* tells fairly conventionally of a prince, a princess, and a wizard). For transformation tales, I am much more drawn to Linda Rogers' *Frankie*

Zapper and the Disappearing Teacher, an institutionally irreverent comic romp with built-in child appeal.

And as far as anthologies are concerned, David and Maggie Helwig's *Best Canadian Stories 94* and *Coming Attractions 94* again provide a good guide to new accomplishments in short fiction; in particular I like the work of Donald F. McNeill, in the latter volume. Dave Speck's *North Coast Collected* is a different kind of book, a close regional sampling rather than a broad survey, and here the subjects recurrently are fish, timber, road-building, and the shore; an interesting story by Jean Rysstand and an Andrew Wreggitt poem stand out. Carol Morrell edited *Grammar of Dissent*, a powerful collection of poetry and prose by three Caribbean-Canadian writers: Claire Harris, M. Nourbese Philip, and Dionne Brand—all of whom probe the strictures that easy assumptions about “equality” only perpetuate. More conventional is R.G. Moyles' textbook, *'Improved by Civilization': English-Canadian Prose to 1914*. Conventional in a different way is Greg Gatenby's *The Wild Is Always There*, a gathering of commentaries on Canada by foreign writers, which range from the familiar contacts (Hemingway, James, London, Cather, Brooke, Butler) to the less known (Borges, Rossini, Cendrars, Burroughs, Eco, Helprin). It's interesting to see how often they don't get the detail right and rely on cliché instead: Algernon Blackwood writes of “reservations” and “Red Indians” and of a “fairyland of peace and loveliness” amid the Muskoka Lakes. A 7-sentence, 8-line squib by Dos Passos scarcely, I think, warranted inclusion; by contrast, Gatenby's commentary, notes, and index to motifs are excellent.

Several books of reference and comment might have learned from Gatenby. I would single out, for example, the three volumes of *Place Names of Alberta*, edited by Aphrodite Karamitsanis (1 & 2) and Tracey Harrison (3); I deplore the format of these books (they are unwieldy in shape, and because they are not overall alphabetical, they assume previous knowledge of provincial geography), yet the information in them could have been fascinating; unfortunately one longs for anecdote and too often has to settle for sparse “factual” data. The same might be said about a lot of the biographical writing that appeared, though in some of these cases one longs for data and has to settle for anecdote. Clearly, some biographies were written simply as introductory guidebooks, and one ought not to fault them for incompleteness; indeed, ECW Press performs a useful task by commissioning brief, readable handbooks on familiar books and writers—among them,

Joseph Adamson's Frye, John Orange's Mowat, Ed Jewinski's Ondaatje, Carol Roberts' Findley, Gary Boire's Callaghan, Zailig Pollock's Klein (more on the works than on the writer). Ira Nadel's *Leonard Cohen: A Life in Art* attempts to do somewhat more: to give a sense of how the writings express a life, giving hints of the longer biography that Nadel has just recently completed. Longer biographies of 1994, however, tended to disappoint. Patricia Morley's attempt to reclaim Leo Kennedy is earnest but too much in awe, as is Judith Skelton Grant's *Robertson Davies*, which tells us a lot about sex and the British Empire—enemas, grovelling, and grammar—but is too unselective in its choice of detail to give shape to the man it so admires. Elspeth Cameron's *Earle Birney: A Life*, by contrast, ends up so interested in the tales of the poet's liaisons that it largely ignores his gentleness and wit as a teacher, with the result that it tells a story of prurience and naked ambition without finding writerly sensitivity. Somewhere between angel and beast is where human beings continue to dwell, much against their impulses sometimes, a judgment it might be useful to remember more often.

Critical books of note examined postmodernism and rhetorical strategems in fiction (Glenn Deer, Janet Paterson), the Maritimes (Gerald Thomas, John Lennox), gender and genre (Cynthia Zimmerman's *Playwriting Women*; S.R. Wilson's *Margaret Atwood's Fairy-Tale Politics*; Janet Guildford and Suzanne Morton's *Separate Spheres*, on women's worlds in the 19th-century Maritimes, including commentaries on marriage and property, Methodism, careers, African-Nova Scotia women, Anna Leonowens and others; Sneja Gunew and Anna Yeatman's *Feminism and the Politics of Difference*, with interesting essays by Margaret Jolly and Roxana Ng on empire and racism); Alice Munro (Ajay Heble on indeterminacy, James Carscallen on the mythological structures achieved by allusion, coding, and other recurrent techniques); power and exclusivity (Frank Davey's *Canadian Literary Power*, on canonicity; Arnold Davidson's *Coyote Country*, on trickster fictions of the Canadian West; Graham Huggan's *Territorial Disputes*, on the mapping strategies that inform both Canadian and Australian fictions; David Jordan's *New World Regionalism*, retrieving its subject from conventional definitions); and on ideology (Evelyn Cobley's *Representing War: Form and Ideology in First World War Narratives*, examining the relation between historical "fact" and lexical construct, with an epilogue on Vietnam; Jane Errington's *The Lion, the Eagle, and Upper Canada*, on the twinned influence of American society and Simcoe's British connec-

tions on the cultural definition of colonial Ontario). I particularly admire Stan Dragland's *Floating Voice: Duncan Campbell Scott and the Literature of Treaty 9*, which takes into account a number of the foregoing topics (region, rhetoric, social mythology, the exclusive power of mapmaking, gender, race, canonicity, and historical ideologies); it reads Scott's "Indian" works against his diaries and against treaty literature, examining the presumptions of authority that led Scott into the wilderness and then back out again, into an intellectual thicket far more dislocating than he ever knew.

Related to these topics are several of the 1994 publications that come under the category "non-fiction." Brock V. Silversides' *The Face-Pullers: Photographing Native Canadians 1871-1939*, for example, covers approximately the same time span as Scott's career; the book is both a curiosity and a documentation: i.e., of the conventions of representation—"dying race," "non-Christian savage"—that for so long governed European perceptions of Native cultures. The photographs are primarily of Blackfoot, Sarcee, Cree, Stoney, Piegan, Assiniboine, and Sioux, including one photo of Big Bear. E.S. Rogers and D.B. Smith edited *Aboriginal Ontario*, a collection of historical perspectives on First Nations. And Ulli Stelzer and Robert Davidson's *Eagle Transforming: The Art of Robert Davidson* includes both photos of the Haida carver at work and a commentary, with some sense of the history and technique of Haida design.

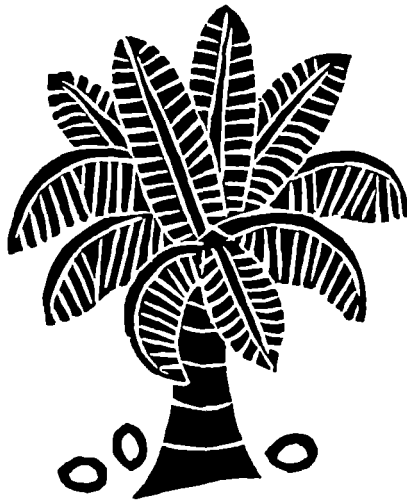
Some commentaries on the Canadian past emphasized images of power (Donald MacKay and Lorne Perry's *Train Country*, on the men and machines that constructed the CNR; Robert R. Reid's *The Front Page Story of World War II*, headlines, year-by-year, from the *Vancouver Sun*, *Province*, and *News-Herald*, and from the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*). Others emphasized the disparity between minority cultures and the effective systems of social control. Sarjeet Singh Jagpal's wonderful book *Becoming Canadians: Pioneer Sikhs In Their Own Words* tells, through photograph and memoir, of the commitment and hard work that helped Indian immigrants to "become Canadian" and overcome, without debilitating rancour, the institutionalized discrimination that was once unexamined social practice. Denise Chong's quietly-told, absorbing personal narrative *The Concubine's Children* tells her family's extraordinary, all-too-characteristic history in Canada: a grandfather is prevented by Canadian law from bringing his family from China; when he is permitted to bring a wife, he already has a Chinese wife and family, but cannot bring them, so declares a concubine as

wife; the secret is preserved from Canadian law, but is known and appreciated in China; the concubine's work helps support the family "at home" as well as the family in Gum Shan; and two generations later, when a granddaughter seeks her history, she opens up the secret that her mother has kept hidden, and together the two women reconnect with their Chinese cousins. Tina Loo's important *Making Law, Order, and Authority in British Columbia, 1821-1871*, relatedly, demonstrates clearly how discrimination became institutionalized. Discourse analysis is brought to bear on fur trade practices, property laws, civil litigation cases, and mining actions, to demonstrate the self-interest of legislation, and the effects of its often unstated prescriptive character on the persons whom it had no interest in punishing but whom it nevertheless diminished or excluded.

Scott Watson's *Jack Shadbolt: Drawings* is indirectly connected with these several topics also, in that "nature," Watson avers, is for Shadbolt "a vortex, a maelstrom opening out onto the forces of darkness and chaos." But where is the boundary line? The "border between nature and colonial culture" keeps shifting, says the text, as the spectacular design of Shadbolt's work reveals. Harold Kalman's ambitious and well-illustrated 2-volume *History of Canadian Architecture* also touches on this question; surveying the changes that have taken Canadian building design from Native dwellings through church and settlement, commerce and industry, regional resistance and Gothic revival, to row housing, the "City Beautiful" movement, brutalism, and post-modernism, the project ends with Kalman's assertion that one feature of Canadian architecture (though its practitioners are still not particularly influential beyond national borders) is the "respect shown to nature." Kalman makes a clear case, though the difference between individual designs and the parking lots of a paved paradise insist that imagination and experience do not yet entirely overlap.

John Moss's book, the *North, Enduring Dreams: An Exploration of Arctic Landscape*, perhaps begins in this distinction. For (like Wiebe's novel, where imagination meets the Hood diaries) Moss's North is part landscape, part desire, part history and part metaphysical apprehension; this is an unusual and absorbing book—enigmatic and gnomic on one page, expansive and generalizing on the next. A travel book, a daybook, a dreambook, a history: Moss has written here what he calls an "exploration"—I see it more as a meditation on both experience and metaphor, for it manages at once to acknowledge and to resist conventional images of Arctic, and to spell out

the health-giving experience of walking through the real place and meeting the real people. This is a private enquiry; but it takes the reader along. John Gray's *Lost in North America* is also a personal book, and it examines Canadian culture from another angle still: that of the witty but passionate commentator. The essays collected here examine language, behaviour, and other features of the Canadian branch of North American culture and, while they observe banality and failure of nerve in contemporary life, they also discover a prospect that is far less bleak than some might expect. "Canada" is an idea, a belief, the book declares. And this declaration serves as a kind of optimistic mantra both for Gray and for the year—one that affirms the reality of the social space, and adds that all that's needed is the will to share it (as distinct from the mere hope that sharing might one day happen) and so to realize in practice the value of who we have been and who we now are. w.n.



A Reader's Deductions

Theory operates according to the principles of indeterminacy;
what furnishes one perception obscures another.

We can not construct the questions for the answers we think
we want.

The axiom can not disprove itself. Nor God undo math.
Forgive necessity.

Most communication is nonverbal; all communication is
partial. Half-truths are not lies.

We only bear witness to our own imagination. Rumour
shapes experience.

Meaning precedes the word. Perception is narrative.
The bee, too, has patterns.

Enigma is the conflux of patterns.

As record of time, a poem is narrative. Image is submerged
narrative. Nouns are verbs.

Imagery is not necessary to a poem. Musicality is not
necessary to a poem. Ideas are not necessary to a poem. A
poem says how its words feel.

The associations of poetry work through convention.
Distrust the subconscious; it furnishes clichés.

Disruption, too, is a convention.

Today is new to the old; yesterday is new to the young.
What is wholly familiar no longer is true.

I am the story I tell. You are my different story.

To resist the sentence is to resist fellowship.

It is not the poem which closes, but the reader who is let go.

What Can Be Named in Numbers Reassures

We mostly agree on the forms of math:
2 by 4s to build with, 3 by 5
paper cards, or 7 by 9
tin pans.
What can be named in numbers reassures.

A bug sails past the window, catching light
which, I suppose, flicks on it through the pear tree
whose thick crest
divides and rations summer.

As if in mind
to choose between the skeins of air, the bug
leaps, zigzags, in a swagger like
the flourish under a signature:
unmeasurable lust.

And poetry,
which measures nothing, spells itself.

But are we needed after all?
Without a noun or numeral the lake
drowns the red sky, is beautiful.

That, also, reassures.

Rescued by Postmodernism

The Escalating Value of James De Mille's 'A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder'

Is James De Mille's *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* a serious novel of ideas in the utopian tradition, or is it simply another of the many "potboilers" produced by this prolific writer of popular fiction? Opinions as to the genre of this text and its aesthetic and intellectual value have changed markedly since the book was first published in 1888. An examination of the challenges the text presents to its would-be interpreters and of the critical strategies that have been deployed in efforts to make sense of it reveals less about the "meaning" of the text itself than about the transformations that have occurred within the field of Canadian literary studies in this century. Tracing the history of *Strange Manuscript's* critical reception demonstrates several distinct shifts in the criteria of literary value that have shaped critical judgment at various points in the development of the canon of Canadian fiction and its criticism.

James De Mille (1833-1880) had two distinct and very different professional careers. One was as an academic; he taught classics at Acadia University from 1860 to 1865, and history, rhetoric and literature at Dalhousie College from 1865 until his early death. Simultaneously, in order to cope with serious financial burdens, he pursued another career as a successful and very productive popular novelist. The dual nature of his working life immediately opens the possibility, even the probability, that his fictional works will ironically exploit the gap between their intellectual author and the popular audience he is addressing. The disparity between De Mille's status as a member of the cultural elite and his role as producer of popular literature has affected critical evaluations of his writing in different ways at different times.

At first glance, *Strange Manuscript* appears to be simply a popular novel of the adventure-in-an-exotic locale variety, which deploys various conventions of popular fiction. It contains a conventional love story, which includes a comically inverted love triangle and is finally brought to a happy conclusion. The story abounds with action, and suspense is maintained by cliff-hanger chapter endings. The text is, however, considerably more complex than this description would suggest. *Strange Manuscript* is riddled with ironies which render it thoroughly ambiguous and raise a number of questions regarding its genre and its thematic content.

Perhaps the most obviously problematic aspect of *Strange Manuscript* is that it is—apparently—unfinished. *Strange Manuscript* was found among De Mille's papers after his death and was first published anonymously eight years later. There is evidence to suggest that he wrote it as early as the late 1860s, and that he may have continued revising it—in particular, searching for a satisfactory ending—until shortly before the end of his life. Debate over the problem of *Strange Manuscript*'s abrupt ending has been a constant factor in the critical literature.

The narrative structure of *Strange Manuscript* is that of a story within a story. The frame story has four characters. Lord Featherstone, a British aristocrat, has fled the boredom of society to cruise the south seas in his yacht. He is accompanied by Dr. Congreve, a medical doctor who is knowledgeable in such fields as geography, botany, and paleontology; by Noel Oxenden, a Cambridge scholar who is an expert on philology; and by Otto Melick, "a *littérateur* from London" (60). The four are becalmed in mid-Atlantic when they discover a copper cylinder containing a letter and a manuscript written on an unusual material which the doctor later identifies as papyrus. To while away the time, they take turns reading the manuscript aloud, pausing between turns to discuss its contents and debate its authenticity.

The letter accompanying the manuscript is signed by one Adam More, who identifies himself as an Englishman who has "been carried by a series of incredible events to a land from which escape is as impossible as from the grave" (8). The manuscript tells the story of More's separation from his ship with a companion, their discovery of a strange race of human creatures who murder his friend, his being carried by an irresistible current through a subterranean channel and emerging into a continent at the south pole which is inhabited by flora and fauna which have survived from prehistoric times and a strange race of people who call themselves Kosekin, or "people of dark-

ness." It is a topsy-turvy world: the Kosekin abhor light and life and worship darkness and death. Their values seem at first glance a direct inversion of those of nineteenth-century western society. More describes meeting and falling in love with the beautiful Almah, who has also come to the land of the Kosekin from elsewhere, and recounts their adventures and misadventures, from which they emerge, it seems, triumphantly. But the reading of the manuscript is abruptly cut off by Lord Featherstone: That's enough for today," said he; "I'm tired, and can't read any more. It's time for supper"(269).

Strange Manuscript appears to be a work of popular fiction, but it is also a work which parodies and critiques its own conventions, particularly through the frame-story character Melick, the London *littérateur*, who is extremely sceptical of More's manuscript's authenticity, calling its writer a "gross plagiarist" (228). Melick is also very critical of More's style, which "has the worst vices of the sensational school" (228). Melick's negative critique may be a clever ploy by De Mille to anticipate and defuse criticism of his work, but this incorporation of critical commentary within the text also suggests an ironic awareness on the part of De Mille of superiority to the sensational genre in which he is working. Melick's criticism, it should be noted, has some justification. More's story is very repetitious, and at times becomes a quite ludicrous parody of the conventional adventure story.

Melick's insistence that More's manuscript is merely an inept fiction is countered by learned disquisitions by the doctor and the Cambridge don, who argue on the basis of scientific evidence for the manuscript's authenticity. Dr. Congreve, for instance, provides extensive discussions of the flora and fauna described by More, identifying them as plants and animals known from fossil evidence. Noel Oxenden identifies the Kosekin language as a form of Hebrew as it might have developed in accordance with Grimm's Law. The effect of this mass of erudition is to lend credibility to More's manuscript. Yet we as readers know that Melick is right, that we are reading a work of fantasy. Thus generic instability is built into the structure of the narrative: are we to be persuaded by the learned apparatus into a suspension of disbelief, or to agree with Melick that More's tale is a shoddy piece of hack writing?

A further level of generic instability is created by the satirical elements in the novel. Critics of *Strange Manuscript* generally agree that it is in some sense a satire. The problem lies in identifying its object.

Adam More, author of the strange manuscript, is an unreliable narrator, a

good-natured fellow who at times seems reasonably intelligent, and at other times appears almost deliberately stupid. He describes Kosekin society in profuse detail, but he is very slow in recognizing the significance of what he observes, and never seems to come to a real understanding of this strange people. Chapter 16 is devoted to More's description of Kosekin values and institutions. It begins,

These people call themselves the Kosekin. Their chief characteristic, or, at least, their most prominent one, is their love of darkness, which perhaps is due to their habit of dwelling in caves. Another feeling, equally strong and perhaps connected with this, is their love of death and dislike of life. This is visible in many ways, and affects all their character. It leads to a passionate self-denial, an incessant effort to benefit others at their own expense. Each one hates life and longs for death. He therefore hates riches, and all things that are associated with life.

He outlines a social structure which inverts the normal order of things, in which "the wealthy class forms the mass of the people, while the aristocratic few consist of paupers" who are "greatly envied by the others" (138). Life for the Kosekin is a constant struggle to divest themselves of wealth, and this struggle is reflected in their legal, political, and economic systems in comical ways. Workers, for instance, strike for longer hours and lower pay, to the frustration of capitalists who are thus forced to accept higher profits. Even at the end of his extended discussion of the Kosekin way of life, however, More seems as baffled as ever:

As to the religion of the Kosekin, I could make nothing of it. They believe that after death they go to what they call the world of darkness. The death that they long for leads to the darkness that they love; and the death and the darkness are eternal. Still, they persist in saying that the death and the darkness together form a state of bliss. They are eloquent about the happiness that awaits them there in the sunless land—the world of darkness; but, for my own part, it has always seemed to me a state of nothingness. (142)

Adam More is continually surprised and horrified at the actions and attitudes of the Kosekin, and utterly unable to comprehend them. The reader recognizes that his judgment is not reliable, but clues as to how the Kosekin world view is supposed to be interpreted are ambiguous.

The commentary provided in the frame story might be expected to shed some light on the meaning of Adam More's experiences, but ambiguities abound at this level too. The frame story is narrated in the third person, but most of it is dialogue, so we must judge the characters largely by their own words. Lord Featherstone appears to represent a decadent aristocracy—he

is self-indulgent, aimless, easily bored. Congreve and Oxenden can be seen as pompous long-winded pedants, although as noted previously their scholarship is sound. Melick's cynicism might be seen as satirizing critics, yet as remarked earlier, his literary judgment is quite acute. And, of course, the irresolvable debate between Congreve and Oxenden on the one hand and Melick on the other as to the authenticity of More's manuscript further complicates the question of its meaning.

It seems impossible to isolate a specific object of *Strange Manuscript's* satire. Melick offers the opinion that More's manuscript is a satire "on things in general":

The satire is directed against the restlessness of humanity; its impulses, feelings, hopes and fears—all that men do and feel and suffer. It mocks us by exhibiting a new race of men, animated by passions and impulses which are directly the opposite of ours, and yet no nearer happiness than we are. . . . [the writer's] general aim is to show that the mere search for happiness per se is a vulgar thing, and must always result in utter nothingness. (226-27)

This view, however, seems too simplistic. Noel Oxenden takes up the religious implications of the Kosekin belief system:

... I sometimes think that the Kosekin may be nearer to the truth than we are. We have by nature a strong love of life—it is our dominant feeling—but yet there is in the minds of all men a deep underlying conviction of the vanity of life, and the worthlessness.... All philosophy and all religions teach us this one solemn truth, that in this life the evil surpasses the good. (236)

One could, of course, interpret the Kosekin contempt for the things of this world as an ironic comment on the materialism of the society of Adam More and the yachtsmen who find his manuscript. The text offers support for such a reading. More encounters an official called the Kohen Gadol who advocates "selfishness as the true law of life, without which no state can prosper" and who is secretly plotting revolution, planning to institute a regime based on the following oddly assorted doctrines:

1. A man should not love others better than himself.
2. Life is not an evil to be got rid of.
3. Other things are to be preferred to death.
4. Poverty is not the best state for man.
5. Unrequited love is not the greatest happiness.
6. Lovers may sometimes marry.
7. To serve is not more honorable than to command.
8. Defeat is not more glorious than victory.
9. To save a life should not be regarded as a criminal offence.

10. The paupers should be forced to take a certain amount of wealth, to relieve the necessities of the rich.

While some of these ideas seem eminently sensible, others are morally suspect and directly contravene Christian teaching, and the final one seems to contradict the Kohen Gadol's own commitment to selfishness. Adam More's description of his own society's values lends further support to the idea that the Kosekin religion is offered as a corrective to unrestrained materialism:

I told him that in my country self was the chief consideration, self-preservation the first law of nature; death the King of Terrors; wealth the object of universal search, poverty the worst of evils; unrequited love nothing less than anguish and despair; to command others the highest glory; victory, honor; defeat, intolerable shame; and other things of the same sort ... (170)

But if the Kosekin contempt for material prosperity compares favourably with the values Adam More attributes to his society, it leads not to spiritual enlightenment but to spiritual death. The Kosekin philosophy could be read as a critique of Christianity. It takes specific Christian values—selflessness, generosity, humility—to their logical extreme. But the Kosekin contempt for the life of this world leads to the worship of poverty, darkness and death, a worship enacted in horrific rituals of human sacrifice (considered a great honour by the victims) and cannibalism (the greatest honour is to be consumed after ritual slaughter—a grotesque perversion of the Christian eucharist). Furthermore, in their pursuit of poverty and privation, the Kosekin exhibit all the vices of the materialistic society which seems to be the opposite of their own, displaying greed, envy, and treachery in their competition to be the poorest and therefore the most honoured members of their death-worshipping society. Adam More, whose name in the Kosekin language is “Atam-or,” which means “man of light,” in the end becomes dictator over the Kosekin with the aid of his beloved consort Almah. He, who throughout his story has repeatedly expressed the most extreme horror at Kosekin customs, is finally content to rule over this perverse people. As a satire on Christian values, the narrative ironically undermines itself, turning into a critique of unChristian values.

S*trange Manuscript*, then, displays characteristic features of popular romance, but it also parodies the conventions of its genre, fails to satisfy the expectations of closure its form arouses, and resists

attempts to grasp its meaning. Nevertheless, it enjoyed considerable popular success from its serialized appearance in American, British and Australian periodicals in 1888 through several editions and reprints by American, British and Canadian presses between 1888 and 1910 (see Parks Intro 305-17). According to Patricia Monk, "The reviews that greeted the novel on its publication are mixed, but on the whole approving" (232), and she cites several positive assessments of the book by Canadian critics writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Popular success is of course no guarantee of critical approval; it is more likely to inspire critical contempt. As French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu demonstrates in *The Field of Cultural Production*, the economy of the cultural field inverts the values which structure other fields such as business and politics, in which popularity sells products and wins elections. In the field of cultural production, interests are masked by the appearance of disinterestedness; the true literary artist is motivated not by crass materialism, but by dedication to his vocation. He produces his work not for the vulgar mass audience but for a small elite readership of other artists, academic critics, and others who possess what Bourdieu calls the "cultural capital" (education, social status, cultivated taste, etc.) which enables appreciation of works of high culture. The field of cultural production is "autonomous" in that it appears to be independent of economic and political determinants:

... the specificity of the literary and artistic field is defined by the fact that the more autonomous it is, ... the more it tends to suspend or reverse the dominant principle of hierarchization; but also ... whatever its degree of independence, it continues to be affected by the laws of the field which encompasses it, those of economic and political profit. The more autonomous the field becomes, the more favourable the symbolic power balance is to the most autonomous producers and the more clear-cut is the division between the field of restricted production ... and the field of large-scale production ... which is *symbolically* excluded and discredited (this symbolically dominant definition is the one that the historians of art and literature *unconsciously* adopt when they exclude from their object of study writers and artists who produced for the market and have often fallen into oblivion). (38-39).

The fiction of James De Mille, which comprises boys' adventure stories, historical romances, and sensational novels, books clearly written in order to earn money, would appear to have little value within the economy of the field of Canadian literary production, and indeed, until the republication of *Strange Manuscript* in McClelland and Stewart's New Canadian Library series in 1969, his work received little critical attention and less critical approval.

The first concerted efforts to define a canon of Canadian literature and to establish Canadian writing as a legitimate academic field were undertaken during the 1920s. From 1920 to 1930 a number of histories and handbooks of Canadian literature were published. Those that mention De Mille's work accord it little value, no doubt because the model of fictional excellence of the day was the nineteenth-century English realistic novel. To critics who sought serious representations of Canadian life, De Mille's sensational and humorous romances could only appear trivial and of little or no value in the construction of a national literature. J. D. Logan, in *Highways of Canadian Literature*, expresses very moderate approval: "De Mille was a prolific writer of mysterious, extravagant, and sentimental fiction . . . [He] certainly possessed a creative imagination . . . and had a distinct sense of dramatic values, which saves such an extravagant tale of adventure as his *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* from developing into the merely grotesque and sensational" (95). Archibald MacMechan, in *The Headwaters of Canadian Literature*, describes De Mille's novels as "facile imitations of the prevailing literary fashions," but defends him against excessively harsh criticism: "Only a gentleman and a scholar possessing something like genius could have written these light, amusing novels" (48). In *An Outline of Canadian Literature*, Lorne Pierce sees little of value in De Mille's fiction, finding fault with his style, his tendency to melodrama and his weak characterization: "None of his novels have a Canadian setting, nor any national point of view, and add nothing to the development of the novel in general or to the Canadian novel in particular" (165). V. B. Rhodenizer, in *A Handbook of Canadian Literature*, is particularly harsh in his assessment of De Mille's work: "In all of his fiction he stresses action and situation. Consequently there is much of caricature, farce, and melodrama, and at best only mild plausibility. He wrote to please not his artistic sense but public taste, and so fell short of greatness but attained wide popularity" (139). Rhodenizer's comment makes particularly clear the degree to which popularity devalues cultural products.

The dismissive attitude demonstrated by the critics of the 1920s persisted until the modern republication of *Strange Manuscript*. Desmond Pacey's *Creative Writing in Canada* ignores De Mille entirely. In his chapter on "Literary Activity in the Maritime Provinces, 1815-1880" in the *Literary History of Canada* Fred Cogswell notes "a waste of a very real talent in the work of James De Mille" (125). He complains of various weaknesses in

Strange Manuscript, but asserts that, "Despite these flaws, *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* is De Mille's most original and powerful work and is by far the most interesting novel to be written in the Maritimes before 1880." Cogswell suggests that the premise of *Strange Manuscript* has potential that is not realized: "His ingenious reversal of the values of contemporary Western life enables him to show human nature as a constant, independent of ideology, and he exploits with telling irony man's tendency to reject the absolute in favour of conformity. Nevertheless, he sacrifices an idea that might have produced another *Gulliver's Travels* for the sake of an adventure story" (127). Once again, De Mille's concessions to popular taste render his work unacceptable.

Cogswell's remarks do, however, point towards the next phase of De Mille criticism. One way of rehabilitating De Mille was to redefine his work, finding serious themes in novels previously dismissed as mere popular fiction. De Mille was, after all, an academic; his popular fictions might well conceal serious themes. Efforts to rescue De Mille's work from the devalued status to which earlier criticism had consigned it began with R. E. Watters's Introduction to the 1969 NCL edition of *Strange Manuscript*, the only one of De Mille's books in which at least some critics seemed to perceive at least potential aesthetic and intellectual value. Watters's effort to insert *Strange Manuscript* into the canon of Canadian fiction appears to have succeeded; his edition initiated a new phase of critical discussion of the text. The novel's canonical status was reinforced by the publication in 1986 by Carleton University's Centre for Editing Early Canadian Texts of the more authoritative edition, with full scholarly apparatus, edited by Malcolm Parks, and articles on De Mille continue to appear in Canadian academic journals.

In his Introduction to *Strange Manuscript*, Watters argues that the novel is fundamentally an anti-utopian satire exposing the inconsistency between social institutions and the value systems that they are supposed to represent and enforce. In the early to mid-seventies a number of essays appeared in which various critics attempted to construct coherent readings of De Mille's text, and in particular to identify the specific object of its satire. What is most striking when one surveys these essays is the degree to which they contradict one another. George Woodcock, in "De Mille and the Utopian Vision," disagrees with Watters's classification of *Strange Manuscript* as an

anti-utopia, complaining that the novel fits no specific generic category, being neither a true utopia nor a true anti-utopia, but merely a satire of the “anti-vitalist” attitudes of Victorian society. In “The Cheerful Inferno of James De Mille,” Crawford Kilian takes a far more charitable view of the text. He analyses it as an example of what Northrop Frye calls “Menippean satire” or “anatomy,” and sees the target of the satire as “irreligion.” Kilian proclaims *Strange Manuscript* “the most unjustly neglected novel in Canadian fiction” (61), and makes quite extravagant claims for its aesthetic and intellectual value, speculating that Canada may have lost a potentially great novelist to the degrading demands of the popular market:

If De Mille was simply an industrious hack with the luck and wit to write one good novel toward the end of his career, well and good; it is still the best novel written in nineteenth-century Canada, and one of the best in all Canadian fiction. But if it was in fact written by a young novelist who was then compelled by financial need to waste his talent on potboilers, it could be said that the potential for a serious ironic tradition existed in Canadian literature over a century ago. (67)

Kenneth J. Hughes, in “A *Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*: Sources, Satire, A Positive Utopia,” is even more extravagant than Kilian. He argues that *Strange Manuscript* is a “positive Utopia” in which Adam More, whose narrative unreliability Hughes ignores, is a Promethean hero who brings renaissance enlightenment to the benighted Kosekin.

All of these critical essays seek to arrive at a single, authoritative reading of the text that unifies its disparate elements and identifies in it a central thematic statement. *Strange Manuscript*, however, resists such totalizing critiques. All of these readings distort the text to some extent by repressing some of its features and privileging others; Hughes in particular takes excessive liberties. The frustrations *Strange Manuscript* presents to the critic bent on achieving a comprehensive analysis is expressed forcefully by M. G. Parks, who, in “Strange to Strangers Only,” resorts to a biographical approach, citing evidence of De Mille’s religious beliefs to support a reading of the novel as a satire on religious extremism:

... De Mille has kept his own point of view so completely behind the scenes that he runs the risk of mystifying the reader or leading the critic into irresponsible interpretation. In both cases an appeal outside the literary work to the nature of the creator is the likeliest means of keeping one’s feet in the slippery mazes of ironies and counter-ironies. (76)

The culmination of efforts to rehabilitate De Mille's work in general, and *Strange Manuscript* in particular, would appear to be Patricia Monk's critical biography, *The Gilded Beaver: An Introduction to the Life and Work of James De Mille*. Throughout her discussion of De Mille's life she emphasizes his literary vocation, reversing the prevailing assumption that De Mille's primary career was as a professor, his writings merely a secondary, money-generating activity. Monk defends De Mille against accusations that he pandered to popular taste by pointing out that he "lived without a serious market for his work in his own country, and was, therefore, forced to conform to the standards and tastes of the United States," and that furthermore his full-time academic work absorbed time and energy that might otherwise have been devoted to writing: "His perseverance in continuing to write in these circumstances deserves applause, not the charge of being a hack who wrote only for mercenary reasons" (252). That an academic critic is prepared to de-emphasize De Mille's role in her own profession in order to enhance the value of his literary productions illustrates clearly the operation of the cultural economy as analysed by Bourdieu. In order to be acceptable as a legitimate subject of academic analysis, De Mille must be shown to be a victim rather than an exploiter of the market-place.

In her chapter on *Strange Manuscript*, basing her analysis on evidence of the text's being unfinished, Monk argues that the novel's satire does have a specific object, the narration developing "towards an assertion that it does not matter what the value set is, the moral code will be inadequate to uphold it" (244). This assertion, says Monk, is never made explicitly, because De Mille never succeeded in finding a satisfactory resolution to the problems his story develops:

Having set up a satirical demonstration of the inadequacy of moral codes, he is without a mechanism to argue for the correction of human folly—at least, human folly defined (in the usual sense of the term) as a failure to adhere to a moral code. Given this technical dilemma and the spiritual bleakness of the notion that all moral codes are inadequate, the abrupt ending of both parts of the double narrative cannot possibly be considered as any form of closure, and the thematic pattern is as unfinished as the patterns of structure, action, symbol and characterization. (245)

Monk's argument for the incompleteness of De Mille's text is persuasive; however, her argument that the text is working towards a specific thematic assertion is less so, resting as it does upon a distinction between "values"

and “moral codes” which is not clearly articulated. Her thesis depends on a single inconsistency in the text’s apparent inversion of western values, but the coincidence that both western and Kosekin society forbid bigamy seems a rather frail thread on which to hang an argument for a coherent thematic statement in a text so full of contradictions, inconsistencies and ambiguities, especially when the thematic assertion inferred from this problematic text is, as Monk concedes, nowhere made explicit.

It would appear that the critical project of reconstructing De Mille as a fundamentally serious writer forced to demean his gifts by conforming to popular taste (and American popular taste, at that) could go little further, although Bruce F. MacDonald, in “*Helena’s Household: James De Mille’s Heretical Text*,” argues for a reading of De Mille’s romance of life among early Roman Christians as a subversion of the orthodox Christianity to which De Mille is generally presumed to have adhered. MacDonald, like M. G. Parks grappling with the ironies of *Strange Manuscript*, has to appeal to biographical information and speculation to support his interpretation.

One way to keep one’s feet in the slippery mazes of ironies and counter-ironies *Strange Manuscript* presents is simply to accept them as textual givens, setting aside the question of whether or not the text is complete and abandoning speculation about authorial intentions. One of the earliest critics to move in this direction was Wayne R. Kime, in “The American Antecedents of James De Mille’s *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*. Although he does seem somewhat preoccupied with a desire to infer the author’s intentions, he focusses on De Mille’s appropriations and parodies of earlier works, commenting approvingly on De Mille’s “resourcefulness as an adapter of used literary material” and on the “pastiche” quality of his text.

Camille R. La Bossière, in “The Mysterious End of James De Mille’s Unfinished *Strange Manuscript*,” rehearses the problems presented by *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* in terms of genre, intertextuality and authorial intention, but focusses on De Mille’s use of repetition as a comic device: La Bossière suggests that de Mille has created a literary joke which places his narrator in a situation in which he is trapped between two extremes with no middle ground to stand on, and that the text’s abrupt ending reflects De Mille’s decision to quit while he was ahead, before the repetition became boring.

Kime’s focus on the parodic nature of *Strange Manuscript* and La

Bossière's treatment of it as a literary joke point in the direction of a post-structuralist reading of the text. In *The Canadian Postmodern*, Linda Hutcheon distinguishes between "a *modernist* search for order in the face of moral and social chaos" and "a *postmodern* urge to trouble, to question, to make both problematic and provisional any such desire for order or truth through the powers of the human imagination" (2). Hutcheon is, of course, referring to fiction rather than to critical writing, but a similar distinction can be drawn between the aims of the formalist criticism that predominated in English Departments throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s and the poststructuralist criticism that has since challenged traditional critical assumptions. The criticism of *Strange Manuscript* cited above takes an essentially modernist approach, seeking to arrive at a single, authoritative reading that unifies the text's disparate elements. More recent readings of the text have tended to treat it as if it were a postmodernist fiction.

In his article on De Mille in *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, George L. Parker notes that De Mille referred to his novels as "potboilers," and remarks that the books "were often parodies of the fictional conventions of his day." In her remarks on De Mille in both "Three Writers of Victorian Canada" and *A Purer Taste*, Carole Gerson points to the self-reflexive strategies his work deploys. Commenting on *Strange Manuscript* she says, "this book contains ironic commentary on both the kind of sensational adventure fiction that De Mille himself wrote and the pretentious literary critics who belittled it, thereby allowing the author the delicious experience of having his cake and eating it too" (*Taste* 55). In *A History of Canadian Literature*, William New describes *Strange Manuscript* as an "anti-Utopian novel [which] combines an attack on an unadulterated view of progress with a satiric send-up of academic discussion," but he also points out the text's self-reflexivity, noting that "the author's focus shifts from the narrative itself to the processes of constructing narrative, and the equally problematic processes of interpretation" (104).

The impact of the burgeoning of critical theory becomes increasingly evident in De Mille criticism. Richard Cavell presents a theory-based reading of De Mille's comic travel narrative *The Dodge Club* in "Bakhtin Reads De Mille: Canadian Literature, Postmodernism, and the Theory of Dialogism." An explicitly poststructuralist reading of *Strange Manuscript* is offered by Janice Kulyk Keefer in *Under Eastern Eyes*. Keefer describes the novel as "strange indeed: a reactionary but radical Victorian text which is bizarrely

post-modernist in technique and conception" (130). She suggests that *Strange Manuscript* might best be described as an "utopia," and concludes that "What De Mille indisputably achieves in his strange fiction is a demolition of our generic and aesthetic expectations, and a deconstruction of those possibilities for imagining radical or alternative mindsets and models which the narrative first seems to create" (137). My working paper, out of which the present essay developed, was motivated by fascination with the "bizarrely post-modernist" qualities of De Mille's Victorian novel, and attempts not to construct a coherent reading but simply to trace the play of irony throughout various levels of the text. Julie Beddoes offers a different kind of poststructuralist analysis in

"Inside Out: Finding the Author in James De Mille's *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*." Beddoes focusses on how Malcolm Parks's CEECT edition of *Strange Manuscript* repeats both "the book's own problematization of chronology" and "a discussion that takes place in the book as to the source and authorship of the strange manuscript" (1), demonstrating that the context of reading determines the construction of the author figure and critical assumptions about authorial intention. Most recently, Kenneth C. Wilson has argued, in "The Nutty Professor: Or, James De Mille in the Fun House," for a rereading of De Mille's fiction in terms of postmodernism: he suggests "that the dominant academic taste culture has to be modified somewhat—perhaps by a cultural-materialist attention [to] the importance of popular writing, or by a postmodern emphasis upon self-reflexivity, parody, and play—before De Mille's work can be fully appreciated" (129-30). Wilson points to the disparity between De Mille's high-culture status and the taste culture of his popular audience as the source of the postmodern-like qualities of his writing and suggests that the affinities of his work to postmodernist style could be "suggestive of the ways in which De Mille's fiction might have subverted the dominant literary taste culture in Canada during the nineteenth century" (146).

I would suggest that the modification of the dominant academic taste culture Wilson advocates has already occurred. The various postmodernist/poststructuralist readings of De Mille cited above indicate that the modernist quest for a coherent reading of De Mille's fiction has been overtaken by a postmodernist impulse to celebrate the self-reflexive, parodic, elusively ironic qualities of his work. The question posed at the outset of this essay has become, if not irrelevant, displaced. To the critics of the 1920s

who were seeking to establish a canon of serious Canadian fiction, De Mille's work was popular and therefore without value in the field of Canadian literary production. To those of the 1960s-70s, who sought to expand the quite recently established national canon and to discover in it "classic" works which could be demonstrated to have value within the context of a modernist aesthetic, it was imperative to treat De Mille's work as serious. *Strange Manuscript*, with its utopian/dystopian elements and apparent satirical intent, is the most amenable of De Mille's fictions to analysis as a novel of ideas. With the advent of a postmodernist aesthetic and a host of new theoretical tools for the analysis of literary texts, *Strange Manuscript* in particular, and De Mille's work more generally, acquires greater cultural and academic value, offering an expanded body of material upon which criticism can work. The problem of whether *Strange Manuscript* is a serious novel of ideas by a nineteenth-century Canadian intellectual or a hack work of vulgar popular fiction produced for strictly mercenary reasons ceases to be a problem. The gap between author and audience becomes an invitation to investigate questions of cultural production, and the text's troublesome generic instability becomes, ironically, the primary source of its aesthetic and intellectual value.

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Deduction of the Aesthetic Judgement

The rule of quietness has an exception: If you make squeaking
or “pishing” noises a bird may come to investigate.

—*National Geographic* FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA

Kant the philosopher says the thing about beauty is
we want to tell each other about it. And I say
fair enough. You know when it comes autumn and the trees
stand like columns of classifications shattered and the leaves sift
pointy and wide and itchy as wool all the way down and when they tap you
swivelling you feel privileged as though under the dome of the sky
and under the fractured cupolas, the treecrowns, chance
has scraped you with dry bright laurels the way
Romans, Greeks garlanded the brows of poets? Not evergreen
certainly but a touch of the Lucretian crisp
caducity of things.

I tell you you only have to walk a fairly short stretch
before you get to some kind of happiness. Pursuit
of the same, whatever they say, is superfluous, really: just
look where the thorns, the hooks, and the stinging things
scratch up against land-titles, look for
ravines and unpromising Pisgahs and stand there
a very basic Orpheus calling up birds by pretending you're Sextus
Propertius kissing, kissing both cheeks of Zephyrus where even
disbanded gravel resonates *Cynthia*, where blueprints
shred on thistles, clot on the tracks and backs
of snails, and lie down broke

beneath pine boughs. Birds being curious just can't
resist the amorous enigma of what you do
with your breath and the wildest
is, in a sense, Lesbia's sparrow and its curiosity soon joins you
to what?— I don't know— with a full-lipped, Eurydicean kiss.

Dead-winter birds! You there with calls lighter than your bodies already
light as breaths! You shine like stars in daylight... Hear them
in the distance over Sisyphean wind pushing clunky cold-snap
smoke off the stacks and pipes of the skyline and rattling
rotary cans slant across cracked streets, hear them over
the eternal hissing hasty glare of windshields up expressway.

Immanuel Kant, you'd like them, dead-winter birds I mean, they're beauty
an sich and yet they're so ridiculously sociable and talk
and talk and talk about whatever beauty *an sich* talks about
with the pared flint of its toenails, glint of its bill eager to strike out
a flicker and lisp of community the way not a night goes over but stars get
together though they're all of distinctly
different generations in the sky not quite apparent till
such celestials have worked every distance, unlikelyhood, eclipse
through to tap like an egg-tooth the dome of now. Birds and stars somehow
without one touch make things more palpable. Dead-winter finches
pass calls under the breath of the wind, kinglets slip wingbeats
under death and hold in one a flashing society in the wingless world.

(Broken thoughts like these lie easy on the backs,
in the voices of the birds hanging out
right side up and upside down in the bitter weather.)

Consequently under sun climbing like a nuthatch you ask yourself, how *is*
it, you idiot, that you can pass from one place to another when
there's so much in place right now right here
where you are. Only oversight makes the grand tour. *Light backs*, you
might murmur, *light wings*, *you've rescued me so often*.

So Kant being on my mind I was confiding as much to a guy
going by and striking gloved palms he spoke: "O dishonest man. Really.
You're just loading those poor little birds with your
silly feelings. They're not beasts of burden for
God's sake. What did they ever do in this life
to deserve such treatment?"

And said I with the kiss still buzzing lightly in my lips, "Well we all
came out of the earth, didn't we, ultimately.
What comes to mind must have come out of earth then
don't you think?" And the snapped-off systems kept falling anyway
past me like garlands awry, some tickling by chance like deciduous
downfeathers
from some high breast and I thinking *Give me a kiss Lesbia, a thousand*
— *make that ten thousand...*

Reading Frames of Reference

The Satire of Exegesis in James De Mille's 'A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder'

Why does it disturb us that the map be included in the map and the thousand and one nights in the book of the Thousand and One Nights? Why does it disturb us that Don Quixote be a reader of the Quixote and Hamlet a spectator of Hamlet? I believe I have found the reason: these inversions suggest that if the characters of a fictional work can be readers or spectators, we, its readers or spectators, can be fictitious. In 1833, Carlyle observed that the history of the universe is an infinite sacred book that all men write and try to understand, and in which they are also written. JORGE LUIS BORGES (196)

Pulled from the ocean of imagination, James De Mille's *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* (1888)¹ fairly drips with the significance of exegesis. The novel's very title signals its tale-within-a-tale hermeneutic, its complex interplay between romance narrative (the strange manuscript transcribed by sailor Adam More) and frame story (the reading and interpretation of the found manuscript by Melick, Congreve, Oxenden, and Featherstone). From the outset of the novel, the romance and the frame become as irrevocably "stuck together" as the paper boats—one red and one white—that Melick launches, in search of amusement, from Featherstone's wind-abandoned yacht. If reinterpreted symbolically, the paper boat analogy begins to reveal the ambiguity of De Mille's pairing of frame and romance: one narrative movement is "red" (passionate, morally censurable), and the other is "white" (pure, morally ratified), but which is which? The critical spotlight has tended to focus on the romance, as if De Mille's satire were aimed solely at the piously cannibalistic Kosekin race nestled in tropical Antarctica, a society that is "at first glance better but ultimately as bad as actual Western society, or worse" (Parks, "Strange to

Strangers Only” 64). If the Kosekin world is morally censurable, however, surely Adam More is no white paper boat of morality within it: witness his pseudo-Christian cant, his inclination toward “downright bigamy” (*SM* 181), his hypocritical willingness at the end of the novel to become “‘Atamor, the Man of Light’” (*SM* 263) by assuming the unlimited wealth and power of the Melek class in Kosekin society. But neither can the moral centre of *A Strange Manuscript* be found in its exegetical frame story, which constitutes five of the novel’s thirty-one chapters. Moving in and out of focus to spotlight the action of the romance narrative, the curious frame does not “explain” More’s manuscript in any profound sense at all; nor does it provide a consistent moral ground of support for More’s outraged sensibilities in the cannibalistic land of the Kosekins. Three of the four men on the yacht are hopelessly superficial interpreters: the degenerate morality of Kosekin society is ironically accentuated by the silence of Congreve, Oxenden, and Featherstone on questions of Kosekin religion and values—conspicuous questions that do not cross the minds of these simple exegetes.² Readers of *A Strange Manuscript* thus search in vain for a white boat, a moral norm, with which to align themselves in order to feel superior to the target of the satire. Indeed, it is central to De Mille’s satiric design that although satire is evidently at work in the novel, the reader cannot dogmatically pin down the target of the attack.

The frame story, however, by virtue of the very inside-outside tensions that define it aesthetically as *frame*, does provide a clue to the “correct” moral response. A literary or pictorial frame not only differentiates realms but, as John Matthews states in his study of *Wuthering Heights*, it “enables a relation between differentiated realms (the reader and the author, the world and the artwork, reality and imagination, and so on)” (qtd. in Pearson 27). As the “permeable boundary between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ of a work of art” (Macaskill 2500-A), the frame participates in both the fictional world of the novel and the “real” world of the reader. Otherwise put, the frame constitutes “the strategic locus of value in the literary text” because it “both constitutes and is constituted by an interplay between stylistic ‘insides’ and ideological ‘outsides’” (Macaskill 2500-A).³ De Mille’s frame, for example, is both an internal stylistic device and an external cautionary tale about the exercise of exegesis. As the latter, it tacitly reminds readers that they are exegetes of the novel just as surely as the foursome on board the yacht are of Adam More, and as More is, in turn, of the Kosekins.

Interpretation or exegesis thus unfolds itself in De Mille's novel in a series of—as Borges would have it in the above epigraph—metaphysically disturbing frames: the reader reading the readers of a reader of a strange land.

John Pearson argues that “[i]ntracompositional frames...bespeak a desire to integrate artist, art work and spectator/reader; they seek to bring creation, product and consumption within one frame that would not exclude or deny any part of the esthetic process” (16). I am taking some liberties with Pearson's notion in suggesting that *A Strange Manuscript* exhibits such a frame, since the literary works that fit his model are those with overt authorial prefaces (Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, for instance, or Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*). Although *A Strange Manuscript* has no such preface, its opening sentences distance the frame story from the reader by means of the narrative/authorial voice: “It occurred as far back as February 15, 1850. It happened on that day that the yacht *Falcon* lay becalmed upon the ocean between the Canaries and the Madeira Islands” (SM1). The pronoun *it* refers to the frame story itself—ie., the event which is the finding and subsequent reading of the manuscript—and thus signals an authorial positioning of the frame within time, as does Hawthorne's “Custom-House” sketch (much more overtly, admittedly) in *The Scarlet Letter*.

Perhaps the most significant means by which De Mille's frame is “intra-compositional”, however, is in its fashioning of Melick, the sceptical *littérateur* on board Featherstone's indolent yacht. Melick, whose name echoes the class of Kosekins that is ironically—and, it would seem, symbolically—eliminated at the end of the novel, is the most self-conscious of several means by which De Mille pulls the “outer” world of the frame story into the “inner” world of the romance narrative, subsequently pulling the external reader into the novel's inner fictional world of reading and exegesis.⁴ Significantly, it is to Melick that the reader continually turns for some sort of normative reading—albeit sceptical, albeit outspoken—both of the manuscript and of the other exegetes on board the *Falcon*. Melick not only gestures to the exegetical process itself by continually revising his opinion/definition of the strange manuscript and by quoting other texts, but he also provides a continual comic corrective (and comic relief) to the welter of scientific jargon expounded by Congreve and Oxenden. As the locus of scepticism and comedy (and perhaps even authorial intention) in *A Strange Manuscript*, Melick seems to hold the key to a more comprehensive

critical assessment of this “most unjustly neglected novel in Canadian fiction” (Kilian 61), namely, the extent to which exegesis itself is the butt of De Mille’s satiric humour.

Considerations of genre are not always relevant to the impetus of satire in a given work of literature; in De Mille studies, such considerations create an all too familiar critical conundrum.⁵ Nonetheless, Northrop Frye’s definition of Menippean satire⁶—or “anatomy”, as Frye prefers to call it—provides some useful insights into the way in which genre can elucidate both the satiric thrust and the frame of De Mille’s novel.⁷ The anatomy, the satire of “ideas”, contains by definition the seminal characteristic of each of the two narrative movements in *A Strange Manuscript*: namely, the “Utopian”⁸ construction of Adam More’s romance narrative, and the exegetical “symposium”⁹ of the characters in the frame story. Within the Utopian structure, says Frye, one often finds the *ingenu*: the “outsider” who “has no dogmatic views of his own, but...grants none of the premises which make the absurdities of society look logical to those accustomed to them” (232). In this regard, Adam More among the Kosekins comes readily to mind. The mutual misunderstanding between the two sides seems to occur as a result of irreconcilable differences in “intellectual pattern” (Frye 310); as becomes apparent in the romance-Utopia story, however, More and the cannibals ironically share many of the same motivations for their actions.¹⁰ Regarding the symposium structure, Frye cites the satirist’s predilection for “piling up an enormous mass of erudition about his theme or...overwhelming his pedantic targets with an avalanche of their own jargon” (311). De Mille accomplishes this in his rendering of Congreve and Oxenden in the frame: their cerebral interpretations of the minutiae of More’s adventure qualify as “masses of erudition” around the theme of exegesis; in the process, they become unwitting satiric “targets” for the mockery of Melick and the amusement of the reader. In both the romance and the frame, then, it is ultimately the idea of exegesis that is mocked. As such, De Mille’s frame not only constitutes one of two characteristic movements (ie., the “symposium”) in the anatomy, but also—by virtue of its metafictional nature, which casts into doubt the very process of exegesis and thus the novel’s meaning for the reader—it effectively particularizes or renames that anatomy as a comprehensive satire of exegesis. In other words, the frame is both component (in the undifferentiated genre of anatomy) and category. The frame is the satire of exegesis which is De Mille’s novel.

Inherent in the anatomy—precisely because it *is* the satire of ideas, fixed intellectual patterns, systems of reasoning—is “the constant tendency to self-parody” (Frye 234), satire’s wry defense against its own creation of fixed patterns or systems of exegesis. That De Mille himself was interested in the self-parody of metafiction is readily apparent. The majority of his novels fall into categories which he defines as either “sensation novel” or “satirical romance”—categories which poke considerable fun at the act of authorial creation. For example, *Cord and Crease* (1868; 1869) is a sensation novel which contains within it De Mille’s self-consciously ironic working definition of the sensation novel, disguised as a conversation between a Reverend Courtney Despard and a Mrs. Thornton:

...in each novel [says the Reverend] there are certain situations. Perhaps on average there may be forty each. Interesting characters also may average ten each. Thrilling scenes twenty each. Overwhelming catastrophes fifteen each...but where you read according to my plan you have the aggregate of all these effects in one combined—that is to say, in ten books which I read at once I have two hundred thrilling scenes, one hundred and fifty overwhelming catastrophes, one hundred interesting characters, and four hundred situations of absorbing fascination...By following this rule I have been able to stimulate a somewhat jaded appetite, and to keep abreast of the literature of the day. (qtd. in Monk 215)

In a letter to a Messrs. Harnes, De Mille explains his other favourite flavour of composition, the “satirical romance”, as follows:

The chief characteristic...is the union of sensationalism with extravagant humour: the most tragic incidents are brought forward only to be dismissed with playful mockery; the plot is highly elaborated, tragedy & comedy exist side by side, the prevalent [sic] atmosphere is one of mock seriousness; and the author while he freely uses the most startling and harrowing details never fails to turn them into ridicule, and thus appears to satirize and burlesque the whole sensational school of fiction. (qtd. in Monk 206)

And *The Dodge Club* (1869), which De Mille lists among his “satirical romances”, provides another interesting comparison with *A Strange Manuscript*. There, the third-person narrator “is frequently interrupted by the author who mocks what he is writing or introduces a digression” (Monk 204), whereas in *A Strange Manuscript* the frame story itself, with its obtuse exegetes, functions as the self-parodic element. We would search long and hard for a better critique of the “novel of ideas” than the undermining of the idea that ideas can be cogently explained. It seems likely that De Mille, a professor of rhetoric, classics, and English literature at Acadia and Dalhousie universities, also envisioned *A Strange Manuscript* as a send-up of

his own decidedly exegetical profession—perhaps even of scholarship in general. Such a satiric impetus might account for *A Strange Manuscript's* not having been released into the sea of publication during De Mille's lifetime.¹¹

No mere string of repetitions, as has been argued (La Bossière 44),¹² the narrative structure of *A Strange Manuscript* suits John Barth's notion of "digression and return...theme and variation" (237), the typical structure of a framed tale and one congenial to the satire of exegesis. This oppositional movement occurs in three different narrative sites in *A Strange Manuscript*: in the frame story, in the romance narrative, and in the interplay between the two. In the frame story, the movement consists in the intellectual chess game played amongst the exegetes: Melick's comic check-mating of his opponents signals the superiority of his scepticism over their haughty boredom (Featherstone) and passive anatomizing (Congreve and Oxenden). In the romance, the contradictory tensions are between movement and stasis, security and insecurity, escape and return—patterns that work themselves out structurally (as I demonstrate in the Appendix) in "set pieces" of narrated action that mirror and frame each other.¹³ In the interplay between frame and romance, the reader's experience of theme and variation is that of reading the outside against the inside: the exegetes against the manuscript, Melick the reader's ally against the Melek that Adam More becomes. This final category not only "frames" the other two in the larger narrative context but also signals that the relationship between the romance and the frame is an "associative or thematic"—or more specifically, a "cautionary or prophetic"—one, as Barth says (232), directed to the reader about the nature of exegesis.

It is Melick who navigates the reader toward the exegetical complexities in *A Strange Manuscript*. From the outset of the frame story, he is clearly an anomaly on board Featherstone's yacht. In the narrator's brief introductory description of the yachters, Melick conspicuously is *not* introduced as a friend of Featherstone's, although Oxenden and Congreve merit the respective epithets "intimate friend" and "friend and medical attendant" (SM 1). Melick is further distinguished from his companions by his activity: he is the only "energetic fallah" (SM 2), in Featherstone's words, aboard the metaphorically sleepy boat.¹⁴ Rather than participate in the "indolent repose", "the dull and languid repose" of the others (SM 1), Melick takes the initiative throughout the entire first chapter of the frame. Not only does he

concoct the paper boat race that finds the copper cylinder, but he fishes out the cylinder, breaks it open, and is the manuscript's first reader. Melick the *littérateur* thus literally engages the literary text.¹⁵ Haughty Lord Featherstone, by contrast, merely poses with "a novel in his hand, which he was pretending to read" (*SM* 1-2); he later admits, unsurprisingly, that he is an "infernally bad reader" (*SM* 71). Given the names of the ineffective exegetes—Featherstone the featherweight,¹⁶ Oxenden the pedantic "Oxford don" (Hughes 122), Congreve the purblind foil of his Restoration comedian namesake—and given the frame's reiterated connection between the Kosekin language and Hebrew, we must see Melick as further elevated amongst his peers by his name's Hebrew equivalent: *Melech*, king.

The very chapter titles in the frame story ("Scientific Theories and Scepticism," "Belief and Unbelief") draw attention to Melick, the sceptic who continually undercuts the insufferable anatomizing of Congreve and Oxenden. Melick emerges as the single challenger (other than the reader) to the Congreve/Oxenden system of intellection that seeks to use scientific knowledge to "accoun[t] for and thereby intellectually domesticat[e]" the "bizarre and implausible" details of More's manuscript (Kime 298). Fred Cogswell exposes Congreve's and Oxenden's dry-as-dust exegesis when he describes the frame commentary as "more boring than convincing" (113), a description that meshes with Sigmund Freud's observation that excessively pedantic "intellectual processes" are distinctly unfunny (283). Cogswell, however, goes on to criticize the "disproportionate number of pages" allotted to the frame tale (113), thereby ignoring what—in Henri Bergson's terms—might be called the "corrective" humour of Melick.¹⁷ Freud reminds us that the Congreve/Oxenden variety of pedantic "abstract reflection" can be shocked into comedy "when that mode of thought is suddenly interrupted" (283). Melick provides such interruption. His pushy humour takes both doggerel and sarcastic form, subverting the rational, adult world of the other exegetes with its seemingly childish delight in nonsense. He recites a "chicken and egg" rhyme in the midst of an evolutionist-creationist debate about eyeless fish. He offers Congreve a glass of wine with seeming solicitude: "After all those statistics...you must feel rather dry" (*SM* 67). He sings a drinking song in praise of the dodo that derails the doctor's careful ornithological distinctions. Exploiting Congreve's use of the word "calamites" in a particularly dense passage of scientific nomenclature, Melick sputters, "Talking of calamities, what greater calamity can there be than such a torrent of

unknown words? Talk English, doctor, and we shall be able to appreciate you” (149). In a brilliant jibe at the academic fervour to own ideas, Melick proposes two theories about the origins of the Kosekins and cautions “they are both mine and I warn all present to keep their hands off them, for on my return I intend to take out a copyright” (*SM* 153).

Although the other exegetes in the frame studiously ignore such quips, the reader nevertheless takes Melick’s satiric point: namely, that “there is no theory, however wild and fantastic, which some man of science will not be ready to support and to fortify by endless arguments, all of the most plausible kind” (*SM* 70). One of the jewels of Melick’s commentary is addressed to Oxenden, following the latter’s contorted reapplication of Grimm’s Law (in chapter 26, entitled “Grimm’s Law Again”) to the Semitic origin of the Kosekins. In one fell swoop, Melick manages to ridicule academic puerility, More’s incredible adventures, the idea of athelebs, and the existence of the Kosekins in general:

I never knew before the all-sufficient nature of Grimm’s Law. Why, it can unlock any mystery! When I get home I must buy one—a tame one, if possible—and keep him with me always. It is more useful to a literary man than to any other. It is said that with a knowledge of Grimm’s Law a man may wander through the world from Iceland to Ceylon, and converse pleasantly in all the Indo-European languages. More must have had Grimm’s Law stowed away somewhere about him; and that’s the reason why he escaped the icebergs, the volcanos, the cannibals, the subterranean channel monster, and arrived at last safe and sound in the land of the Kosekin. What I want is Grimm’s Law—a nice tidy one, well trained, in good working order, and kind in harness; and the moment I get one I intend to go to the land of the Kosekin myself. (*SM* 233)

The reader can only applaud Melick’s exposure of intellectual pedantry that cannot see beyond its own exegetical pen. Melick’s most stunning barb of sarcasm is received straight up by the bovine Oxenden:

What a pity it is...that the writer of this manuscript had not the philological, theological, sociological, geological, palaeological, ontological, ornithological, and all the other logical attainments of yourself and the doctor! He could then have given us a complete view of the nature of the Kosekin, morally and physically. (*SM* 238)

Oxenden plays directly into Melick’s exposure of academic elitism by subsequently attributing More’s manuscript deficiencies to his “simple-minded” and “emotional” sailor’s nature (*SM* 238). The comment recalls Congreve’s equally condescending assumption that More “has a decidedly unscientific

mind" (SM 144). The reader cannot help but join in the satiric joke against Oxenden and Congreve for their glaring errors in exegesis: their penchant for the passive elaboration of knowledge rather than its active interrogation; their desire to particularize knowledge rather than to contextualize it. For such reasons, Melick, the "professional cynic, sceptic, and scoffer" (SM 145), indeed seems our only reasonable ally in the frame.

Nowhere does Melick's scepticism show itself more metafictionally than in his insistence on the "fictional" nature of More's manuscript. In his stubborn opinion that the manuscript is the work of an outside author/creator, the frame-bound Melick implicitly gestures beyond the fiction itself, toward De Mille. Unlike his companions who accept More's manuscript at face value and proceed to their own exegeses on the premise of its truthfulness, Melick views the manuscript solely as a work of fiction. He becomes, in effect, a literary critic of More's story, preoccupied with its genre and style and scornful of its clichéd lack of verisimilitude. In the manner of a responsible critic, however, his opinion of the manuscript metamorphoses from outright dismissal to grudgingly serious consideration. Significantly, the critical labels that Melick attaches to the manuscript as he revises his interpretations of it are De Mille's own: the pejorative "sensation novel" (SM 61), and the more complex "satirical romance" (SM 226). Melick even attempts to define the "quiet satire" at work in More's manuscript as "directed against the restlessness of humanity" (SM 226), a comment that at least one twentieth-century critic has appropriated to describe De Mille's novel as a whole.¹⁸ Congreve and Oxenden, predictably, resist Melick's scepticism. "For my own part," says Congreve, "I feel like taking More's statements at their utmost value" (SM 70). Oxenden, denying Melick's observation that there is a "perpetual undercurrent of meaning and innuendo...in every line," calls More's account "a plain narrative of facts" (SM 227). Arguably, these failed attempts at definition (including Featherstone's "scientific romance" [SM 226]) are intended by De Mille to serve as both advertisement and warning to the reader of his *Strange Manuscript*. But whether or not such an argument is convincing, it seems clear once again that Melick—who brings a fairly broad base of previous knowledge to bear upon his interpretations, including *Paradise Lost*, *Gulliver's Travels*, and *Robinson Crusoe* (SM 228)—is emblematic of the comprehensive process of exegesis that rightly stands in opposition to the intellectual pedantry of Congreve and Oxenden.

Wayne R. Kime argues for *A Strange Manuscript's* power to transform the otherwise "passive" reader into an "enterprising...detective" who will effectively "undertake a scrutiny of More's manuscript identical in aim to that being performed by the auditors on board the *Falcon*" (298-99). Such a statement is certainly true, as far as it goes. It doesn't, however, go far enough. Kime's own sense of the incompleteness of his model reveals itself in his footnoted suggestion that the frame story itself might merit a readerly interrogation.¹⁹ It is crucial that an interpretation of *A Strange Manuscript* take advantage of the exegetical double vision that the novel affords. The reader necessarily receives More's strange reading of the strange Kosekins through the filter of the symposium on board the *Falcon*, itself a group that cannot claim immunity to satiric censure. Thematically and structurally the novel demands that the reader superimpose the two readings: read the romance through the frame, and subsequently re-scrutinize the frame through the romance. What does such a consideration reveal? How are the frame story and the romance narrative mutually informative? Read concurrently, the frame and romance reveal misinterpretations, omissions, discrepancies, unanswered or ignored questions. They reveal the impossibility of exegetical consensus and thus the impossibility of ending (an important issue to consider in relation to De Mille's "unfinished" novel). Perhaps the inter-relationship of the two narrative movements is, simply, a moral one: a warning against the amorality of bad readers and their faulty exegesis; a warning against exegetical abso-lutism, or, as in More's case, exegetical abdication. It is an inter-relationship specifically aimed at the reader, whose responsibility lies in seeing *A Strange Manuscript* as simultaneously a warning and an invitation: a warning about the difficulty of exegesis that nevertheless invites the reader to become an exegete in order to reach this conclusion.

Perhaps the most obvious discrepancy in the reader's superimposition of frame on romance is the absolute omission, in all discussions by the exegetes on Featherstone's yacht, of the "human interest" stories in More's manuscript. Central issues such as cannibalism, Kosekin society in general, and the love triangle between More, Almah, and Layelah are left unexamined despite the fact that the structure of the novel provides ample opportunity for—and in effect seems deliberately to court—such discussion. Agnew's death at the hands of the cannibals in chapter 4 is never mentioned by the exegetes in chapter 7, despite More's reiterated sorrow about it. More

could not be more obvious about his horror at the Kosekin custom of cannibalism, yet not one of the exegetes—not even Melick—makes mention in chapter 17 of this central concern of More’s throughout chapters 9-16. Incredibly, cannibalism is altogether left out of the exegesis (unless one counts Melick’s chapter 26 listing of “the cannibals” as one of the Kosekin dangers escaped by More). This exegetical hole might not draw the reader’s attention were it not that the men on the boat make overt references to cannibalism and food on other occasions: Congreve is obsessed with the idea, in chapter one, that the copper cylinder might contain some sort of “meat” (*SM* 5-6); Oxenden makes what is both a joke and a racist comment when he suggests that the cylinder might contain “the mangled remains of one of the wives of some Moorish pasha” (*SM* 6); the exegetes regularly interrupt their reading of the manuscript in order to eat their own meals. In a similar vein, chapters 19-25 deal overtly with More’s dilemma of loving two women at the same time, yet it is athalebs and alphabets that preoccupy the exegetes in chapters 26-27. More’s inclination toward bigamy is never mentioned by the men on the yacht, and the irony of his morally unhealthy fear of what must be seen as female initiative is never exposed.²⁰

De Mille implicitly uses the progress of More’s narrative to fashion a concurrent moral/exegetical critique against his symposium of readers. High on the list of omissions in the frame is Christianity, the implicit but absent moral referent that is obliquely brought to the reader’s attention again and again. More’s tale is replete with Biblical echoes, almost all of which occur ironically, yet no mention is made of them. More’s Christian name “Adam”, for example, is never interpreted symbolically by the exegetes despite the fact that “Adam More”—with its allusion both to the pre-lapsarian Adam and to the Renaissance man Thomas More, author of *Utopia*—seems a particularly reader-friendly detail. Adam More himself, who constantly cribs Judaeo-Christian diction, explicitly aligns himself with the Biblical Adam sentences before the novel’s close: in an ironic comment that places him firmly in a post-lapsarian Eden, he claims that he must be “the only man since Adam that ever was married without knowing it” (*SM* 269). The self-reference here betrays on More’s part at least a passing familiarity with the Bible, and thus necessitates a re-scrutiny of the earlier Biblical echoes in his manuscript. Examples include More’s essentially pantheistic praise to the elements (“falling on my knees I thanked the Almighty Ruler of the skies for this marvellous deliverance” [*SM* 49]; “Light had come and we rejoiced and

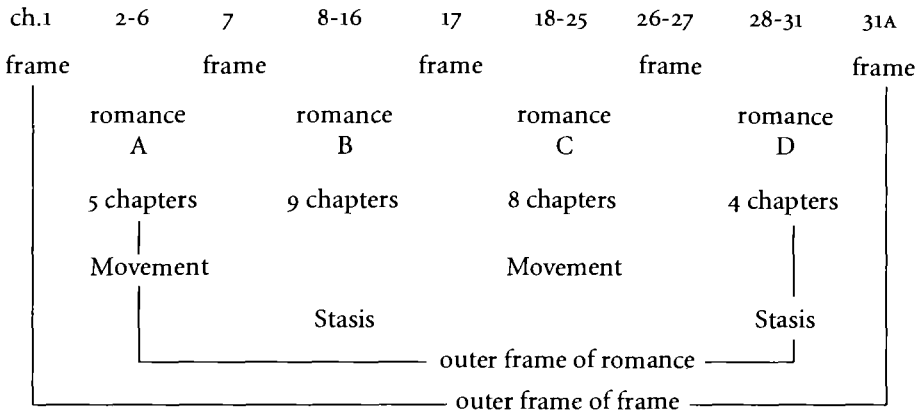
were exceeding glad" [SM 204]); his Genesis-like rendering of his escape with Layelah during which "darkness was upon the face of the deep" (SM 220); and his ultimate declaration of himself "Atam-or, the Man of Light", a symbolic rival to the self-proclaimed Light of the World, Jesus Christ, the sinless second Adam of St. Paul's letters. Moreover, it does not take a particularly perceptive reader to note that the Kosekin ideal of right living is an extremist version of Christ's Beatitudes, yet the exegetes aboard the yacht (like More himself) never acknowledge this "principal subtext or conceptual referent" for the romance narrative (La Bossière 47). Similarly Oxenden's "sermon" in chapter 27, undertaken to justify the "truth" of the Kosekins' love of death, could not be more classically ironic in its non-reference to Christianity. In it, Oxenden speaks of the vanity of life with reference to every religion (Buddhist, Hindu, Chinese, Japanese, ancient Greek) except "the one most obviously being invoked by De Mille" (La Bossière 47). Displaying his prowess as a philologist, Oxenden defines the Kosekins as a Semitic race (SM 150-52) yet never bothers to fit them into Jewish history²¹ or to point out—never mind ponder—the ironic import of the Hebrew-based words "Kosekin" (*cosek* = darkness) and "Kohen" (*cohen* = priest) (Watters xiii, fnt 5).²² Readers who are aware that De Mille was "an accomplished linguist" (Watters xiii, fnt 5) can readily see that Oxenden's linguistic myopisms and the novel's hidden etymologies display further calculated attempts by De Mille to satirize the murky business of interpretation.

It is true, as R.E. Watters maintains, that misinterpretation of the "other" is a consistent thematic thread between the frame and the romance narrative. Just as the readers of the manuscript talk at cross-purposes in the frame,²³ Adam More and the Kosekins in the romance assess each other according to their own circumscribed understandings of "human nature" and thus are soon frustrated by the other side's inability to conform. It cannot be subsequently true, however, as Watters contends, that De Mille's central theme in *A Strange Manuscript* is the validity of each and every individual interpretation or attempt at exegesis.²⁴ Surely accuracy counts for something. Surely More's view of the Kosekins must be tempered by the reader(s)'s view of More himself—a character blind to the simple truth that Kosekin motivations, values, and practices are merely a half twist in perspective from his own, or at most, the logical extreme.²⁵ Surely, in turn, the pedantic Congreve and Oxenden and the bored Featherstone deserve less exegetical weight, in the final analysis, than the sceptical Melick—a charac-

ter whose indispensable quality of textual interrogation seems symbolically in danger of elimination in a critical climate where Mores/mores can usurp Meleks in the twinkle of a gun blast.

If the “theme” in *A Strange Manuscript* is exegesis, then its “variation” (to use John Barth’s terms) is also exegesis—from a slightly different angle. From a different frame of reference. *A Strange Manuscript* is an anatomy poking fun at the subject of anatomies, an idea making a “mockery” of itself, to borrow one of Adam More’s favourite words. But above all, perhaps—and ironically rather than satirically—*A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* is (un)finished. Critical debate continues,²⁶ yet the simple truth about the end of De Mille’s novel is that it is finished in its incompleteness, it is completely (un)finished. Had Featherstone’s announcement of yet another dinner break preceded yet another exegetical session instead of ending the novel, exegesis itself would still have been under satiric fire, and the responsibility of reading would remain both a necessity and an impossibility. “An extraordinary number of great satires,” says Frye, “are fragmentary, unfinished, or anonymous” (234). The frame story in *A Strange Manuscript*, seemingly cut off in mid-exegesis, reminds us that limits are arbitrary, that our reading life is too short for the book we live, that we ourselves must be held up to ridicule—as Melick holds up his peers, as someone may hold up this article—if we smugly refuse the perpetual call to read. We will always be incomplete readers of readers, and we will always (incompletely) be read. To think otherwise would be like looking at Degas’ *Tête-à-tête dîner*, “where the frame cuts off half of the man’s face” (Frow 30, fnnt 15), and not recognizing that the missing half is our own.

Appendix



The romance narrative of De Mille's novel provides a highly complex structure of inter-episodic framing, or *encuadramiento*, that seems designed to bring the careful exegete's attention to "the contrast or relation between characters or thematic messages" (Medina 27). Just as More's papyrus manuscript is framed by its copper cylinder which is in turn framed by the larger incident of the cylinder's discovery by the boat(s),²⁷ so the episodes within the romance find themselves framed and mirrored by other episodes. These framings are best appreciated visually (see above chart), but their articulation is important, if only to uncover the way in which their structural trajectory validates the success of Adam More in the romance. Such structural validation, albeit buried in the text, adds another layer of difficulty to the reader's process of interpreting *A Strange Manuscript*, given that the fictional exegetes themselves (as I have elaborated above) do not interrogate More's moral ambiguity.

Simply put, then, the romance divides itself into four episodes of movement and stasis, organized, in both mirror images and frames, around the centre point of chapter 17. These episodes, which I alphabetize for ease of reference, are the following: (A) Chapters 2-6, a movement section that details More's journey from his sailing ship to the land of the Kosekins; (B) chapters 8-16, a stasis section that treats More's arrival among the Kosekins until his departure for the sacrifice at the amir; (C) chapters 18-25, a movement section that dramatizes More's voyage to the amir, his escape, and his subsequent recapture; and (D) chapters 28-31, a stasis section that describes

More's imprisonment and almost accidental escape from death. (A) mirrors (C) (both are movement episodes) and together their respective chapters form a section of thirteen chapters; likewise, (B) mirrors (D) (both are stasis episodes) and together their respective chapters form a section of thirteen chapters. The inner frame of the romance, (B)-(C), is a stasis-movement progression (*from* life among the Kosekins *to* escape from it) that is a negative mirror image of the outer frame (A)-(D). This latter, the outer frame of the romance, is a movement-stasis progression (*from* More's old life as a sailor *to* his subsequent achievement of permanent Melek/king status in the new land of the Kosekins) that validates the entire structural trajectory. Whereas (B) describes a stasis that quickly passes from security (life with Almah) to insecurity (news of the impending Mista Kosek), (D) describes a stasis that passes from insecurity (imprisonment, unrequited love, and impending death) to security (wealth, requited love, and life).

The (D) section is privileged not only because it provides structural closure to the romance story but because the (A)-(D) frame provides a thematic circularity to More's tale: whereas the nightmare hag kills Agnew in (A), More both avenges Agnew's death and saves Almah's life when he shoots that same nightmare hag in (D).²⁸ Marianne Torgovnick defines circularity's relation to closure thus: "When the ending of a novel clearly recalls the beginning in language, in situation, in the grouping of characters, or in several of these ways, circularity may be said to control the ending...A familiar and obvious kind of circularity is the 'frame' technique common in narratives" (13). Torgovnick goes on to state that "[a] circular ending may suggest growth and change in a character by showing him behaving differently in a situation similar to that which begins a novel" (199). More can thus be seen to have "grown" symbolically by the end of the novel because whereas in (A) his passive flight had permitted the murder of Agnew, in (D) his active murder saves Almah. Structurally, then, More becomes a hero.

As irrefutable as this structural trajectory is, it is also highly ironic in context, given More's less than heroic character. And, of course, herein lies the exegetical dilemma for the reader of De Mille's romance narrative.

NOTES

- 1 James De Mille, *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*, ed. by Malcolm Parks (1888; Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1991). All subsequent references to this edition will be cited parenthetically, with the designation *SM* appearing where necessary.
- 2 The term “exegete” is ironic when applied to these three figures, given the ancient Greek definition of the word as recorded by the *OED*: “At Athens, one of those three members of the Eumolpidae whose province it was to interpret the religious and ceremonial law, the signs in the heavens, and oracles.” Congreve, Oxenden, and Featherstone are as imperviously uncurious about the mysteries and profundities of religious ceremony and morality as can be imagined.
- 3 John Frow points out that the frame
 is unitary, neither inside nor outside, and this distinction of levels must be seen as a convenient fiction to express the frame’s dual status as a component of structure and a component of situation. For a literary text, it works both as an enclosure of the internal fictional space and as an exclusion of the space of reality against which the work is set; but this operation of exclusion is also an inclusion of the text in this alien space. The text is closed and suspended, but as a constructional element the frame is *internal* to this closure, and through it the text signifies *difference*, signals what it excludes. (27)
- 4 De Mille’s repetition in his frame of a compositional element (Melick, the Meleks) echoes, no doubt unconsciously, the framing experiments of late nineteenth-century painters. John Everett Millais’ *Convent Thoughts*, for example, “repeats the lilies in the painting on the vertical panels of the frame.” Dante Gabriel Rossetti not only inscribes two explanatory sonnets on the frame of his *The Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1848) but also decorates the frame “with symbols identical to those on the canvas, thus extending the composition and explaining it in the same intermediary space” (Pearson 20, 21).
- 5 *A Strange Manuscript* has persistently eluded consensus as to the generic category that best contains its satire. R. Watters, for instance, locates the novel within “the genre of utopian fiction combined with an imaginary travel narrative,” yet also argues that the work simultaneously manifests all of the various internal definitions tendered by the frame story’s exegetes: sensational novel, satirical romance, scientific romance, satire on humanity, and plain narrative of facts (viii, xvii). George Woodcock sees the novel as a “hybrid” of “the prose epic, the exotically sentimental romance, and the novel of ideas” (104). Wayne R. Kime declines to assign a specific genre to the novel: “The book is a generic non-descript, a pastiche of fantastic adventure, implicit social satire, intellectual puzzles, and parody” (302). Kenneth Hughes, in what is surely a colossal misinterpretation (ie., giving Lord Featherstone disproportionate symbolic weight in the text), dubs De Mille’s novel “a positive Utopia which satirizes an aristocratic class that serves no useful social function” (123). M.G. Parks maintains in 1976 that the novel is “squarely in the ‘classic’ line of English anti-Utopias” (“Strange to Strangers Only” 64); ten years later, he modifies his opinion slightly to include the “romance of adventure” (“Introduction” to *SM* xxxix). Camille La Bossière claims that although the novel “is no one thing [ie. genre],” it is certainly “not a positive utopia...[n]or an anti-utopia” (43, 44). John Moss’s *Reader’s Guide* claims the novel to be a fusion of “fantastical adventure yarn” and “seriously conceived satire”, where the target of the latter is “marvellously ambiguous”, satirizing variously “Christianity, British society, the aristocracy, the new age of science, Darwinism, or all of these—or something else entirely” (91). Moss is one of the few critics to acknowledge that the exegetes in the frame story “become as much the butt of De Mille’s satire as

are the values of their world, which the Kosekin so dreadfully distort" (91).

The composition history of *A Strange Manuscript* is yet another critical minefield. The question bears upon the ugly charge of plagiarism often levelled at De Mille's novel by critics who set its composition date in the late 1870s, late enough to make the novel "a mere imitation" of the works of H. Rider Haggard, Samuel Butler, Jules Verne, Bulwer-Lytton, W.H. Mallock, and others. Critics such as Fred Cogswell, George Woodcock, and Kenneth Hughes have argued this position. The influence of Haggard, at least, was in 1969 soundly ruled out by Watters, who pointed out that De Mille was two years dead by the time Haggard's first novel appeared in 1882 (viii). The most recent scholarly work on De Mille upholds a composition date of "the mid- to late 1860s" (Parks, "Introduction" to *SM* xx), although Crawford Kilian offers that the novel might have been begun as early as the 1850s, a suggestion based on evidence from Douglas E. MacLeod's unpublished 1968 M.A. thesis on De Mille's life and work (66-67).

- 6 This form of satire, says Frye, "deals less with people as such than with mental attitudes," "present[ing] people as mouthpieces of the ideas they represent" (309). Frye divides his complex discussion of satire into the two defining categories of *mythos* (structural principal or attitude, as it appears in any art) and *form* (genre, specific to literature). According to Frye's six-phase structure of categorizing the *mythos* of satire, De Mille's novel would seem to correspond to "quixotic satire," second phase satire of the low norm (230). (The "low norm," says Frye, "takes for granted a world which is full of anomalies, injustices, follies, and crimes, and yet is permanent and undisplaceable" [226].) The *mythos* of quixotic satire—whose theme is "the setting of ideas and generalizations and theories and dogmas over against the life they are supposed to explain" (230)—thus corresponds to the *form* of Menippean satire.
- 7 George Woodcock's assertion that "the novel of ideas remains and is our reason for continuing to read *A Strange Manuscript*" (104) seems rightly to validate De Mille's orientation towards the anatomy—a satiric form that expresses itself by means of an "intellectualized approach": "dissection or analysis" (Frye 311-12). This highly intellectualized genre, however, has not been without its detractors. Frye could be discussing De Mille's *Strange Manuscript* when he notes that the anatomy has perpetually "baffled critics", and that fiction writers deeply influenced by the genre (Swift in *Gulliver's Travels*, Voltaire in *Candide*, Butler in *Erewhon*, Huxley in *Brave New World*) have often endured accusations of "disorderly conduct" (313). The earliest review of *A Strange Manuscript* was the *New York Times*' contention in 1888 that the novel displayed a "reckless prodigality of invention" (qtd. in Monk 232). And in 1965, Fred Cogswell found De Mille's novel deficient "because its author attempted in its composition to do too many things at once" (114). As Crawford Kilian suggested in 1972, however, *A Strange Manuscript* reveals much when considered under the rubric of Frygian anatomy (62).
- 8 Anatomies, says Frye, can swing flexibly to an extreme of fantasy (as in the Alice books or *The Water-Babies*) or morality. The latter type "is a serious vision of society as a single intellectual pattern, in other words a Utopia" (310).
- 9 Frye: "The short form of Menippean satire is usually a dialogue or colloquy, in which the dramatic interest is in a conflict of ideas rather than of character...Sometimes the form expands to full length, and more than two speakers are used: the setting then is usually a *cena* or symposium" (310).

- 10 Watters makes this point elegantly in his 1969 Introduction to *SM*: Not at all “opposite” are the passions and impulses which animate the Kosekin, since they are such familiar ones as selfishness, envy, love of power, and kindness, self-denial, love of good. What differs is not the inner prompting, so to speak, but rather the objective result, the specific or substantial meaning assigned to abstract terms of value. Their goals are not ours, but only because they define those goals differently.” (xviii)
- 11 *A Strange Manuscript* was not published until 1888, eight years after De Mille’s death. See note 5 for a summary of the critical debate surrounding the novel’s probable composition date.
- 12 La Bossière’s argument that *SM* is “extraordinarily repetitive” (44) is made strictly on the basis of the romance narrative; the frame is never brought into the discussion. Such an argument does not include the full aesthetic space that is De Mille’s novel and thus cannot be considered comprehensive. As John Pearson remarks, “compound esthetic structures are created when frame and art work remain intact; the art work without its frame must be considered a different semiotic field” (25).
- 13 Because these patterns are best appreciated visually, because they are not absolutely central to my argument, and because any discussion of framing in *A Strange Manuscript* would seem to me to be incomplete without them, I have relegated a discussion of them to the Appendix.
- 14 If the *Falcon* is to be interpreted as a “ship of state” trope, it is best seen as a ship of readers (and thus, by extension, as a potential ship of fools) rather than as a ship of “Britain itself,” as has been argued by Kenneth Hughes (122).
- 15 *Le petit Robert* cites two definitions for *littérateur*. The first, an archaic usage, is “Humaniste” (in the old style sense of a master of Greek and Latin languages and literature). The second definition, a modern usage, is “Hommes de lettres, écrivain de métier.” Interestingly, however, this latter definition is designated as “souvent péjoratif.” We have no way of knowing in which sense De Mille wished Melick to be viewed: as a humanist, as a rather poor writer who nevertheless writes for a living, or simply as an author (*Le petit Robert* does offer *Auteur* as a potential synonym). In any case, Melick is overtly associated with literature in a way that none of his companions are. Writers (though the supposition is not always true) are usually careful readers; thus we can safely impute good reading skills to Melick, despite not knowing exactly how best to classify his occupation.
- 16 George Woodcock sees the name as connoting “light-brained,” and dubs it a “typical Peacockian nam[e]” indicating Featherstone’s “humours” (110).
- 17 In his seminal work *Le Rire*, Bergson writes:

Le rire est, avant tout, une correction. Fait pour humilier, il doit donner à la personne qui en est l’objet une impression pénible. La société se venge par lui des libertés qu’on a prises avec elle. Il n’atteindrait pas son but s’il portait la marque de la sympathie et de la bonté. (150)

Wylie Sypher reprints the following standard translation of this passage:
 Laughter is, above all, a corrective. Being intended to humiliate, it must make a painful impression on the person against whom it is directed. By laughter, society avenges itself for the liberties taken with it. It would fail in its object if it bore the stamp of sympathy or kindness. (187)
- 18 In the *Canadian Bookman* in 1922, R. W. Douglas stated (in language unintentionally

- echoing Melick) that De Mille's impressive *Strange Manuscript* was "a biting, blistering satire on the restlessness of humanity" (qtd. in Monk 234).
- 19 "A *Strange Manuscript* invites one to adopt not only the role of detective, but in addition that of judge. The reader is placed in a position as potential evaluator of the several interpretations of More's narrative put forward by Featherstone and his companions" (Kime 305, fnt 29).
 - 20 One of the best indications of More's skewed priorities (and De Mille's comic sense) is More's description of his discomfited masculinity following Layelah's proposal of marriage:
 I had stood a good deal among the Kosekin. Their love of darkness, their passion for death, their contempt of riches, their yearning after unrequited love, their human sacrifices, their cannibalism, all had more or less become familiar to me, and I had learned to acquiesce in silence; but now when it came to this—that a woman should propose to a man—it really was more than a fellow could stand. I felt this at that moment very forcibly; but then the worst of it was that Layelah was so confoundingly pretty, and had such a nice way with her, that hang me if I knew what to say. (*SM* 179-80)
 - 21 Following Oxenden's linguistic speculations, Melick identifies the Kosekins as "the Lost Ten Tribes," but only as a means of ridiculing Oxenden and "the writer of this yarn, whoever he may be" (*SM* 152). Never one to pass up an opportunity, Melick revises his hypothesis about the Kosekins almost immediately, in order to capitalize on the comic opportunity of labelling them the descendants of Noah's son Shem who were transported to the South Pole via the Ark (*SM* 153).
 - 22 Watters provides other useful etymologies for the proper names in the romance world of *A Strange Manuscript*: 'Adam' is Hebrew for 'man'; 'Layelah' is derived from the Hebrew word for 'night'; Almah, who is not Kosekin but belongs to "another South Polar people," may have a name based on "the Latin *alma*", which translates to "such English equivalents as 'bounteous,' 'fostering,' 'gracious,' 'kind,' etc." (xiii). The symbolic naming of More's murdered companion 'Agnew' (from the Latin for 'lamb') is obvious, given his plainly sacrificial death that saves More himself from falling victim to the cannibals of the outer sea.
 - 23 A perfect example of such deadlock of opinion occurs in chapter 26, as Melick and Oxenden hold firmly to their beliefs regarding the authenticity of More's manuscript:
 "[More's] father!" exclaimed Melick. "Do you mean to say that you still accept all this as *bona fide*?
 "Do you mean to say," retorted Oxenden, "that you still have any doubt about the authenticity of this remarkable manuscript?"
 At this they looked at each other; Melick elevated his eyebrows, and Oxenden shrugged his shoulders; but each seemed unable to find words to express his amazement at the other's stupidity, and so they took refuge in silence" (*SM* 229).
 - 24 "Every reader, like the four who retrieved the manuscript, may readily discover his own interests and values reflected in the *Copper Cylinder*" (Watters xvii).
 - 25 La Bossière (51) concurs with Parks ("Strange to Strangers Only" 76) that the romance tale of *A Strange Manuscript* is "an assault upon extremes of opposite kinds." Crawford Kilian notes that the symposium of readers on board the *Falcon* misses the point of its analyses, namely, "that if the Kosekin are our spiritual cousins, and have simply pursued our common heritage to its logical extreme, then we shall have to re-examine the Judaeo-Christian foundations of our present values to see whether they, or we, have been found wanting" (65).
 - 26 Patricia Monk and Camille La Bossière epitomize the two poles of critical thought on the ending of *A Strange Manuscript*. Monk, arguing on the basis of comparisons with De

Mille's other novels, claims that the novel is indubitably unfinished. Her rather weak position depends entirely on structural deficiencies that she attributes to the frame story (240-43). La Bossière, by contrast, argues (not unconvincingly, and in the playful spirit of the text) that the apparent abruptness of De Mille's ending is the function of a deliberate rhetorical strategy of repetition; thus, by its end, this "novel of ideas ha[s] played itself and its author out" (52).

- 27 The incident of the paper boats' finding of the manuscript is, of course, a vignette within the larger frame of the yacht's finding of the manuscript (the yacht itself being a "paper boat" in the sense that it exists only on the paper of De Mille's novel).
- 28 "[T]hey were all around us; and one there was who looked so exactly like the nightmare hag of the outer sea that I felt sure she must be the same, who by some strange chance had come here...And so here she was, the nightmare hag, and I saw that she recognized me" (SM 252).

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Edward Hopper

Edward Hopper paints what isn't there
the pause between notes when silence
rushes in with a great noise
swallowing that wooden store front
gone white with morning sun
one eye drawn shut
the forest implacable
the shelves emptying
at seven a m October 1948
a day on which death
was abroad at an early hour

no one in the frame can see
the woman strutting like a gable
her blond hair her front porch
her looking forward her mother
reading the obits the empty room
with a square of lemon light
and a blurry forest bushing
round the house
is it really only as he says
second story sunlight

with a patch of shade

and in the beginning the laying on of oil
the world an oil slick the world
huddling under
the oil fire of Hopper
Pont du Carrousel in the Fog of oil
Valley of the Seine a great splash
the paintings front the world
the world declines the offer

a fragment of facade only
one end and a top circa long ago
stand in for the city
dead still now at an early hour
traffic far beneath the art
which traffics best
in silence
art can
silence a city
this Seattle morning

this is how day by day sketch by sketch
the deed was done the woman leaning her head
lightly on her hand looking someplace
only she's been some movie drawing women
from bed sits and cold water flats
looking right through the story

when the work is complete
all of a career all of a shape
in the final room of the gallery
the large paintings luminous with emptiness
a drawing away a draining away the vessel poured out
the absolutely palpable and the great invisible rush
of wings of clear water of clear air of
ominous light that giveth and taketh
the artist about the business
of his missing father

when I'm written out
I can no longer see
a wan translation
moving like any car
in the city

A Tendentious Game With An Uncanny Riddle 'A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder'

Most of the critics of James De Mille's *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* are inclined towards defining it as one of various combinations of two or more of the following genres: "Utopian satire . . . , exotic adventure story" (Kilian 61), "prose epic . . . exotically sentimental romance, . . . novel of ideas" (Woodcock 104), "pot-boiler" (Lamont-Stewart 1), and "*science fiction*" (Proietti 226). The widespread suggestion is that De Mille's novel appropriates the 'strangeness' its title safely assigns to the manuscript it is about, since it defies the attempt to make a single genre account for itself. This suggestion puts forward a view of the novel as a puzzle to be solved, which its apparent lack of closure, another strongly debated point among the critics of De Mille's novel,¹ can only strengthen. John Moss considers it "an inviting enigma" (Moss 61), and Camille R. La Bossiere focuses on "The Mysterious End of James De Mille's Unfinished Strange Manuscript" (La Bossiere 41). Finally, for Linda Lamont-Stewart, "this text is so riddled with ironies at every level that it seems . . . impossible to arrive at any satisfactory reading of it, even a partial one" (Lamont-Stewart 1).

The four intra-diegetic readers of De Mille's novel discuss Adam More's manuscript in similar terms. First of all, they try to decide whether it is "a transparent hoax" (SM 62), as Melick has it, or whether it is "a plain narrative of facts" (SM 226-7), as Oxenden argues later in the novel; Oxenden's view is implicitly shared by Dr. Congreve, who right away accuses Melick of being "a determined sceptic" (SM 67). Secondly, specific genres are taken

into account: Melick supports the view that More's manuscript is "a sensational novel" as well as "a satirical romance," while Featherstone asks whether it can be considered "a scientific romance" (SM 229). In the same chapter (26), other literary comments are made: for Melick, More's "plan is not bad, but he fails utterly in his execution" (SM 228), and therefore he considers More's manuscript "rot and rubbish" (ibid). For Oxenden, on the other hand, there's no "undercurrent of meaning" and More "had no idea of satirizing anything" (SM 227). The four yachtsmen debate all these views (and many more) without reaching a satisfactory conclusion—which, as we have seen, is also a charge laid by some critics against De Mille's novel. So it seems that the four yachtsmen's *fictional* disagreement over More's manuscript, which, in light of their eagerness to kill time is thus qualified as a riddle to be solved, is an uncanny anticipation of the similar scenario encountered *in reality* by *A Strange Manuscript*.

The very first comment on More's 'strange' manuscript is that of Featherstone:

A deuced queer sort of thing this, too . . . this manuscript. I can't quite make it out. Who ever dreamed of people living at the South Pole—and in a warm climate, too? Then it seems deuced odd, too, that we should pick up this copper cylinder with the manuscript. I hardly know what to think about it. (SM 61, emphasis added)

Is Featherstone unsure of what to make of the manuscript, or does his puzzlement revolve around the fact that he and his friends have picked it up? It is tempting to consider that the latter possibility may be the cause of his slight annoyance ("that *we* should pick up this copper cylinder with the manuscript"), as if he realized that their act was already inscribed in the text they are reading. Then for Featherstone the question would be not so much whether the manuscript is a work of fiction or a truthful account of a real experience, but rather to what degree he and his friends can resist the (assumptions made by a) text that has already, and absolutely, drawn them into its self.

The four yachtsmen are irresistibly seduced by the manuscript's 'strangeness,' which not only depends on it being "no one thing" (La Bossiere 43), but also, and more importantly, on the effacement of "the distinction between imagination and reality" that it initiates. The latter quote, from Freud's paper on "The Uncanny" (U 367), introduces my attempt to interpret Adam More's obsession with the death images that pervade *A Strange*

Manuscript as the product of his repression of the fear of death—a fear that the four yachtsmen’s induced leisure may have managed to render temporarily unfamiliar. Why on earth should they have such sad thoughts during their wonderful vacation? It is not surprising then that Featherstone, who has organized that vacation, should be upset if the paper-boat race, whose prospect he had so enthusiastically embraced as an excellent idea to kill time, ends up by bringing him upon an only too familiar scene, namely “the inevitable fate of every living being” (U 364). His annoyance is an anticipation of his final statement: “That’s enough for today . . . I’m tired and can’t read anymore. It’s time for supper” (SM 269).

It can be argued that Featherstone’s interruption, which sanctions the end of *A Strange Manuscript*, amounts to the repression of his on-going identification with More: rather than confronting the consequences of More’s ‘fear’ of death, he chooses to stop reading a text that threatens to nullify the purpose of the vacation he has organized in order to escape the weariness of his life in England. As Camille La Bossiere has noted, “[e]nthusiastic for eating, drinking, and sport, the effete Featherstone is one who quickly becomes restive in the absence of some form of pleasurable stimulation” (La Bossiere 42). Then would it not be possible to imagine that Featherstone is in fact trying to escape the long continuance of his own indulgence in some terribly distressing thought? If Melick plays the role of sceptic as Dr. Congreve argues, that Featherstone almost invariably should play the role of moderator suggests his unwillingness to take any personal stand on More’s manuscript, which provokes in his friends a contrary reaction. This response could be taken as a sign of his reluctance to take More’s manuscript seriously, a prospect which would bring him to define it inescapably either as a fictional or as an autobiographical text. If the differing opinions of his friends are equally valid for him as long as they divert his attention from a possibly frightening subject, the ‘strange’ manuscript may be thought of by him more as the object of an entertaining but futile investigation than as the uncanny reminder of a familiar truth: namely, that one day his life will end too.

De Mille’s novel systematically reverses its own narrative strategy, by polluting More’s manuscript with the four yachtsmen’s comments. In a way, More’s manuscript may be taken as the pledge of his candidacy for the Russian formalist school, in so far as it embodies Viktor Shklovsky’s theory of estrangement.² The latter writes:

The purpose of art is to convey the impression of an object through its 'vision' rather than its 'recognition'; the device of art consists of the 'estrangement' of objects, as well as of the obscure forms which make perception more difficult and make it last longer. (Shklovsky 1965, 82, my translation)³

More's descriptions estrange what in the words of Dr. Congreve and Oxenden becomes clear and known again.⁴ Obscure monsters are given their names. The strange "vegetable substance" upon which the manuscript is written is reassuringly reduced to "papyrus." Known currents are taken into consideration in order to explain More's peregrinations, which are given approximate longitude and latitude. The Kosekin people are traced back to the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel, and their language to Hebrew, etc. Thus the two learned men make familiar what More made unfamiliar, in a movement that is reminiscent of Schelling's definition of the uncanny: "'*Unheimlich* is the name for everything that ought to have remained . . . secret and hidden but has come to light'" (U 345, emphasis provided). If by illuminating More's obscure description Congreve and Oxenden seem to illustrate the process that Schelling describes, it is clear that they are not the agents of the manuscript's uncanny effects, which rely instead on the defamiliarization techniques employed by More throughout his narration. In other words, More tries to keep hidden what Congreve and Oxenden will unveil so as to annihilate the uncanny effects of his monsters and rituals, but their learned revision is only partly responsible for the failure of his strategy of concealment, since it is his obscure descriptions that already, to a degree, bring to light what "ought to have remained . . . secret and hidden" (cit.), inviting the doctor and his friend to complete the job and erase the uncanny effects. Thus More's manuscript embodies at one and the same time Freud's idea of the uncanny and Shklovsky's technique of defamiliarization, as the latter is employed in order to repress the (cause of the) former.

On one level More's complicated imagery can be read as an estrangement performed for artistic reasons, quite apart from Melick's suggestion that More is pursuing a literary career. But at a different level his obscure form testifies to an attempt to distance himself again from something that was once known to him, that he had managed to repress into his unconscious, and that his contact with the Kosekin makes uncannily re-emerge into his consciousness: namely, his wish to die, as it is distorted into his fear of death. According to Freud, "distortion" is the overall effect of the dream-work, which transforms the latent dream-thoughts into "a manifest forma-

tion in which they are not easily recognizable" (Laplanche & Pontalis 124). Distortion operates mainly through "condensation" and "displacement." The first makes it possible for an idea to represent many associations of ideas, while the second transfers an idea's intensity on to other ideas, which were originally less intense. These operations, together with the dream's "secondary revision," allow the dream-thoughts to be effectively censored, in order for them to be acceptable to the ego. Given the fact that for Freud the "secondary revision" of a dream is the "reorganization of its elements by means of selection and addition" (Laplanche & Pontalis 412), the amazing events narrated by More, whose puzzlement is that of a dreamer witnessing the unravelling of the absurd scenes staged by his unconscious, may have been reorganized by his ego as he was writing them down, so as not to be annihilated by their uncanniness, which he safely refuses to understand because of its 'strangeness.' Thus his 'strange' manuscript amounts to the secondary revision of what has in fact all the elements of a 'bad' dream, whose uncanny effect is made apparent by Featherstone's conclusive decision.

The constantly re-emerging seam between More's manuscript and the interspersed commentary of the four yachtsmen has the uncanny effect of a return of the repressed distinction between the two narratives—which potentially stands for the distinction between life and fiction. The resumption of More's voice will obliterate that distinction once again, snaring the reader of *A Strange Manuscript* into a loop. As long as it is possible for her/im to keep the two narratives separate, s/he will be able to maintain a critical judgment towards the Kosekin's inverted values, on the one hand, and towards More's increasingly waning distance from them, on the other hand.

As Linda Lamont-Stewart has suggested, such a position is well represented by the four readers on board the "*Falcon*," whose commentary "highlights the problems which confront anyone who undertakes textual interpretation" (Lamont-Stewart 16). This gives *A Strange Manuscript* some 'paradigmatic' value, in the sense put forward by Thomas Kuhn, for whom, according to Peter Steiner:

'[t]he paradigm provides the scientific community with everything it needs for its work: the problems to be solved, the tools for doing so, as well as the standard for judging the results.' (Steiner 269)

For the first issue that Kuhn indicates, *A Strange Manuscript* prompts its critics to ask, as already shown, what genres it belongs to, and whether it is an accomplished work or not (in the two senses of 'coherent' and 'finished'). Critics also dangerously dwell on its author's alleged purposes (i.e., for De Mille to escape the boredom of an academic life and to make money are suggested among other possibilities). These are the questions that the four yachtsmen ask of More's manuscript. As previously indicated, they discuss it in terms of genres, and try to assess its literary value, although they *cannot* ask whether it is finished or not—which can be taken as a further illustration of that very question being asked of De Mille's novel. It is 'fictionally certain' that the four yachtsmen have not finished reading More's manuscript by the time De Mille's novel is over. Since this discrepancy is played against various occurrences of symmetry between More's manuscript and *A Strange Manuscript*, one can take it as the critical occasion for either enhancing or weakening the mirror effect mutually established by the two diegeses. In a logical extension of the external one, one could imagine the yachtsmen reaching the end of More's manuscript and deciding whether the question of it being finished or not is even an issue. That is to say: they may after all not have to ask that question, simply because it could be apparent to them that More's manuscript is finished. That they do not ask that question, then, can be taken as an illustration of *A Strange Manuscript's* alleged lack of closure, since they cannot ask that question—*yet*. Featherstone and his friends, instead, ask themselves whether More's manuscript was intended to start the literary career of its implied author (as Melick argues), or whether More indeed wrote in order to be rescued by his father (a view shared by Dr. Congreve and Oxenden).

As for the second issue highlighted by Kuhn, on one level *A Strange Manuscript's* apparent appropriation of the different genres that it can be measured against provides its critics with some 'ready' tools, just like the ones employed by the four yachtsmen while discussing More's manuscript. Both critical attempts can thus comfortably claim to find their interpretative devices in the text. At a different level, despite the fact that other critical strategies can be applied to De Mille's text which would not so precisely mirror those employed by the four yachtsmen, their discussions, in so far as they establish a critical distance from the object of their investigation, would still be representative of the dialogue a text initiates with its readers as they read it.

It is precisely such a dialogue that is liable to provide Steiner's "standard for judging the results" (cit.), an issue that is as apparent in De Mille's novel, as it is, in turn, in More's manuscript, in the critical material on De Mille's novel, and in this very paper. On the one hand, the degree to which each one of the above texts should be worth replying to will indicate its value to that same text's successive investigators, the ultimate, implicit definers of "a standard for judging the results" (cit.) that is as shifting as it is functional to whatever purposes such investigators have. On the other hand, in line with Kuhn's opinion that Max Scharnberg reports, namely that "a paradigm will leave a sufficient number of unsolved problems to keep future scientists busy with puzzle-solving" (Scharnberg 14), the definition of "a standard for judging the results" (cit.) implicitly performed by the successive investigators of a text will obviously have to take into account the balance between the solved problems and the unsolved ones.

To sum up: De Mille's novel seems to provide its critics with a number of problems that are characteristic of exegesis, that are mirrored by those encountered by the intra-diegetical readers of the manuscript it revolves upon, and that are in line with Kuhn's ideas of "paradigm" and "puzzle-solving."

That critics should pursue the attempt to assign De Mille's novel to various combinations of specific literary genres, an attempt that is mirrored by the four yachtsmen's commentary on More's manuscript, potentially indicates the uncanny effacement of the distinction between fiction and reality. Featherstone's puzzlement, together with his annoyance, threatens and 'entertains' (i.e. both 'amuses' and 'keeps in mind') at once, and respectively, the 'hypocrite lecteur' of *A Strange Manuscript* and the effacement of the distinction between the two narratives. As that reader is constantly reminded, this distinction stands for the one between reality and fiction. The threatening images of death instead urge her/im to repress such an awareness, in order to keep on reading what would be unbearable otherwise. This is why the readers of *A Strange Manuscript* can only welcome what is in effect imposed on their own reality, that is, the unappealing/unappetizing decision of Featherstone—one of the only four readers of the 'strange' manuscript who are fictionally entitled to take it.

Various elements of coincidence between the two narratives sustain, and at the same time paradoxically efface their distinction. For instance, More and Agnew are adrift in the Pacific on board the "*Trevelyan*," just as the four

yachtsmen are becalmed in the Atlantic on board the “*Falcon*.” Both images are images of death, as the calmness of the ocean reveals the two parties’ common impotence. In this context, More’s and Agnew’s seal-hunt structurally occupies the place of the yachtsmen’s boat race, as both endeavours are meant to be a diversion, just as More’s ‘strange’ manuscript, as well as De Mille’s *A Strange Manuscript*, can be safely assumed to be used as such by their respective readers.⁵ Ultimately, More’s manuscript may as well have been picked up by one of us, as long as we occupy the same reading position as the four yachtsmen: after all, ‘we’ are reading the manuscript that ‘they’ have picked up. Therefore we may share Featherstone’s disappointment at the realization that his reading of More’s manuscript is the fulfilment of its precondition, i.e. that somebody should read it. The ‘mise en abyme’ thus established ends up by drawing us into the same void in which More’s manuscript involved Featherstone and company: as with the latter, so with us.

That Featherstone and his friends should read what we are reading—More’s manuscript—is only the first image of the double in a whole series. For instance, consider Agnew, whose sacrifice anticipates the intended fate of his companion who barely escapes it; or else the first meeting of the two drifters with the ugliest representatives of the Kosekin, which anticipates More’s own prolonged sojourn with them. Or else consider the two women that More finds in his path—Almah and Layelah, who are in their respective, different cases, the platonic objects of his love. That he has no apparent sexual encounter with either one despite numerous opportunities, can be taken as a sign of his “narcissism,” that is “love directed towards the image of oneself” (Laplanche & Pontalis 255), as opposed to other people’s images. In the light of More’s obsession with double images, this hypothesis seems confirmed by what Freud writes on “The Uncanny”:

Such ideas [of the double], however, have sprung from the soil of unbounded self-love, from the primary narcissism which dominates the mind of the child and of primitive man. But when this stage has been surmounted, the ‘double’ reverses its aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality [like in the case of Ancient Egyptians’ mummification], it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death. (U 357)

Apart from the the various images of the double, including the identification of the readers of *A Strange Manuscript* with the readers of the ‘strange’ manuscript, other elements participate in the creation

of its uncanny atmosphere. More finds himself in the same narrative place again and again. This can be read as an instance of “the repetition of the same features or character-traits or vicissitudes” (U 356), which for Freud indicates a compulsion to repeat, affirming the power of a death wish over the pleasure principle:

It is possible to recognize the dominance in the unconscious mind of a ‘compulsion to repeat’ proceeding from the instinctual impulses and probably inherent in the very nature of the instincts—a compulsion powerful enough to overrule the pleasure principle, lending to certain aspects of the mind their demonic character . . . All these considerations prepare us for the discovery that whatever reminds us of this inner ‘compulsion to repeat’ is perceived as uncanny. (U 361)

Indeed, if More’s own fear of death is to be considered the cause of his curiosity regarding the details of rituals that he pretends to abhor, his mind may well be considered “demonic.” On the other hand, that he should rely so unquestionably on his weapons at the first signs of danger, as if they were the pseudopodia of his mind, makes of him a primitive believer in the demonic ‘omnipotence of thoughts.’

The following is only the first of More’s numerous encounters with monsters of various, usually complicated forms:

I heard quick, heavy pantings, as of some great living thing; and with this came the noise of regular movements in the water, and the foaming and the gurgling of waves. It was as though some living, breathing creature were here, not far away, moving through these midnight waters; and with this discovery there came a new fear - the fear of pursuit. I thought that some sea-monster had scented me in my boat, and had started to attack me. (SM 45-6)

His reaction is to shoot his rifle, which establishes a pattern for his future behaviour: whenever More is in trouble, he either thinks of firing his rifle, or he does so. This usually has stunning effects. The above monster is scared off; others are killed; and apart from one occasion (the natives he and Agnew encounter), More’s trust of his gun’s power is always reconfirmed by each and every shot, to such an extent that the Kosekin must share his on-going conviction that he is endowed with ‘omnipotence of thought’: for More only has to ‘think’ of his “*sepet ram*” and it will work wonders.

The same can be said of Layelah, who, upon More’s threat to kill the athaleb if she does not turn back, challenges him : “. . . you cannot kill the athaleb. You are no more than an insect; your rod is a weak thing, and will break on his iron frame” (SM 216). More’s self-indulgent comment anticipates both Layelah’s bewilderment at the results of his uncomprehended action, and the eventual celebration of his narcissism performed by the closing scene—that,

as already indicated, not unsignificantly coincides with Featherstone's final yawn: "It was evident that Layelah had not the slightest idea of the powers of my rifle" (ibid). The latter is an obvious symbol of More's sexual prowess, which is never demonstrated, as it is sublimated in his seamanship and swiftness with guns; and yet it is his "*sepet ram*" that produces the collective stupor of the Kosekin who proclaim him at once "Father of Thunder", "Ruler of Cloud and Darkness", and "Judge of Death to the men of the Kosekin" (SM 264). Similarly Almah, having learnt how "to fire the pistol" (SM 263), is proclaimed "consort of Atam-or", "Co-ruler of Clouds and Darkness", and "Judge of Death to the women of the Kosekin" (SM 264). Thus the apotheosis of More's narcissism, signalled by his "damming up of the libido" (Laplanche & Pontalis 255) that detracts from his two amorous relationships and adds to his skill with firearms (which in its turn restores his child-like belief in the omnipotence of his thoughts), coincides with his 'never-to-be-consummated' matrimony and with his elevation to the status of ruler of "a land from which escape is as impossible as from the grave" (SM 8).

Leaving aside the question of whether *A Strange Manuscript* as we have it is finished or not, why would More want to escape from his apparently enviable condition? It is in this respect that More's repeated horror at the Kosekin's supreme valuation of death acquires significance. Here is his description of the cavern where Almah daily performs her handmaid duties:

Far above rose the vaulted roof, to a height of apparently a hundred feet. Under this there was a lofty half-pyramid with stone steps. All around, as far as I could see in the obscure light, there were niches in the walls, each one containing a figure with a light burning at its feet. I took them for statues. (SM 85)

At first, More's description of the "figures" sounds 'strange', which is in line with the mysterious, dark cavern; but it is precisely because the "statues" are perceived as 'strange' that they remind him of something very familiar, which makes him "recoil with horror" as he judges them to be "a hideous sight" (ibid). Thus his 'strange' metaphor is the precondition for the surfacing of the shocking realization that awakens him to full terror by making him aware of what he had unconsciously repressed: "It was no statue that I saw in that niche, but a shrivelled human form" (ibid). His horrific experience is sustained by his silence, as he gradually realizes that the Kosekin way of life is a celebration of death, and that their system is an economy of death, with rules that revolve around it and duties that are performed in order to proclaim its absolute priority:

I said nothing, but followed and watched her, carrying the wreaths and supplying her. She went to each niche in succession, and after taking the wreath off from each corpse she placed a fresh one on, saying a brief formula at each act. By keeping her supplied with wreaths I was able to lighten her task, so much so that whereas it usually occupied her more than two hours, on the present occasion it was finished in less than half an hour . . . The number of those which had to be crowned by her was about a hundred. Her work was only to crown them, the labor of collecting the flowers and weaving the wreaths and attending to the lamps being performed by others. (SM 87)

More's eagerness to learn all the details of a ritual which occupies the whole community equals his pride in helping Almah carry out her own duties. That he should declare: "I was anxious . . . to forget it all" (*ibid*), then, comes as no surprise, as he would rather return to the previous belief that those "figures" in the niches were "statues," a belief which "reality testing", or else "the process postulated by Freud which allows the subject to distinguish . . . between what he perceives and what he only imagines" (Laplanche & Pontalis 382), had forced him to abandon.

Similarly, Featherstone would rather return to a more palatable occupation, and apparently he does so. For More, though, this is not such an easy task, as everything the Kosekin do uncannily reminds him of death and how much they praise it. While following the Kohen at a "sacred hunt," it is not long before he must face the fact that the usual carnivalization of values practiced by the Kosekin may have tragic consequences, as he finds out that his question about "what were the animals that [they] expected to kill" (SM 89) during the hunt is ironical, since in the Kosekin version of hunting the hunters are also the game.

At this point, More is still far from being fluent in the Kosekin language, and cannot make out Almah's explanations. In this context, it is significant that the first, full-size statement uttered by the Kohen during the hunt that is comprehensible to More is: "Atam-or . . . give me also the blessing of darkness and death!" (SM 92), because it signals his entrance into the Kosekin's symbolic world, and as such it is horrific, since it amounts to his acceptance of the Kohen's recognition of his capability of doing so.⁶ If the reason why More is horrified by the Kohen's request is that by understanding it he implicitly comes to share the Kosekin's celebration of death which inscribes it, from a Lacanian point of view More's understanding of the Kohen's request amounts to his entrance into the Kosekin Symbolic.

For Lacan this is one of the three orders of experience accessible to (wo)man, the other two being the Imaginary and the Real. The Imaginary is the pre-verbal world accessed by the child through the mirror stage, a phase of the child's development that takes place between six and eighteenth months of age and is characterized by the child's (mis)recognition of her/his own image in a mirror. The as-yet-uncoordinated child identifies with the static image of her/himself reflected by the mirror, a totalizing image that constitutes her/im at once as an alienated subject. The child can then blindly indulge in her/his desire to be the exclusive object of her/his mother's desire, until s/he is forced to recognize her/his father's priority in the desire for the mother's desire, an event which mortifies her/im as it disrupts the empowering symbiosis s/he had envisaged with her/his mother by enforcing on her/im the Symbolic as a system of symbolic exchange, and ultimately language itself. As Madan Sarup puts it:

In Lacan's view, the father introduces the principle of law, in particular the law of the language system. When this law breaks down, or if it has never been acquired, then the subject may suffer from psychosis. In order to escape the all-powerful imaginary relationship with the mother, and to enable the constitution of the subject, it is essential to have acquired the 'name-of-the-father.' This is a structure which lays down the basis of the subject's 'law,' in particular the law of the language system. (Sarup 108)

This in turn explains why More, in the eyes of the Kosekins, goes as far as being considered a bit 'strange,' but never 'mad' altogether, as he eventually, and literally, 'comes to his senses,' that is he recognizes the Kosekins' wish of death as the original version of his own fear of death, and avoids irrupting into the Real, "that which is outside the Imaginary and the Symbolic" and "has little to do with any assumptions about the nature of the world, with 'reality'" (Sarup 104), as he starts to 'make sense' to the Kosekin by adopting their language and its cultural values.

From a Lacanian point of view, then, More's understanding of the Kohen's request to kill him sanctions his recognition of the 'Name-of-the-Father' and his Law, which in More's case is the Law of Death, and therefore his entrance into the Kosekin culture as a moribund participant. Considering that he is first introduced to that culture by Almah, their encounter can be read as that of the child who recognizes her/his own image reflected by a mirror, the central event of that "fundamentally narcissistic experience which [Lacan] calls *mirror stage*" (Laplanche & Pontalis 256, emphasis provided):

She stood with her face looking at me full of amazement; and as I caught the gaze of her glorious eyes I rejoiced that I had at last found one who lived in the light and loved it—one who did not blink like a bat, but looked at me full in the face, and allowed me to see all her soul revealed. (SM 74)

Almah's amazement equals More's own amazement at recognizing that her being different from the Kosekin amounts to his being similar to her. Such a realization triggers off a regression to a state that is similar to the one experienced by the child who is learning to speak: "It was necessary to go back to first principles and make use of signs, or try to gain the most elementary words in her language" (SM 75).

Having understood the Kohen's request to give him "the blessing of darkness and death" (cit.), More can have extensive conversations with Almah; during one of these, she explains the Kosekin way of life:

It is so with this people; with them death is the highest blessing. They all love death and seek after it. To die for another is immortal glory. To kill the wounded was to show that they had died for others. The wounded wished it themselves. You saw how they all sought after death. These people were too generous and kind-hearted to refuse to kill them after they had received wounds. (SM 93)

By paraphrasing Freud, one could say that More's following "perplexity" (ibid) is 'the token of his repression'; he does not understand Almah's explanation—i.e. it sounds 'strange' to him—because understanding it would amount to recognizing what he already knows unconsciously: namely, that he is as attracted to the idea of death as the Kosekin are.

It is during the ceremony of the dark season, when human sacrifices take place, that he realizes it:

There was a horrible fascination about the scene, which forced me to look and see all. The Kohen took the victim, and drawing it from the altar, threw it over the precipice to the ground beneath. (SM 106)

Such a fascination is the beginning of his acceptance of the Kosekin reversal of values. He lets his own valuation of darkness over light escape the net of the secondary revision that constitutes his manuscript in the following passage, which is worth quoting in full:

The dark season had now begun, which would last for half the coming year. Now the people all moved out of the caverns into the stone houses on the opposite side of the terraces, and the busy throng transferred themselves and their occupations to the open air. This with them was the season of activity, when all their most important affairs were undertaken and carried out; the season, too, of *enjoyment*, when all the chief sports and festivals took place. Then the outer

world all awoke to life; the streets were thronged, fleets of galleys came forth from their moorings, and the sounds of labour and of *pleasure*, of toil and of revelry, arose into the darkened skies. Then the city was a city of the living, no longer silent, but full of bustle, and the caverns were frequented but little. This cavern life was only tolerable during the light season, when the sun-glare was over the land; but now, when the *beneficent and grateful darkness* pervaded all things, the outer world was *infinitely more agreeable*. (SM 109, emphasis added)

This is clearly meant to be More's 'uncommitted' report of the Kosekin's point of view; and yet one can read between the lines his fascination with darkness, which is associated with "enjoyment" and "pleasure", and, above all, which is said to be "beneficent and grateful", as well as "infinitely more agreeable." This is why the starkly official remark that follows such a revealing passage sounds like an attempt to recuperate the lost ground:

To me, however, the arrival of the dark season brought only additional gloom. I could not get rid of the thought that I was reserved for some horrible fate, in which Almah also might be involved. (ibid)

It seems to me that More's "horrible fate" is as strongly and consciously resisted as it is unconsciously invoked, and that the obsessive fear he displays towards his insistently announced and repetitively deferred end, is a sign of his secret and unacceptable wish for it. He admits:

The stain of blood-guiltiness was over all the land. *What was I, that I could hope to be spared?* The hope was madness, and I did not pretend to indulge it. (SM 110, emphasis added)

Even at the beginning of his descent into hell, while drifting off the Kosekin land together with Agnew—whose hope accompanies him till the very end—More had already made clear how far from hopeful his inclinations were. The two companions also differ in their reaction to the natives, who are treated with friendliness by Agnew, whereas More, who thinks that they are "animated mummies" (SM 32), inevitably fires his gun so as "to inspire a little wholesome respect" (SM 31). Quite apart from the fact that More's behaviour proves wiser in the end, it is perhaps worth noting how the same situation and the same people should provoke such opposite reactions. This may substantiate the impression that More is in fact always already obsessed with death, so that the first 'strange' event, and the first 'strange' people that he encounters, do not fail to trigger what he had repressed, each one in its turn to become a "harbinger of death" (U, cit.).

In other words, More's readily available and constant hopelessness can be

considered a sign of his melancholy, described by Freud as a process which “borrows some of its features from mourning, and the other from the process of regression from narcissistic object-choice to narcissism” (MM 259). Given the mirror-stage scene that occurs between More and Almah, then Layelah’s judgment of the latter as “cold and melancholy” (SM 178) may as well be referred to More, who acts as if he were already mourning himself, in a wishful anticipation of his consciously abhorred fate.

More’s unsuccessfully repressed ‘fear’ of death haunts him throughout his manuscript—and even leaks out of it to induce Featherstone to ‘yawn it off.’ Again in the following passage, while More is anxiously waiting for Agnew’s return, his ‘fear’ of death is re-converted into its genuine form, i.e. its invocation:

[T]hough I longed to fly, I could not for his [Agnew’s] sake. The boat seemed to be a haven of rest. I longed to be in her once more, and drift away, *even if it should be to my death*. Nature was here less terrible than man; *and it seemed better to drown in the waters, to perish amid rocks and whirlpools, than to linger here, amid such horrors as these.* (SM 36-7, emphasis added)

If More’s preferred choice of death sounds vaguely Romantic, perhaps this is because death by water is also the fate of his prototypical forerunner, i.e. Narcissus.

Given the fact that for More learning the Kosekin language amounts to absorbing their way of life and participating in their culture in the ways that have been indicated, the following passage’s final remark, tainted as it is by More’s son-like gratitude towards the Kohen/Father, acquires the value of a further admission:

The Kohen was untiring in his efforts to please. He was in the habit of making presents every time he came to see me, and on each occasion the present was of a different kind; at one time it was a new robe of curiously wrought feathers, at another some beautiful gem, at another some rare fruit. He also made incessant efforts to render my situation pleasant, *and was delighted at my rapid progress in acquiring the language.* (SM 110, emphasis added)

Here again More’s linguistic progress equals the Kohen’s recognition of him as one of the Kosekin, whose language More can feel proud of learning, as long as he pretends that his linguistic advancement has no bearing on his assessment of the Kosekin culture. In this way, More can still consciously oppose it while being unconsciously attracted to it, as long as that culture proves to be functional to what can be called his ‘narcissistic indulgement.’

If his disinterest in having sex with women who want him is a sign of his narcissism, the latter can also account for his fear of death, once such fear has been reconverted into its original form, namely the wish to bring his life to an end, which in turn is a sign of his melancholy. From this point of view, then, More's endeavour is to oppose the Kosekin fascination with death consciously enough so as to be given the excuse to use his "weak rod" in the pretense of his own defence, a stratagem which will proclaim him absolute ruler, something which should prove good enough for his narcissistic demands, and which will also, and inescapably, bury him in the (water)land of the Kosekin.

More becomes curious, he is eager to learn every detail of the Kosekin's ceremonies, and asks Almah how long it takes to embalm the corpses she attends to; he wants to know "what will they do with them" (SM 110). He feels "a great interest" in the "Feast of Darkness" and states that "there seemed something of poetic beauty in this mode of welcoming the advent of a welcome season" (SM 111), thus revealing the amount of influence that his exposure to the Kosekin culture has already produced. Almah, who is aware of such a risk, wisely suggests that he stay in his room "till the fearful repast is over" (SM 112). As More will find out, the central event of the feast "is awful, tremendous, unspeakable", and "too terrible to name" (SM 115). That he should unquestionably accept the Kosekin "Mista Kosek" as the name for what eventually he will have to recognize as "cannibalism" (SM 180), shows how 'More-as-artist' puts into practice Shklovsky's theory of estrangement once again by refusing to call "a thing by its name" (Shklovsky 1990, 6). For 'More-as-self-censor,' on the other hand, such a refusal amounts to giving up his moral stand against what he can still pretend to judge as horrific by accepting a 'strange' name for it—which shows how familiar that concept is to him. By endorsing their word for an event he refuses to name in his own language, he is in fact erasing the difference between his own conscious morality and that of the Kosekin's, and that is why he is terrified. Eventually, he will confess:

I had stood a good deal among the Kosekin. Their love of darkness, their passion for death, their contempt of riches, their yearning after unrequited love, their human sacrifices, their cannibalism, *all had more or less become familiar to me.* (SM 179-80, emphasis added)

Because his narcissism directs his love towards himself, as opposed to external objects, More can in fact eagerly welcome and fully appropriate the

Kosekin idea of “unrequited love,” together with what he significantly recognizes as their “passion” for death.

That he is gradually accepting the Kosekin way of life is apparent to the Kohen, who later on tells him:

You are growing like one of us . . . You will soon learn that the greatest happiness in life is to do good to others and sacrifice yourself. You already show this in part. When you are with Almah you act like one of the Kosekin. You watch her to see and anticipate her slightest wish; you are eager to give her everything. She, on the other hand, is equally eager to give up all to you. Each one of you is willing to lay down life for the other. You would gladly rush upon death to save her from harm, *much as you pretend to fear death*. (SM 158, emphasis added)

When More admits that indeed he would gladly give up his own life for Almah, the Kohen exclaims:

Oh, almighty and wondrous power of Love! . . . [H]ow thou hast transformed this foreigner! Oh, Atam-or! you will soon be one of us altogether . . . Almah has awakened within you your true human nature. (ibid)

Finally, when More tells Layelah “I will stay and die for Almah” (SM 182), his acceptance of the Kosekin reversal of values is complete. He has virtually become a Kosekin, so much so that he is now ready to become their ruler, and more than ever indulge in his narcissistic impulse which has driven him towards Almah—whose eventual disappointment at her newly-wed husband is foreseeable from what More tells Layelah:

Marriage—idle word! What have I to do with marriage? What has Almah? There is only one marriage before us—the dread marriage with death” (SM 181).

I started this paper by individuating in genre-assignment the critical strategy employed by most of the critics of James De Mille’s novel. I argued that this strategy responds to a view of the novel as a riddle to be solved, which is based upon the widely shared opinion that no one genre is capable of exhausting it. Such a view, together with the strategy it prompts, is also that of the novel’s intra-diegetic readers with reference to the ‘strange’ manuscript the novel revolves around. As a consequence, I considered the interpretative problems that are posed by *A Strange Manuscript* as ‘paradigmatic’ of textual exegesis, in the sense proposed by Kuhn in his discussion of the social and physical sciences, and as exemplified by the genre-assignment as a strategy that establishes a critical distance from the text it dialogically confronts.

In a successive gesture, I first took the ‘strangeness’ of More’s manuscript as an exemplification of Viktor Shklovsky’s theory of estrangement, and then I considered it in the light of Freud’s theory of the uncanny as More’s attempt to repress his unconscious attraction to the Kosekin’s appreciation of death, which he consciously pretends to fear. As such, ‘strangeness’ is not restricted to More’s manuscript, since various elements of coincidence between the latter and the meta-narrative it is constantly placed against make it possible to extend such a qualification to De Mille’s novel as a whole. I suggested that the ‘strange’ manuscript’s relation to the meta-narrative of the four yachtsmen at once creates and puts into jeopardy “the distinction between imagination and reality” that Freud writes of in his paper on “The Uncanny” (cit.), threatening and at the same time entertaining the reader of *A Strange Manuscript*. I argued that the obsession with death images that pervades More’s manuscript leaks out of it to induce Featherstone to stop reading it, as he cannot face the risk of an effacement of the distinction between reality and fiction that a prolonged reading would force upon him. I suggested that such a risk is also run by the reader of *A Strange Manuscript*, in so far as s/he is not able to keep separate the two narratives that constitute it.

Finally, I proposed an interpretation of More’s personality as “melancholic” in order to claim that his sexless relationships with Almah and Layelah are “narcissistic,” using such terms in the sense put forward by Freud in his papers “Mourning and Melancholia” and “On Narcissism.” I showed how More’s endeavour in the land of the Kosekin is directed at exploiting their reversal of values for his own purpose, namely to indulge in his own narcissism, which will amount to bringing about a version of that death which he pretends to abhor. In a Lacanian gesture, I read More’s meeting of Almah as the event that signals his Kosekin mirror stage, previous to his entrance into the Kosekin Symbolic that is marked by his understanding of the Kohen’s request to kill him, which amounts to his recognition of the Name-of-the-Father and his Law of language. I argued that, since More’s comprehension is inscribed into the Kosekin’s celebration of death which he comes to share by understanding what the Kohen wants from him, the Law of language that he thus subscribes to becomes a Law of death, and that is why the Kohen’s request to kill him horrifies him, as he realizes that he only pretends to fear what the Kosekin wish, namely to die. I described More’s gradual acceptance of the Kosekin values as it culminates

in his elevation to the position of their ruler, allowing him to indulge in his narcissism undisturbed, which amounts to burying himself in “a land from which escape is as impossible as from the grave” (SM, cit).

I have shared the same critical anxiety that is shown by the four yachtsmen and by the critics of *A Strange Manuscript* when I employed the theories of Freud, Kuhn, Lacan, and Shklovsky to confront its ‘strangeness’ and render it familiar. In this sense, it is as if I sought a kind of death for a text that is capable of defying its exhaustion by means of its ‘strangeness.’⁷ The degree to which my own attempt at solving the riddle posited by *A Strange Manuscript* shares the anxiety of its critics determines to what extent my endeavour is the expression of a view of exegesis as the defense mechanism that allows the reader’s, as well as the text’s, survival.

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NOTES

- 1 For instance, George Woodcock argues that “a writer as experienced in the craft of Victorian popular fiction as De Mille would not have deliberately made so lame an end, which even as an anti-climatic device is ineffective” (Woodcock 100). Conversely, for Kenneth J. Hughes “when the main sources of the work are revealed, the ending of *A Strange Manuscript* is not, as Woodcock argues, a lame one” (Hughes 111).
- 2 I am indebted to Roberto Bedini who first suggested this connection to me.
- 3 The English translation reads somehow less satisfactorily: “The purpose of art, then, is to lead us to a knowledge of a thing through the organ of sight instead of recognition. By ‘enstranging’ objects and complicating form, the device of art makes perception long and ‘laborious’” (Viktor Shklovsky 1984, 6).
- 4 While, as it has already been indicated, Melick and Featherstone concern themselves with playing down More’s manuscript in their own respective ways.
- 5 The mirror effect of SM has been persuasively commented upon by R.E. Watters in his “Introduction” to the New Canadian Library edition of the novel.
- 6 That he will eventually consider himself fully capable of killing is shown by the hilarious offer he will make to the Chief Pauper when the latter tells him: “I have poverty, squalor, cold, perpetual darkness, the privilege of killing others, the near prospect of death, and the certainty of the *Mista Kosek* - all these I have, and yet, Atam-Or, after all, I am not happy. [. . .]’ To this I had no answer ready; but by way of saying something, I offered to kill him on the spot” (SM 249, emphasis provided).
- 7 This interpretation of my critical attempt has been graciously put forward by Patricia Cormack.

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The Traveller

for Douwe Stuurman

Santa Barbara sirens run the aqueduct
from the dam to the mission,
the sign reads the indians
built it under supervision.

At the Botanical Gardens
we take turns talking to trees.
At a doubled redwood trunk
he quotes a man of virtue
out of the blue. Frail,
he's near aerial—

what you will love most

*is to walk
on the earth*

and he makes you drive
to meadows
to walk. To where
the wild meadows were.
He wants you to see everything.

Sitting, he's near silent
but up and about you get Reed in the thirties,
Huxley, Krishnamurti,
what Solvang was before the tourist machine.
His near-anonymous report

of one man's half-century
reading Proust.

And if one of your stories is well told
the praise is in saying
it sounds like you've begun

to love to know.

And when you leave
he presses a cloth bag
of wildflower seeds
in your other hand.

He'd gone into the Gift Shop
that day you thought you were waiting
while he had a piss.

Now you remember the way you felt.
Your step-father slipping you
an extra twenty
to help you on your way
when it was time to leave.

And how they left their hands in ours
that split second longer

gave us all we needed.

Reprieve for the Body

The body wants wind it can fall back on, involuntarily
hurried along a few flighty steps, arms outstretched

wants the hands of the masseuse divining
completely its faults and shudders, its taproots and aquifers.
The body wants its walking daylight, daily
bread of whole air and things seen at the right pace.

The body half-wants to carry in 21 sheets of gyproc
from the truck by itself in the rain even. It doesn't

want its bicycle, its skis, its Nautilus machine
so much as a clean dive into the lake
and coming up straight-limbed and strong with the force
of the water's counterweight on its heels, eyes opening
breaking into the bright world with a whoop.

But the body appreciates definition and discipline
tempered with wit, wants to make the unlikely serve
deservedly, likes to get lucky in the back-court, the deep
corners.

I don't make an argument for the body
has no use for argument not even the flawed
patient struggle the poem has saying
what it hopes is true. The body shakes it off, phooey

like a labrador

and goes on wanting the blurred reciprocal urgency
of lovemaking at its best, the body dressed in its splendour
of kisses

the brave-hearted body electric, the 20th century body
in the earth-chair kneeling at the terminal needing its ground.

The body wants its earth

especially stumbling off the train where its been a waiter
legs braced against the sway, tray centered in its left palm
2 days Vancouver to Winnipeg and 2 days return 10 hours later

especially deplaning at Narita it wants
no cunningly wired and padded layover pod but a loud
pebbled beach, its remembered cherry tree, sun-hot granite slab
on Fuji.

The body wants to lie down on the ground and stay put
till dusk, rolling over now and then as it pleases
feeling its way, dreaming its magnificence, its breath and fingers

ruffling the wild mint, the heaped grass-clippings, the leaves'
musk under the hedges, dead-still as the neighbour victim

of knock-out-ginger crashes onto his porch
his houselights raging, or strangers

go by on the sidewalk, their voices lonely and trivial —
an aching poetry wanting the singing body
so near, forsaken, so sullen with its losses
it won't come in for calling for the longest time.

Colonialist Discourse, Lord Featherstone's Yawn and the Significance of the Denouement in 'A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder'

The notoriously brusque conclusion to James De Mille's *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* is, in most instances, critically undervalued, slighted and derided. From the moment of its posthumous publication in 1888 to the more recent interest sparked by the 1969 New Canadian Library edition of the text and its subsequent promotion within the Canadian canon, *Strange Manuscript* has been considered structurally flawed, which partly explains why De Mille's novel is regarded "as a minor classic of Canadian fiction" instead of a fully fledged major classic and also accounts for the paucity of critical commentary on the novel.¹ Reviewers, academics, readers and students alike have been variously surprised, flummoxed, bemused, perplexed, disappointed and irritated by an ending generally considered inconclusive and frustratingly incomplete.

The conclusion is an obtrusive structural problem that all readers have to wrestle with. "Readings of *Strange Manuscript*," argues Patricia Monk, "therefore, must take into account the abruptness of the ending and its lack of formal closure."² Lord Featherstone's yawn, it seems, is no substitute for a cracking denouement. "What could be more provoking than such a conclusion as this?" asked an early reviewer of the text, dissatisfied with the sudden narrative closure.³ A similar complaint pervades recent criticism of

Strange Manuscript.⁴ “A writer as experienced in the craft of Victorian popular fiction as De Mille would not have deliberately made so lame an end,” writes George Woodcock, who proposes that the “disappearance” of Layelah and the Kohen Godol from the story and the absence of references “to the circumstances in which, after his escape from sacrifice, More writes his narrative” support a reading of the novel as incomplete.⁵ The view that *Strange Manuscript* is unfinished and its conclusion capricious, careless and clumsy is hardening into critical orthodoxy, a trend best exemplified by Monk’s comprehensive study of De Mille’s life and work, *The Gilded Beaver*. *Strange Manuscript*, Monk contends, “is a fragment, not a complete novel—a beginning without an end—albeit an intriguing fragment” (239). After analysing the text’s structure, action, symbols, themes, characterization and length, elaborating further on Woodcock’s comments on the disjointed nature of the sub-plots and demonstrating how the double narrative is “unbalanced” (240) and lacks resolution, Monk concludes her study with an unequivocal verdict: *Strange Manuscript* “is inarguably [sic] unfinished” (245). Amid Monk’s detailed textual analysis and tightly argued critical commentary a brief, bizarre and unsubstantiated explanation for the ending of the novel is advanced. In her zeal to claim an unfinished state for the novel Monk enters the realm of speculative conspiracy theory:

The pattern here is all too suggestive of outside interference: an ending cobbled together by someone who was unfamiliar with the manuscript and who, accidentally or on purpose, juxtaposed pages from drafts of separate chapters that had been left as they were when De Mille had either given up trying to revise the novel or had been prevented from finishing it by his sudden death. (241)

Regrettably, by intractably claiming an unfinished status for the text, Monk depreciates critical readings which either regard *Strange Manuscript* as textually intact or see its conclusion as calculated artifice. Such readings, according to Monk, are “on thin ice.”⁶

Monk’s forthright dismissal of the few critics who read *Strange Manuscript* as unabridged raises some interesting critical issues. At stake in the various readings of *Strange Manuscript* are questions relating to how meaning and value are produced. The critical position epitomised by Monk interprets, reads and values *Strange Manuscript* as an incomplete text; yet for all its incompleteness, Monk maintains that the text nonetheless possesses certain attributable values and is the origin of meaning. What I want to suggest, in contrast to Monk’s approach, is that the act of critical intervention is

responsible for producing the text's meaning and its condition (whether it be seen as complete or incomplete). The literary practice and theory that Monk brings to the text produces *Strange Manuscript* as incomplete. In *Formalism and Marxism* Tony Bennett argues that the "text is not the issuing source of meaning. It is a site on which the production of meaning—of variable meanings—takes place."⁷ *Strange Manuscript* is such a site. Value, like meaning, is also produced:

A work is of value only if it is valued, and it can be valued only in relation to some particular set of valuational criteria, be they moral, political or aesthetic. The problem of value is the problem of the social production of value; it refers to the ever ongoing process whereby which texts are to be valued and on what grounds are incessantly matters for debate and, indeed, struggle. Value is not something which the text has or possesses. It is not an attribute of the text; it is rather something that is produced for the text. (173)

I intend to read *Strange Manuscript* in relation to a "particular set of valuational criteria" and, in the process of social and critical re-articulation, produce post-colonial meaning and value, because *Strange Manuscript* is situated within a composite colonial history. The external narrative depicting a wealthy Englishman and his guests adrift is embedded in colonial history. The internal narrative (More's manuscript), which textually enacts the activity and discourse of the colonial encounter that precedes colonial domination, is read by beneficiaries of the colonial system. Secondary and tertiary details in both narrative frames place the story at a time when the English colonial system was quite robust. For example, Adam More is lost after transporting convicts to Van Dieman's Land, Australia. Reference is made to the Tasmanian Aborigines, with whom the Kosekin are unflatteringly compared. Some geographical details, Crawford Kilian argues, seem "physically similar to the Gulf of St. Lawrence" and "the Kosekin elite who dwell on the outer coast are analogous to Canadian Maritimers."⁸

Even without these sporadic flashes of descriptive geographical minutiae, *Strange Manuscript* is still about colonialism because Adam More's language and actions replicate the basic pattern and trajectory of colonial encounters. More's "account of [his] adventures" (25) can be read as an allegory of the colonial encounter and, intentionally or not, De Mille illustrates how discourse and its accompanying practice function in such a confrontation. When More confronts the Kosekin, certain discursive techniques and linguistic resources are deployed. As More acts, speaks, represents and calls the

unknown into being, the terribly familiar paradigms of colonial action, thought and discourse come into play. Through the continual assertion of his superiority and his decisive and timely application of the great Western technological pacifier, the gun, More maintains an opposition inherently colonialist in orientation and operation between himself and the Kosekin. By the novel's end he reaps all the rewards desired and imagined by the colonising West: power, love, wealth, the capacity to control and govern a foreign culture. This, though, is short-lived.

The external and internal narrative frames are juxtaposed: More's narrative is enclosed by the narrative of its discovery. We see how More discursively constructs the world and how the Englishmen respond and fail to respond to aspects of More's discourse. When considering More's representation of the Kosekin, the four Englishmen do not question the images that More produces, how language produces meaning, the implications of his narrative, the purpose and effect of his central tropes, or the relationship between language and practice. But as Edward Said makes clear: "The things to look at are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, *not* the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original."⁹ What More's language, style, images and tropes do, in a disturbingly simple way, is prepare the way for More's eventual colonial rule. More's language clears the ground, so to speak, in readiness for his elevation as a supreme power. This literal and symbolic dispersal is accomplished with the application of the manichean allegory which contains, reduces and controls the alien world through the "coercive framework" of its representations.¹⁰ More achieves physical, moral, economic and political dominance by linguistically producing the necessary pre-conditions for that dominance.

Rather than see Lord Featherstone's yawn as arbitrarily positioned and a sign of the text's deficiencies and incompleteness, I propose to produce from the extraordinary suggestiveness generated by the abrupt ending a political reading, a critical intervention that relies on the text as it is and interprets *Strange Manuscript* as a critique of colonial non-discursive and discursive practices.¹¹ This paper will examine the political expediency of Featherstone's yawn, and its connection with the two levels of narrative—the external narrative pertaining to Lord Featherstone and his guests and the discovery of the mysterious manuscript, and the internal narrative detailing Adam More's experience among the Kosekin. To regard Lord

Featherstone's yawn as politically motivated, we need to consider its placement. His yawn terminates the text at a particular moment: the apex of Adam More's triumph over the Kosekin. This triumph I will argue is distinctively colonialist. Lastly, I will examine the incompleteness suggested by the yawn and the narrative absence between More's ascension to power and the prefatory letter that introduces the manuscript to the Englishmen. The lacuna between More's narrative, cut off by the yawn, and his preface suggests that there are potentially self-destructive and dangerous limits to colonial exploitation, development and growth.

The first narrative frame is remarkable for its air of lassitude and indifference. The atmosphere surrounding the *Falcon* contradicts any expectation the reader may have of speed, flight or movement intimated by the ship's name. Listlessness and inertia prevail. The *Falcon* is "becalmed."¹² The owner of the yacht, Lord Featherstone, "weary of life in England" (19), embodies a monied, social torpor. Featherstone is apparently burdened by the riches generated by imperial capitalism: he is "weary of the monotony of the high life, and like many of his order, was fond of seeking relief from the *ennui* of prosperity amid the excitements of the sea" (70). Featherstone's assorted guests and crew are lulled "into a state of indolent repose" (19). The "dull and languid repose" (19) experienced by those on board occurs as they return from a tour of colonial islands. Even the prospect of returning to the Mediterranean, the geographical centre and symbolic heart and mind of Western civilisation, fails to draw them on: the *Falcon*, a representative little England, is suspended in the middle of the nineteenth century (February 15, 1850), its progress thwarted.

To varying degrees and intensity Featherstone, Congreve, Melick and Oxenden are English literary critics, the readers and interpreters of a mysterious manuscript. The social relations that influence the reading process are important. A dilettante who listens to the various arguments going on around him "without saying much on either side" (153), Lord Featherstone nonetheless plays a crucial role in the dynamics of power that overdetermine who reads and who speaks. This seems odd, given his reading habits. In the opening scene he "was pretending to read" (19), later he admits that he is "an infernally bad reader" (79) and when he finally does read he declares that he "sha'n't be able to hold out so long" (226) as the other readers. In terms of reading time Featherstone reads the least (Melick reads

chapters 2-6 [27-70], Congreve 8-16 [80-142] before called to a halt by Featherstone's yawn, Oxenden 18-26 [154-214], Featherstone 28-31 [227-52]) yet he is the one who with a yawn calls the narrative to a close. He also decides who will read: "You, Melick, read" (26) and "Doctor, what do you say? Will you read the next instalment!" (79).

How, then, to account for Featherstone's role? The stream of mannerly genteel discourse conducted aboard *The Falcon* is reminiscent of the eighteenth century English coffee-house culture, a cultural and political milieu in which truth, rationality and reason rather than authority, domination and power supposedly defined the boundaries and operative conditions of discourse.¹³ Generally speaking, Melick, Congreve and Oxenden inhabit this world. Lord Featherstone, however, is the unconscious problematic of a reading process informed by a seemingly universal formulation of truth and reason. There is something more to reading than the ability to speak within the sanctioned boundaries of rational bourgeois discourse. While the conversation of Featherstone's "congenial friends" (19) appears to evidence the dissolution of social and political distinctions, their actions and banter suggest otherwise. Throughout *Strange Manuscript* they read and converse at the beck and call of Featherstone, a person of considerable wealth who makes the trip possible. His presence and status directly contradict the reading protocol of rational bourgeois discourse, its codes of rational enquiry and critical disinterestedness, yet he is tolerated. While Melick, Oxenden and Congreve attempt to prove themselves through discourse by using the "formal character of [their] discourse" as the measure of their achievements, Featherstone has no real need to prove himself because his political, cultural and discursive authority is derived from his "social title."¹⁴ To consolidate their bourgeois cultural, political and social positions, the three men do the bulk of the reading. Featherstone can pretend to read and boast good-naturedly about his poor skills because the middle-class will read and interpret on behalf of the propertied, upper class.

Discovered by Melick while looking for an object to which his paper-boats can sail, the manuscript is the catalyst that inspires much debate. The moment of its discovery is illuminating. The description of the copper cylinder as "foreign work" (23) and the surprise they articulate when they learn that the manuscript inside is written in English is perhaps an appropriate image of most writing generated from colonies. The manuscript is written in familiar English, but at the same time it is "foreign work,"

metaphorically encased by an unfamiliar social, political, geographical and cultural context. The readers, though, assume that because the work is written in English it can be read and understood according to the familiar paradigms of knowledge, genre, reading practice, science, art, and so on. Any implicit critique of English discourse contained within such a “foreign work” is likely to be missed, particularly by an audience becalmed, adrift and out of sorts. One of the first things they do as readers is naturalise the work. Strangeness, they think, can be familiarised by “strategies of naturalization and cultural assimilation.”¹⁵ Once they ascertain that the casing is “foreign” work, the immediate point of reference is back to England and what is normal practice there. In assessing the significance of the cylinder, the men set England, the familiar, against the cylinder, the alien.

In the course of *Strange Manuscript* seemingly divergent reading strategies compete: the scientific rationalism or mimetic realism of Congreve, the stylistic and genre criticism of Melick, the philological treatise of Oxenden and the eclectic foppery of Featherstone. Yet for all the arguments over the manuscript, the various ideological positions of the readers, the degrees of polemic and the apparent differences these orientations embody, the assumptions that the drifting critics bring to bear on the text are inherently the same. They share a “predominantly mimetic view of the relation between the text and a *given* pre-constituted reality.” One of the problems Homi Bhabha identifies with mimeticism is that it revolves around “the classic subject/object structure of knowledge,” the methodology of which is based wholly on “the question of appearance and reality” or “knowledge as the *recognition* of given objects.”¹⁶

In the external narrative, the reading practices of Featherstone, Melick, Oxenden and Congreve, are challenged by the manuscript. The Englishmen’s quarrels over whether the manuscript is an accurate, representative reflection of the world solidifies the dialectic between the known world and More’s manuscript. They assign greater weight to what they understand as reality than to the specific discursive mechanisms of the text. There is an inordinate emphasis on the manuscript’s contents. “Let’s have the contents of the manuscript” (26) says Featherstone. The analysis of the manuscript that follows his request is considerably “content-oriented,” a critical orientation that refers back to the given reality predetermined and thoroughly mediated by England, its history, culture and language.¹⁷ They repeatedly evaluate the manuscript’s reflective and expressive correct-

ness. All that More says in the manuscript will be empirically related back to England or Europe. When they appraise the value of the text the “issue of mimetic adequacy” dominates their arguments to the exclusion of everything else. Bhabha explains the consequence of such a critical approach:

The ‘image’ must be measured against the ‘essential’ or ‘original’ in order to establish its degree of *representativeness*, the correctness of the image. The text is not seen as *productive* of meaning but essentially reflective or expressive . . . , neither a discourse nor a practice, but a form of recognition.¹⁸

Melick recognises the manuscript in relation to an emerging literary tradition that is poised to become dominant, Congreve according to historical and scientific reports about the world, and Oxenden to philological connections. Each reader attempts to reclaim the manuscript and invest it with meaning already known, as though by referring More’s narrative back to England and alluding to its Englishness it can be controlled.

Congreve is the most visible offender. He desires to establish that the manuscript accurately reflects and is corroborated by a specifically European reality. Even the texture of the manuscript is subjected to the rigorous tests of mimetic accuracy. The manuscript is made from “actual papyrus” (72) Congreve asserts, basing his claim on the fact that he has “seen and examined” (73) two rolls at Marseilles. More’s descriptions and representations of his exile suffer a similarly reductionist fate:

[J]ust consider the strong internal evidence that there is to the authenticity of the manuscript. Now, in the first place, there is the description of Desolation Island, which is perfectly accurate. But it is on his narrative beyond this point that I lay chief stress. I can prove that the statements here are corroborated by those of Captain Ross in his account of that great voyage from which he returned not very long ago I happen to know all about that voyage, for I read a full report of it just before we started, and you can see for yourselves whether this manuscript is credible or not. (73)

Congreve wants to verify the veracity of the manuscript and substantiate More’s account by referring it to a reliable factual and historical source. Convinced by More’s accurate description, Congreve believes that the manuscript reflects reality and, for this reason, he urges the others to “accept as valid the statements of this remarkable manuscript” (78). Significantly, Congreve prefaces his discussion of the manuscript by asking that they analyze it “in a common-sense way” (71), a coded way of invoking a seemingly non-theoretical and non-ideological reading position that will make the

manuscript intelligible, transparent and able to be understood as an objective reflection of the empirically knowable world.

Melick's vociferous, biting objections to Congreve's reasoning fail to obscure the similarities between them: he too attempts to authenticate the manuscript, although by a different yardstick. The manuscript is "a transparent hoax" and a rather crude attempt at "a sensational novel" (71). Expression, style, description, metaphor, dialogue, genre, narrative devices, plot—these are the things that Melick focuses on. "I simply criticise from a literary point of view" (75), he says, as if anything could be as simple as a literary point of view. Later on he calls the manuscript "a satirical romance" (215), but he is reluctant to incorporate it within the emerging literary canon. The jocularly sardonic Melick suddenly becomes seriously prescriptive:

In order to carry out properly such a plan as this the writer should have taken Defoe as his model, or still better, Dean Swift. 'Gulliver's Travels' and 'Robinson Crusoe' show what can be done in this way, and form a standard by which all other attempts must be judged. But this writer is tawdry; he has the worst vices of the sensational school—he shows everywhere marks of haste, gross carelessness, and universal feebleness. When he gets hold of a good fancy, he lacks the patience that is necessary in order to work it up in an effective way. He is a gross plagiarist, and over and over again violates in the most glaring manner all the ordinary properties of style. (216-17)

Putting aside De Mille's debt to Swift, the emphasis on propriety, literary standards, hierarchy, the generality of critical terms and Melick's disdain for work that fails to meet universal standards is, perhaps, a sign of the influence of Matthew Arnold on De Mille.¹⁹ According to Melick, the manuscript's style, intelligence, themes, metaphors and "the intention of the writer" (216) fail to measure up against the literary models he describes. In Melick's view, More violates literary standards, therefore his narrative is barred entry to the emerging and constructed literary canon. Confronted with an unknown text, Melick seeks the safety of the literary models known to him to master, control and overwhelm the manuscript.

The generic confusion surrounding More's manuscript (and, one could add, *Strange Manuscript*) is, however, an explicit challenge to expressive realist strictures and assumptions. "A deuced queer sort of thing this" (70) says Featherstone, and so it is. Melick argues that "it's not a sailor's yarn at all" but the work instead "of a confounded sensation-monger" (75). When Melick pronounces that it is a "satirical romance" Congreve immediately wants to know why it is not a "scientific romance" (215). Unswayed by these

two, Oxenden declares that it “is a plain narrative of facts” (216) and ridicules Melick’s literary analysis. Clearly, the manuscript doesn’t fit into accepted and traditional genres, nor does it accord with what authors are normally supposed to write about. De Mille draws attention to the way in which literature is not *given*, or *obviously great*, but *mediated*. As the men argue about the strangeness of the manuscript, its indefinability, we see how literature is assessed, discussed and judged. In the process of canon formation, a sophisticated form of intellectual colonisation, we see meaning and a hierarchy of values produced.

S*trange Manuscript* is no exception to Bakhtin’s axiom: “The idea of testing the hero, of testing his discourse, may very well be the most fundamental organizing idea in the novel.”²⁰ In the internal narrative, Adam More’s decidedly colonialist values, practices and discursive strategies are rigorously tested when he confronts the Kosekin. Language has an ideological function and with More’s narrative we see a relationship between colonialist discourse and practice. More’s narrative of his life with the Kosekin embodies all the textual strategies and “interchangeable oppositions” so characteristic of the manichean allegory, which Abdul R. JanMohamed defines as the efficient and effective “central trope” that dominates and overdetermines the relationship between coloniser and colonised.²¹

In the internal narrative of *Strange Manuscript* Adam More uses the dominant tropes of colonialist discourse when he meets the Kosekin. The first meeting between More and Agnew and the humans they espy is a physical and discursive encounter. Based only on what he sees of the people on the shore, More decides that it is his best interest to fire his gun, a non-discursive colonial response to the unknown. To Agnew’s cry of “Why,” More gets straight to the point: “I only mean to inspire a little wholesome respect” (45). “A little wholesome respect” euphemistically refers to a relationship based on coerced deference, wherein a series of exchanges based on domination and subordination take place. The gun presages More’s eventual colonial dominance. Surprisingly, the fired gun does not achieve the required response. The natives defy More’s expectation that they would run away by sitting down. Momentarily stumped, More nonetheless is comforted by the fact that he “had another barrel still loaded and a pistol” (45). The weapons overdetermine More’s “state of mind” (45) when he lands: he

is ready to use the guns to achieve power, “a little wholesome respect.” After he is made aware of their ritualised cannibalism, More’s response is an elaboration of colonial practice: “I felt sure that our only plan was to rule by terror—to seize, to slay, to conquer” (50). This, strangely enough, is what he eventually gets to do: rule and conquer. The coupling of discourse and practice eventually results in power, a power premised on what seems to be profound moral, social and cultural differences; differences which in turn justify his power. One of the disturbing elements of More’s accession to power is that he makes it appear as though he is symbolically sacrificing himself for the good of the Kosekin.

Colonialist discourse plays an important role in *Strange Manuscript*. More’s colonialist language shapes the tenor of the engagement irrevocably, constructing as it does a situation whereby the use of a gun is normalised. The Kosekin, as depicted by More, bear no relationship to civilised humanity. He prefers the terrors of the “river of death” to meeting the human figures, who are characterised as “strange” and potentially dangerous “creatures” (43). As the lost Westerners float closer to these creatures, More’s discourse, in terms of its disdain and fear, intensifies. There is also a corresponding increase in the repetitiveness of his choice of words and images to describe the unknown people. The very act of reiteration, the deadening mantra-like quality of More’s banal and limited description, invariably prefigures a justification for violence and results in the acquisition of power and, ultimately, in his deification. Repetitive discourse, in this instance, functions as a means of control: it subjugates, objectifies and colonises. Consider More’s opinions of the “creatures” as he gets closer to them:

They were human beings, certainly, but of such an appalling aspect that they could only be likened to animated mummies. They were small, thin, shrivelled, black, with long matted hair and hideous faces. They all had long spears, and wore about the waist short skirts that seemed to be made of the skin of some sea-fowl. (43)

More continues in this style and discovers that the longer he looks at them “the more abhorrent they grew” (44). The people he describes remind him of another colonial context where the indigenous inhabitants are renowned for the horror and disgust they inspire:

Even the wretched aborigines of Van Dieman’s Land, who have been classed lowest in the scale of humanity, were pleasing and congenial when compared with these. (44)

When Agnew persuades More that they should go ashore, More consents for two reasons: they are armed and the natives “made no hostile demonstrations” (44). As they approach the shore More’s descriptive language registers his revulsion:

the crowd of natives stood awaiting us, and looked more repulsive than ever. We could see the emaciation of their bony frames; their toes and fingers were like birds’ claws; their eyes were small and dull and weak, and sunken in cavernous hollows, from which they looked at us like corpses—a horrible sight. (45)

More’s descriptions intensify as he nears the people:

their meagre frames, small, watery, lack-lustre eyes, hollow, cavernous sockets, sunken cheeks, protruding teeth, claw-like fingers and withered skin, all made them look more than every like animated mummies, and I shrank from them involuntarily, as once shrinks from contact with a corpse. (46)

This disgust, More says, is spontaneous, unconscious, instinctive; in other words, natural. Further on they are “human vermin” (46), the children “little dwarfs,” the women “hags” (47), their language primitive gibberish. “The vilest and lowest savages that I had seen were not so odious as these” (49). His observations, labels and descriptions, hardly neutral, culminate with this:

They had the caricature of the human form; they were the lowest of humanity; their speech was a mockery of language; their faces devilish; their kindness a cunning pretence. (50)

Aside from the repetition of certain adjectives, nouns and phrases, the major point worth noting about More’s language is it degrades and dehumanises the people he encounters. Such pejorative projections, inevitability fatalistic, encourage a relationship determined predominantly by the European that is based on superiority and inferiority, one that posits a distinction between the practices of the civilised and those of the barbarians.

Whenever More loses power or feels threatened he resorts to the familiarity and comfort of colonial discourse. When he is confined with the Chief Pauper and the recipient of the best of the Kosekin world (imprisonment, poverty, darkness, certain death), More is being endowed with gifts that are the inverse of the dominant Western values and practices. Isolated and intimidated by the loss of power, More uses colonial discourse with a punitive vengeance. Thus the Chief Pauper is “a hideous wretch, with eyes nearly closed and bleary, thick, matted hair, and fiendish expression—in short, a devil incarnate in rags and squalor” (232). He is “an object of never-ending hate,

abhorrence, and loathing" (233). Consider, too, More's crescendo of anxiety when he contemplates Almah's fate, surrounded as she is by "hags." Such is More's ranting that it is hard not to consider it as some form of libidinal dread:

The women—the hags of horror—the shriek-like ones, as I may call them; or the fiend-like, the female fiends, the foul ones—they were all around us . . . A circle was now formed around us, and the light stood in the middle. The nightmare hag also stood within the circle on the other side of the light opposite us. The beams of the lamp flickered though the darkness, faintly illuminating the faces of the horrible creatures around, who, foul and repulsive as harpies, seemed like unclean beasts, ready to make us prey. (237)

Having established the Kosekin's inferiority, More's own measure of self-worth rises inestimably. This is brilliantly ironic, considering how obtuse More is. More's sense of superiority is based on his interpretations of the actions of the Kosekin as deferential gestures of respect and acknowledgements of his preeminence. Upon seeing the Kosekin prostrate themselves before Agnew and himself, More assumes "that they regarded us as superior beings of some sort" (46). Unable to comprehend the excessively generous actions of the Kohen and others, More again fancies himself as being revered "as some wonderful being with superior powers" (67). The less than demure Layelah's adoration for him excites strong feelings of emotion from More. Once again, his interpretation of the situation rests heavily on feelings of importance granted largely on race and language:

She evidently considered me some superior being, from some superior race; and although my broken and faulty way of speaking was something of a trial, still she seemed to consider every word I uttered as a maxim of the highest wisdom. (168)

By the narrative's end, having avoided sacrifice and at the height of his power, More believes that the multitude beneath him regard him not as a sacrificial victim but "as some mighty being—some superior, perhaps supernatural power, who was to be almost worshipped" (246). What is most extraordinary about the various usages of the word "superiority" is the escalation of its significance. First, it applies to More as an individual, then it refers to his race, culture and language. Before long it refers to his divine status as a transcendent deity. In his transformation as a god, More, admitting that he is nonetheless "a weak mortal" (246), determines "to take advantage of the popular superstition to the utmost" (247). The projection of this largely imagined superiority puts More in a position where he is able to exploit the Kosekin.

The purpose of the colonialist discourse wielded by More is to construct the Kosekin as savage and evil so that their savagery appears self-evident. Discourse rationalises colonial subjugation and exploitation, paving the way for More's eventual arrogation of power and his deification. The ingenious deflection of materialism (power, wealth, land) in favour of something abstract (civilising savages) is a characteristic manoeuvre of colonialist discourse. More masks his power by letting it be known that it is a burden, an onerous weight reluctantly shouldered by a simple Englishman. In other words, his power is selfless, not selfish. More believes that any material benefit he gains is of secondary importance to the principal objective of reforming Kosekin values and behaviour, bringing them into alignment with English values and behaviour.

More's notions of superiority and the outcome of the sacrifice whereby he and Almah, outsiders to Kosekin culture, achieve dominance, are analogous to colonial conquest. More capitalises on "preexisting power relations of hierarchy, subordination, and subjugation within native societies", and this is made possible in part by "the technological superiority" of the gun, a metonym for European military force.²² In fact, More assumes "the putative superiority of the European and the supposed inferiority of the native."²³ Through the deployment of colonial discourse, More constructs a series of oppositions which allow him to stigmatise the values, practices and mode of production of the Kosekin.

Contingent historical, cultural, economic and political forces are responsible for constructions of race, gender, class, ethnicity and so on. Kohen Gadol, the most despised person in the Kosekin social order, reveals the importance of socialisation in conditioning attitudes and preconceptions. Shipwrecked at an early age, rescued and taken to an environment beyond his own, Kohen Gadol is inculcated with different values during his formative years: "I learned their language and manners and customs, and when I returned home I found myself an alien here" (165). Values, ways of seeing and interpreting are neither universal nor natural, but specific and socially constructed. Almah, for example, refuses to eat lobster because of a particular cultural prejudice instilled in her a long time ago:

She could not give any reason for her repugnance, but merely said that among her people they were regarded as something equivalent to vermin, and I found that she would no more think of eating one than I would think of eating a rat. (197)

It is worth noting that “vermin,” used to designate something repugnant, is also used by More to describe the Kosekin. What More considers “natural to a seafaring man like myself” (210), is, from another point of view, “a thousand false and unnatural habits, arising from your strange native customs” (156). More’s values, assumptions and practices appear organic, instinctual and normal. Thus More’s abhorrence when he meets the people is “immovable” and “something that defied reason” (50). What defies logic is a cultural prejudice so deeply ingrained that More’s hostility appears to be natural, spontaneous. Like his readers, More is constrained by the inherent assumptions and attitudes of his world and by the images his language produces, which he recognises and attributes to cultural conditioning: “The fact is my European training did not fit me for encountering such a state of things as existed among the Kosekin” (187). Cultural conditioning overdetermines, constrains and limits one’s behaviour and perceptions. It also overdetermines the discourse one uses when engaging with the world. Cultural prejudices inaugurate a particular vocabulary.

By the end of Adam More’s narrative it appears that Western technology, morality and discourse triumph. Through the timely discharge of his gun and his and Almah’s manipulation of existing power relations, More becomes the apotheosis of power, granting himself the authority to perpetually subordinate the Kosekin. In the process he gains immense riches for himself and Almah, wards off the possibility of miscegenation and wields immense power over the Kosekin, a power that operates within a colonialist dynamic. The Kosekin, interpellated as colonial subjects, recognise More as the ultimate leader and are gratefully subservient to his rule. Selfishness masquerades as selflessness. More’s victory over the Kosekin is a celebration of wealth, power, domination, the individual. And then Featherstone yawns.

The yawn silences the narrative. The chasm between the Featherstone’s decisive yawn and the conclusion of More’s inner narrative (signified, perhaps, by an imaginary “The End”) is the source of trouble for many critics. A rude anti-climax and an inexplicable strategy for terminating the adventure narrative, the yawn, George Woodcock argues, denies readers access to the circumstances in which More produces his text. Some critics see the yawn as conclusive proof of De Mille’s inability to finish the *Strange Manuscript*. To concentrate on De Mille’s boredom, forgetfulness or the demands of earning a living to account for the novel’s incompleteness,

however, is to see the author as the sole repository of meaning. It is also to read the text in a certain way.

Critics to date have regarded the yawn as the end of More's narrative, without considering what the placement of the yawn does to the internal narrative. Featherstone halts the narrative just as it simultaneously fulfils a Western colonialist fantasy of triumph and power and endorses a self-interested materialism. For the narrative to be yawned off at this point is, however, particularly appropriate, especially when the one doing the yawning is wealthy and powerful. Just as More's colonialist discourse has an ideological function and practical application, so too does Featherstone's yawn. It stops, for example, the other Englishmen from questioning the character of their society, the nature of progress and the assumptions upon which the colonial empire is built.

The English readers of More's manuscript, and the readers of *Strange Manuscript*, read the constituent parts of More's narrative in a particular order, and that chronology affects interpretations of the text. The structural order More's narrative is read in helps create a sense of resolution or incompleteness. In structural terms, More's narrative consists of three parts: the letter, the manuscript and an absence. Read in that order, an unfinished text is produced because the narrative appears structurally incoherent. The colonialist momentum of More's narrative is disrupted and left conclusion-less. However, by re-structuring the order of More's narrative, a conclusion based on the allusions in More's preface to the manuscript is manifest. Read in this way—manuscript, absence and letter—More's narrative is, in an odd way, complete. Its completeness, though, depends upon an important absence, a lacuna which marks the decline of colonial power. The ellipsis between the point at which More's narrative is yawned off and the prefatory note accompanying the manuscript cannot be subjected to critical speculation, critical production. The implied uncertainty generated by the narrative absence is provocative because it insinuates, through absence, More's decline, which, analogously, is the decline of colonial power. Perhaps this is what Lord Featherstone does not wish to read or have read to him. Hence, the denouement, which many have found unsatisfactory, is more than appropriate.

The letter attached to the manuscript is, in a sense, More's full stop, "The End," even though it occurs, paradoxically, at the beginning of his narrative. Although a preface introduces a work it is usually written retrospectively in order to assist readers, to allude to the general theme and tone of the writing

that follows, to give some sense or shape to the whole. In this work, then, the letter functions as a conclusion. The letter bridges the void signified by Featherstone's dismissive yawn and offers a tantalising though sombre finale. More's prefatory note is reminiscent of Kurtz's exclamation of horror in another text that probes the limitations and consequences of colonialist discourse and practice.²⁴ All is not happy, the power that comes with exploitation and acquisition is fraught with danger and for More "escape is as impossible as from the grave" (25).

Fundamentally transformed by the system he established and prevailed over, More desires to be released from a hell produced by colonist discourse and practices. In the letter he appeals for mercy. Despite his position of authority he appears to have had little success in transforming the Kosekin world into what he considers a civilised society: "I have written this and committed it to the sea, in the hope that the ocean currents may bear it within reach of civilized man" (25). The covering letter can be read as an oblique critique of society; not the Kosekin society that More rules over, but the European society that furnished him with the discursive and non-discursive methods that he used to gain power. In its call for compassion and its tone of despair, More's letter signals the failure of his colonialist appropriation of power and foreshadows the limits of colonial discourse. It is a pitiful contrast to the supposedly triumphant ending of the internal narrative, evoking the horror implicit in the colonialist acquisition of power and suggesting that there are limitations to this power. The text has not concluded at the height of colonialism: the letter accompanying the manuscript is its coda. What More has gained—wealth, power, authority—has a dark underside. The letter suggests that More's final conception of power contains within it the micro-organisms of its corruption and decline, the very fall of Empire.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

When I arrived in Canada Richard Cavell urged me to read *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*. For that, and our discussions on De Mille, I'm extremely grateful.

NOTES

- 1 M. G. Parks, "Strange to Strangers Only," *Canadian Literature* 70 (1976): 61. The 1969 New Canadian Library edition provided the impetus for a brief but much needed flurry of scholarly activity devoted to the novel. See Crawford Kilian, "The Cheerful Inferno of

James De Mille," *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 1:3 (1972): 61-67; George Woodcock, "De Mille and the Utopian Vision," *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 2:2 (1973): 174-79; and Wayne R. Kime, "The American Antecedents of James De Mille's *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*," *Dalhousie Review* 55 (1975): 280-306.

Since the mid-1970s, however, academic interest in the novel has been sporadic. Notwithstanding the publication of the Centre for Editing Early Canadian Texts (CEEET) critical edition of the novel in 1986 and Patricia Monk's full length study of De Mille in 1991, the novel continues to receive meagre notice. Richard Cavell is alone in ranking De Mille "as one of our most important novelists on the basis of *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*," see "Bakhtin Reads De Mille: Canadian Literature, Postmodernism, and the Theory of Dialogism," in *Future Indicative: Literary Theory and Canadian literature*, ed. John Moss (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1986) 206.

2 Patricia Monk, *The Gilded Beaver: An Introduction to the Life and Work of James De Mille* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1991) 239.

3 Quoted in Monk, 238.

4 An early exception to this complaint is Archibald MacMechan, who considered *A Strange Manuscript* to be his "most careful novel." See "De Mille, the Man and the Writer," *Canadian Magazine* 27 (1906): 415.

5 Woodcock, 174.

6 Monk, 239. Readers longing to examine examples of "thin ice" criticism should read Kenneth J. Hughes, "A Strange Manuscript: Sources, Satire, a Positive Utopia," *The Canadian Novel: Beginnings: A Critical Anthology*, ed. John Moss (Toronto: New Canadian, 1980): 111-125, and Camille R. La Bossiere, "The Mysterious End of James De Mille's Unfinished *Strange Manuscript*," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 7 (Winter 1983-84): 41-54. For Monk's discussion of these articles see *The Gilded Beaver*, 238-39.

7 Tony Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism* (London: Methuen, 1979) 174.

8 Kilian, 65.

9 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978; Ringwood: Penguin, 1991) 21.

10 Said, 237.

11 That the ending could have a political function is something not considered by Monk. For an example of criticism that does consider the political dimensions of the novel, see Janice Kulyk Keefer, *Under Eastern Eyes: A Critical Reading of Maritime fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987): 130-37.

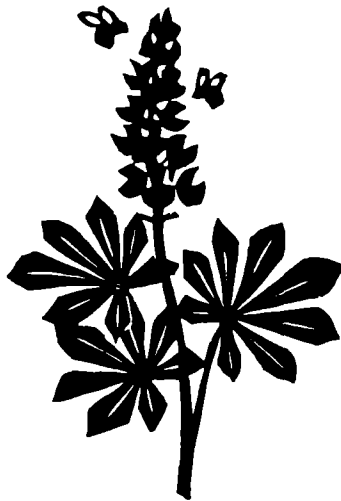
12 James De Mille, *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969) 19. All references are to this edition.

13 Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism: From the Spectator to Post-Structuralism* (London: Verso, 1984) 17.

14 Eagleton, 15.

15 Homi Bhabha, "Representation and the Colonial Text: A Critical Exploration of Some Forms of Mimeticism," *The Theory of Reading*, ed. Frank Gloversmith (Brighton: Harvester, 1984): 98-99.

- 16 Bhabha, 99.
- 17 Bhabha, 100.
- 18 Bhabha, 100.
- 19 Interestingly, *A Strange Manuscript*, said to have been written in the mid to late 1860s, is tantalisingly bracketed by Matthew Arnold's *Essays in Criticism* (1865) and *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). Melick's literary values predate the essay that would go on to influence and, some would argue, shape English and North American literary taste and values, *The Study of Poetry* (1880).
- 20 M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist and trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 388.
- 21 Abdul R. JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," *Critical Inquiry* 1 (1985): 63, 61.
- 22 JanMohamed, 62.
- 23 JanMohamed, 63.
- 24 "In a perverse way," writes Kulyk Keefer, "*Strange Manuscript* reads like an anticipatory parody of *Heart of Darkness*" (131).



First Rain, Then Snow

The spirit moves in the moment,
not in the hour.
In the sudden flick of flesh,
turn of phrase, a raised hand
you are separated
from your previous life—and still you say
“Everything is fine.”
Except always one thing is not fine:
you forget to love your spouse one day and
it stretches into three, or at work
someone in your department tightens his grip
until you turn your face
to a new direction;

and by consigning yourself away from the world,
by saying no to those who cross your office door
with the intention of demeaning you,
abusing you in seminar
because you have not held the proper theory
or sought after their truth,
you cut their power, you stop the fight.
You have been given this moment
not to speak aloud
but to say to yourself
what you want from life.

Now, lying on the bed, you see
out the window the tops of three trees
and with these you measure
first rain, then snow, then rain again,
then light, then dark, then leaves,
then wind. None of these
encroach on you or appear to make you
less than you are; neither do they
help much when you turn to your pillow
or rise, understanding that
the children’s voices downstairs will eventually
call up to you.

Sparrows on Ossington Avenue

Look up.
On the stave of the powerlines,
waiting,
 divided by posts
into measured bars,
sparrows scatter
from wire to wire
like small dark notes
 in an improvised score
composed in flight.

Each landing
 transcribes
a new arrangement
commissioned by sunlight.

The sky written on like manuscript paper
whose fabric,
 so old,
has worn clear.

Anne Wilkinson in Michael Ondaatje's 'In the Skin of a Lion' Writing and Reading Class

In *the Skin of a Lion* is a richly intertextual novel, invoking the works of writers as diverse as Baudelaire, H.G. Wells, Joseph Conrad, John Berger, and the anonymous authors of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the books of the Old Testament.¹ Some of these references are in the form of directly attributed quotations, or the name of the author; others are buried more subtly, more elusively, in the text: the name of the essay from which the Berger epigram is taken, for example, is embedded in the description of Nicolas Temelcoff, the bridge daredevil:

Even in archive photographs it is difficult to find him. Again and again you see vista before you and the eye must search along the wall of sky to the speck of burned paper across the valley that is him, an exclamation mark, somewhere in the distance between bridge and river. He floats at the three hinges of the crescent-shaped steel arches. These knit the bridges together. The moment of cubism (Ondaatje 1987, 34).

One of these buried intertextual allusions is to the poetry and prose of Anne Wilkinson (1910-1961).² Like the other intertextual references in the novel, the works of Anne Wilkinson draw out meanings relevant to the themes of the novel, and enrich and complicate the scenes in which the references are made. The form of this allusion is different from all of the others, however, in that it occurs through the representation of Wilkinson in the character of Anne, the poet, who has a bit part in the section of the novel called "Caravaggio." That she is the only writer-character in the novel suggests that she has a metafictional role, one which is buttressed by the similarities

between Wilkinson's work and Ondaatje's, and one which is revealing in respect to the relationship between the writer and the material of the novel. Furthermore, because the Wilkinson intertexts are so deeply embedded under the surface of the episodes in which Anne appears, making them available only to the initiated and privileged, they provide telling metatextual information about the reading, and the reader, of the novel.

The encounter between Caravaggio and Anne offers one of many representations of the relationship between the wealthy and the working classes with which the novel is fundamentally concerned. It is the difference between Anne and Caravaggio in this respect which he most notices when watching her:

He put his hands up to his face and smelled them. Oil and rust. They smelled of the chain [in the boathouse, upon which he hoisted himself to the roof]. That was always true of thieves, they smelled of what they brushed against. Paint, mushrooms, printing machines, yet they never smelled of the rich....And what did this woman smell of? In this yellow pine room past midnight she was staring into a bowl of kerosene as if seeing right through the skull of a lover (Ondaatje 1987, 199).

Unlike Rowland Harris, or Ambrose Small, whose wealth is commensurate with their ambition and power, or the rich people at the Yacht Club ball, whose ignorance and decadence sets them apart from Caravaggio and Patrick, Anne inhabits a world which can be entered by Caravaggio. He first enters through perception, watching her through the window, comparing the boathouse with the houses in Toronto from which he has stolen:

But this boathouse had no grandeur. The woman's bare feet rested one on top of the other on the stained-wood floor. A lamp on the desk, a mattress on the floor. In this light, and with all the small panes of glass around her, she was inside a diamond, mothlike on the edge of burning kerosene, caught in the centre of all the facets. He knew there was such intimacy in what he was seeing that not even a husband could get closer than him, a thief who saw this rich woman trying to discover what she was or was capable of making (Ondaatje 1987, 198).

He then enters her domain bodily, not as a thief, but as a person in need of help (Ondaatje 1987, 200-201). In his first encounter with her, in the canoe, Caravaggio was struck by her generosity: he says, "I'm here to get my bearings;" she replies, as a native, "This is a *good* place for that" (Ondaatje 1987, 187):

He had never heard anyone speak as generously as she had in that one sentence. This is a good place....Caravaggio looked over the body of water as if it were human now, a creature on whose back he shifted. He did not think of approaches or exits, suddenly there could be only descent or companionship (Ondaatje 1987, 188).

In the house she offers him what he needs: the telephone, some food. After food, they discover that both live in darkness, he as a thief, she in her boathouse, in a conversation which provides one of the only dramatized moments of peaceful exchange between the rich and the not. Her role is thus that of a compassionate, generous, and non-threatening rich person; as Martha Butterfield writes, Anne “is redeemed by her earthiness, her generosity...her attempt to discover her capabilities, who she was, her focused stillness, her simple bare feet” (1988, 166). The only other rich character who behaves with generosity is Harris, when he acts with care towards Patrick at the end; these actions are necessary to defuse the tension in the episode, and Harris’ behaviour in the moment is further ironized by the history of his actions towards working men and women in the novel. Nothing about Harris, or about Small or the rich people at the Yacht Club party, suggest their affinity to Patrick, Alice and Clara, as Anne’s beauty, simplicity, and attention to the secrets of the dark do.

The further significance of Anne to the rest of the novel lies in the fact that she is a writer. Her role as a writer gives her a power in history³ which Caravaggio can never possess:

He was anonymous, with never a stillness in his life like this woman’s. He stood on the roof outside, an outline of a bear in her subconscious, and she quarried past it to another secret, one of her own, articulated wet and black on the page. The houses in Toronto he had helped build or paint or break into were unmarked. He would never leave his name where his skill had been. He was one of those who have a fury or a sadness of only being described by someone else. A tarrer of roads, a housebuilder, a thief—yet he was invisible to all around him (Ondaatje 1987, 199).

In this sense, Anne is representative of one of the major themes of the novel, that only the stories of the rich are written down and become history. When Patrick researches the building of the Viaduct, “[t]he articles and illustrations he found in the Riverdale Library depicted every detail about the soil, the wood, the weight of concrete, everything but information on those who actually built the bridge” (Ondaatje 1987, 145). It is Patrick’s task in the novel to learn these stories, and ultimately to become the hero of his own, working-class, story, which he tells to Hana in the car, as we are told by the novel’s frame. In this respect, Anne represents the narrative hegemony of the ruling class, much as the waterworks building represents the story of Harris’ dreams, and the wealth of the city which supported them, but denies the lives and deaths of the men who built it. Within the novel, we are given

no information to suggest that Anne's texts are any different from those which Harris might produce. Her character is tempered by generosity and compassion; her power, however, to shape the images and history of the world around her, is unimpeached.

Several particulars about the scenes in which Anne appears suggest that she is—or stands in for, within the fiction—the poet Anne Wilkinson (1910-1961). The copyright information which precedes the title-page acknowledges the use of two sentences from the journals of Anne Wilkinson, which suggests the identification.⁴ In the novel, the cottage is on “Featherstone Point” (Ondaatje 1987, 197); Anne Wilkinson's great-grandfather was Featherstone Osler, and his son, Edmund Osler, owned a cottage estate at Roches Point on Lake Simcoe, where Anne Wilkinson spent all of the summers of her life. Anne Wilkinson's great-uncle was William Osler, a famous physician also noted for his sense of humour; in the novel, Anne tells Caravaggio about the time she had measles:

My uncle—he's a famous doctor—came to see me. In my room, all the blinds were down, the lights drowned. So I could do nothing. I wasn't allowed to read. He said I've brought you earrings. They are special earrings. He pulled out some cherries. Two, joined by their stalks, and he hung them over one ear and took out another pair and hung them over the other ear. That kept me going for days. I couldn't lie down at night without carefully taking them off and laying them on the night table (Ondaatje 1987, 202).

Finally, Anne tells Caravaggio about the poem she was writing as he watched her in the boathouse:

I have literally fallen in love with the lake. I dread the day I will have to leave it. Tonight I was writing the first love poem I have written in years and the lover was the sound of lakewater (Ondaatje 1987, 203).

This describes, with Ondaatje's customary brevity and accuracy, one of Wilkinson's early poems, “Lake Song,” which I quote here in its entirety:

Willow weep, let the lake lap up your green trickled tears.
Water, love, lip the hot roots, cradle the leaf;
Turn a new moon on your tongue, water, lick the deaf rocks,
With silk of your pebble-pitched song, water, wimple the beach;
Water, wash over the feet of the summer-bowed trees,
Wash age from the face of the stone.

I am a hearer of water;
My ears hold the sound and the feel of the sound of it mortally.
My skin is in love with lake water,

My skin is the leaf of the willow,
My nerves are the roots of the weeping willow tree.

My blood is a clot in the stone,
The blood of my heart is fused to a pit in the rock;
The lips of my lover can wear away stone,
My lover can free the blocked heart;
The leaf and the root and the red sap will run with lake water,
The arms of my lover will carry me home to the sea.
(Wilkinson 1968, 20).

Wilkinson is primarily remembered as a poet, a contemporary of Margaret Avison, P.K. Page, Irving Layton, Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath and many others, and as a founding editor of the *Tamarack Review*. She was also, however, the informal historian of her own historically significant family. She wrote *Lions in the Way*, a history of the Osler family, and set down more personal memories of her family, and their places, in an unfinished memoir, "Four Corners of My World," published first in the year after her death and reprinted in the 1968 *Collected Poems*. Wilkinson's sense of history is deeply indebted to the continuity of her family and their places. She wrote of Roches Point, site of the Beachcroft cottage, in her memoir:

At Roches Point I witnessed my first summer, as did my mother and brother and sister; and the whole or part of every subsequent summer; hence no beginning, no moment when I observed it consciously for the first time. The place is tall with tales of my grandparents, uncles and aunts, my own generation and that of my children. Under the circumstances it is difficult to say what happened to whom. As members of primitive tribes experience group rather than individual emotions, likewise our eighty Roches Point summers appear to belong equally to the dead and the living. Here time flaunts its paradox; rushes by yet never moves an inch—a caged squirrel running on its revolving stair (Wilkinson 1968, 183-4).

In another passage of the memoir, she describes viewing the picture gallery at Craighleigh, her grandfather's Rosedale mansion:

The grandfather [Edmund Osler] sighs. He looks a long time at the portrait of his mother [Ellen Picton Osler]. Because she lived to be a hundred we always think of her as a century, not a day more or less. Once she walked these floors, a living presence. Her footsteps are still everywhere heard (Wilkinson 1968, 196).

This sense of history, of time, of personal identity is, as Wilkinson notes, tribal; one might also say that it is aristocratic, in the diluted Canadian sense of the word. The members of this family possess the stories, the means to perpetuate them, the places to share, and the negation of death which is provided by continuing inheritance which is unavailable to the working

class characters in *In the Skin of a Lion*. Significantly, the Osler family—particularly Edmund, Wilkinson's grandfather—were not just rich and powerful; they were deeply involved in laying the foundations of the official culture of Toronto in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Edmund Osler was a founding member of the Royal Ontario Museum, the Art Gallery of Ontario and one of the first Chancellors of the University of Toronto. In a sense, then, Anne Wilkinson's history depends upon and incorporates the Harris's of the cultural world, building bridges and purifying plants for colonial civilization. The allusion to these texts and this history which is made through the figure of Anne and her situation in the splendid family cottage deepens and enriches the inter-connection between cultural history and capital which is such a significant theme of the novel. At the same time it provides a specific intertext which particularizes the sense of history against which the novel works.

Tempering the presentation of Anne as a scion of establishment Toronto and an aristocratic myth-maker are her poems, which are also invoked by the allusion. These serve, first of all, to identify the novelistic Anne as a poet who possessed great talent and integrity, and who used her craft to write beautiful poems. The character Anne, without this reference to specific, actual poems, is not actually shown to have such talent; without the intertexts, one might take her as an idle rich woman, frittering away the luxury of time scribbling poetry. There are similarities between Ondaatje's poetry and Wilkinson's which strengthen the quality of the allusion. A.J.M. Smith wrote of Wilkinson, as one might write of Ondaatje, "[s]he never knew the tragedy of not living in a sensual world....For Anne Wilkinson the body and its sense were the instruments through which nature and reality entered the mind and became a part of being" (Wilkinson 1968, xiv, xvi). Ondaatje's poems posit a similar relationship between sensual experience and the learning of living reality; the Ceylon poems, such as "The Cinnamon Peeler," exemplify this, but most of his lyrics require the same trope. In the prose poem which concludes *Secular Love*, the barriers between the human sexual and the natural worlds are dissolved:

He slips under the fallen tree holding the cedar root the way he holds her forearm. He hangs a moment, his body being pulled by water going down river. He holds it the same way and for the same reasons. Heart Creek? Arm River? he writes, he mutters to her in the darkness....He thinks of what she is, what she is naming. Near her, in the grasses, are Bladder Campion, Devil's Paintbrush, some

unknown blue flowers...He has gone far enough to look for a bridge and has not found it. Turns upriver. He holds onto the cedar root the way he holds her forearm (Ondaatje 1984, "Escarpment," 126).

The confusion and intermixture of objects in nature and parts of the human body is even more strongly evident in Wilkinson's poetry; in this respect, "Lake Song" is a good example, although "The Red and the Green," to which I will refer again below, is even more apt, and "In June and Gentle Oven," from which the following is excerpted, serves well:

Then two in one the lovers lie
And peel the skin of summer
With their teeth
And suck its marrow from a kiss
So charged with grace
The tongue, all knowing
Holds the sap of June
Aloof from seasons, flowing.
(Wilkinson 1968, 62).

Wilkinson and Ondaatje also share some images; for example, insects, with their precise, untamable beauty, figure metaphorically in both authors' works. In "In June and Gentle Oven" Wilkinson writes:

Fabulous the insects
Stud the air
Or walk on running water,
Klee-drawn saints
And bright as angels are.

Honeysuckle here
Is more than bees can bear
And time turns pale
And stops to catch its breath.
And lovers lip their flesh
Light as pollen
Play on treble water
Till bodies reappear
And a shower of sun
To dry their langour.
(Wilkinson 1968, 62).

In some of Ondaatje's poems and in *In the Skin of a Lion*, insects inhabit a world which is alien, desired, and finally known by the speaker. At the conclusion of "Claude Glass," for example:

the crickets like small pins
begin to tack down
the black canvas of this night,
begin to talk their hesitant
gnarled epigrams to each other
across the room.
Creak and echo.
Creak and echo. With absolute clarity
he knows where he is.
(Ondaatje 1984, 19).

In the novel, it is this “absolute clarity” which Patrick seeks, and it is in the insect world that he first locates his desire for understanding, and for voice:

He walks back into the bright kitchen and moves from window to window to search out the moths pinioned against the screens, clinging to brightness....He crayons the orange wings of the geometer into his notebook, the lunar moth, the soft brown—as if rabbit fur—of the tussock moth....Perhaps he can haunt these creatures. Perhaps they are not mute at all, it is just a lack of range in his hearing....He knows the robust calls from the small bodies of cicadas, but he wants conversation—the language of damsel flies who need something to translate their breath the way he uses the ocarina to give himself a voice, something to leap with over the wall of this place....In the way he steps from the dark house and at the doorway of the glowing kitchen says to the empty fields, I am here. Come and visit me (9-10).

Like other images in the novel, the insects of his childhood return to him, as he attains his voice, as he begins to assemble his narrative, and—in the following instance, at least—when he is in the embrace of love. Regarding the Finns’ burning cattails on the river, which first appear to him as fireflies, Patrick says,

All that gave direction was a blink of amber. Already he knew it could not be lightning bugs. The last of the summer’s fireflies had died somewhere in the folds of one of his handkerchiefs. (Years later, Clara making love to him in a car, catching his semen in a handkerchief and flinging it out onto bushes on the side of the road. Hey, lightning bug! he had said, laughing, offering no explanation) (Ondaatje 1987, 20).

These thematic and metaphoric alliances between Ondaatje’s work and Wilkinson’s poetry serve to give Anne in the novel, “mothlike on the edge of burning kerosene....this rich woman trying to discover what she was or what she was capable of making” (Ondaatje 1987, 198), and her work, an integrity and authentic beauty they do not otherwise possess.

They also, more obviously, ally the actual author of *In the Skin of a Lion*

with the fictional author Anne, an alliance which is reinforced by the sense of history presented by Wilkinson in her poetry. In her verse Wilkinson invokes a sense of history which is markedly different from the history of the procession of the ancestors, of the portraits in the mansion houses, of the continuity of blood which permits the nobly-born to evade the erasure of death. In the poem "The Red and the Green," for example, memory is lost and amnesia is incurred in the experience of the senses:

Here, where summer slips
Its sovereigns through my fingers
I put on my body and go forth
To seek my blood.

I walk the hollow subway
Of the ear; its tunnel
Clean of blare
Echoes the lost red syllable.

....

But the quest turns round, the goal,
My human red centre
Goes whey in the wind,
Mislaid in the curd and why of memory.

Confused, I gather rosemary
And stitch the leaves
To green hearts on my sleeve;
My new green arteries

Fly streamers from the maypole of my arms,
From head to toe
My blood sings green,
From every heart a green amnesia rings.
(Wilkinson 1968, 68-69).

This ritual transformation into the green man metamorphosizes human time into natural ahistory and atemporality. This alteration does not occur in the poem entitled "Roches Point," which is about the cottage where the fictional Anne writes, but, in contrast to the sense of history described in Wilkinson's memoir, the objects which mark time, history, and the continuing presence of her family in that place, are here locked away in an attic:

This land rings,
In stone of its houses,
In cedar and sod,
The myths of my kin.

The long lake knows our bones;
Skin and scar and mole, sings
Them like a lover, truly.

....

The body still goes back
For of necessity
It makes strange journeys.
I, my being,
Shut the door against return
And in the attic pack
One hundred summers,
Seven burning wounds,
A root of deadly nightshade
And the silky waters
Where our epochs drowned.
(Wilkinson 1968, 134).

This poem presents, therefore, a midway position between the experience of the body transformed in nature, which produces an atemporal epiphany, and the continuous, consistent, unending sense of history provided by the ancestors and their houses. The memories are packed in the attic, out of daily use, but still accessible, where one might, as Ondaatje puts it, “retreat from the grand story and stumble accidentally upon a luxury, one of those underground pools where we can sit still. Those moments, those few pages in a book we go back and forth over” (Ondaatje 1987, 148). The allusion to Wilkinson’s poetry, then, evokes a sense of history which differs from that presented in her historical works, and one which allies the poet Anne more closely with the unofficial histories, the histories of individuals which are begun through sensory experience, continued through passion, and consummated in love and violence, with which the novel is so deeply concerned.

These aspects of the intertexts which the character Anne brings with her into the novel greatly enrich her role as a metafictional author-presence in the novel. Throughout the novel, metaphors and images get drawn back into the plot at a later time (the Finns on the ice, the feldspar, the dynamite, etc.), creating a richly textured interplay between symbol and action which is essential to the meaning of the novel and indicative of the artistry of its author. That Anne does not get drawn back into the plot, that she seems to play no role in motivating action of any kind, and that she does not, as so many of the other characters do, have a relationship with a character other than Caravaggio, suggest further that her role is more strictly and simply

metaphoric than other symbolic characters and things in the novel. Her position outside the action of the novel reinforces her status as an image of the author. This does not imply that Anne stands in, biographically or autobiographically, for Ondaatje, but that she—as a writer, as a member of the upper classes, as one whose control over history is both acted upon and consciously relinquished in her art—represents the author's relationship to his material more fully than it is otherwise represented in the novel. This in turn suggests the delicate, ambiguous, and difficult relationship of the literate, educated, privileged writer to the histories with which he is concerned—of the illiterate, the under-educated, the unprivileged. As such, both the compassion, intelligence, perception, and talents given Anne and underlined by the intertextual allusions she brings, and the fact that her social position gives her power that she is not able to relinquish, provide a telling, sensitive and interesting portrait of the author of, or in, the novel. In this way, the Anne episodes differ from the other intertextual moments in the novel, inasmuch as they depict and invoke an author and his or her works, rather than just the works and their relevant meanings.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of this intertextual reference, however, lies not in the construction of the author figure and the relation to his or her material which it implies, but in the way in which this episode constructs the reader's position and thus comments metatextually on the reader's perception of meaning in the novel. Unlike other intertextual references, which make available the relevant works to any reader willing to track down the allusion in conventional sources, the Wilkinson intertexts are so deeply buried as to be available to only a few readers, those who are either familiar with her work, or who recognize the obscure signs posted throughout her episode; the most public clue to her identity, the copyright information, refers to a document which was, at the time of the publication of the novel, unpublished and therefore unavailable to the ordinary reader. The Wilkinson allusions, then, suggest more strongly than anything else in the novel that, just as there are class divisions in work and writing, there are two classes of readers, one of which possesses privileged, insider information, and the other of which does not. Unlike the division between workers and bosses and the division between the writers and the written, both of which are permeable and transgressable (Nicolas becomes a boss and Patrick attains a certain authority over Harris; Nicolas and Patrick become storytellers, and Alice always has been; Ondaatje himself is able to write the

novel), the division between readers, in this episode, is absolute. For a reader who is not already inside the stories Anne Wilkinson told, it would be very difficult to get inside the stories Anne tells in the novel. Through Anne, then, the author seems to be implying that at the root of the structures of differential power depicted in the novel is the difference between the inside and the outside reader; that it is, ultimately, knowledge which is the only absolute sense of power, as a reader, as a writer, as a worker or a boss. This, the novelist implies, is something he can do nothing about; it is our responsibility, as readers, as privileged readers, to bridge the gap of knowledge between the inside and the outside of our texts.

When Caravaggio sees Anne in the boathouse, she is described as wearing “[a] summer skirt, an old shirt of her husband’s, sleeves rolled up” (Ondaatje 1987, 197). When she finds him in the house, he asks her if it is her husband’s shirt which she wears, to which she replies “No. My husband’s shirts are here, though. You want them?” (Ondaatje 1987, 200), a reply which marks both her fear of the thief and her generous impulses towards this fellow solitary traveller in the dark. Two pages later she tells him “I have a brother who doesn’t speak. This is his shirt. He hasn’t spoken for years” (Ondaatje 1987, 202).⁵ Putting on the skins of others who are mute is what the storyteller does in this novel; Alice does it (Ondaatje 1987, 157), Patrick does it. The intertextual information provided by identifying Anne as Anne Wilkinson allows us to relate this incident, unironically, to similar incidents in the novel, and to the title, which suggests the centrality of the episode.⁶ It is Caravaggio’s refusal of the shirt, a refusal of fear and misguided generosity, a refusal of her power to give and his talent for theft, which is perhaps most significant with regard to the metafictional role of this character, for it marks most poignantly the terrain of misunderstanding, of loss, of fear, of empty gifts which lies between the writer and his subject in this novel. That we, as readers, are drawn into this terrain if and only if we identify Anne Wilkinson, and bring her works, her integrity, her struggle with the making and the being of history, is testimony to the endurance of the divisions with which the novel is so fundamentally concerned. That—at least for the inside reader—Ondaatje’s simple delineation of a marginal character in the novel (a boathouse, a shirt, three sentences describing a poem) brings to the novel layers of complexity and intrigue is testimony to the extraordinary richness of the novel, and artfulness of its author.

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NOTES

- 1 This quality of the novel may be too obvious to have received much critical attention; even Linda Hutcheon, in her analysis of the post-modern aspects of the novel, does not note this distinctively post-modern technique, and I have found no other analyses of intertextual references.
- 2 This identification is also made by Martha Butterfield in her review of *In the Skin of a Lion*. According to Butterfield, the historical counterpart, Anne Wilkinson, to the fictional character Anne was suggested and confirmed by personal correspondence with Ondaatje.
- 3 The power of written history is countered, in the novel, by the power of oral and performed story, each of which is allied with a specific class. See Gamlin on the topic of orality in the novel.
- 4 These were unpublished at the time of the publication of the novel, but some have since been published in *The Tighrope Walker*.
- 5 Ruth Bonder, one of my students, pointed out the similarity between the shirts in this episode and the skins of the lions in others.
- 6 Is there a play in the title on Wilkinson's *Lions in the Way*? No need to be so literal in our reading, but the idea is intriguing, at least in passing.

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Anthropos Metros

the length of you
the unit of length

your body separated from mine
the definition of space

your heartbeat
time

i cannot bear to measure
the distances between us

Touch

He says that molecules are in constant motion, even
the molecules of the old, brown desk
although they swirl less quickly than the
molecules of my fingertips. He says that
when I touch the scars on the desk its molecules and
mine
swirl.

He says that every molecule retains every shred of
memory and experience common to its owner and that when
I touch the desk it becomes part of me and I of it.
It knows me.

There is a train station in Vancouver where my
grandmother once was. She was called off the train
there to be given the news that her brother was dead.
She stood on the boards of the station and wisps
of steam from the train curled around her legs.
She read the telegram there.
She wore boots that had that flap of fur
that folded over
The boots knew her feet and the wood of the
platform. The wood remembers her now.

I could walk there, if the boards are the same and
I would be recognised as one who knew her too.
I could stand for a moment and the molecules of
my shoes would mingle with the memory of her.

Columbus & After

To America and Around the World: The Logs of Christopher Columbus and Ferdinand Magellan.
Branden Publishing, n.p.

Alexander McKee

A World Too Vast: The Four Voyages of Columbus.
Souvenir P n.p.

Michael Bradley

The Columbus Conspiracy: An Investigation into the Secret History of Christopher Columbus.
Hounslow P n.p.

Pauline Holdstock

The Burial Ground New Star Books n.p.

Marlene Nourbese Philip

Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence
Mercury P n.p.

Reviewed by Noel Elizabeth Currie

The United Nations declared 1993 the International Year of Indigenous Peoples, following the controversy surrounding the five hundredth anniversary of the supposed discovery of the new world by Columbus in 1492. The debate continues about the nature of Columbus' legacy, whether or not such an anniversary should be celebrated, and on whose terms. The works under review indicate the parameters of the field. They reveal the predominant biases of a traditional viewpoint, however unself-consciously, or transcend the boundaries with sophisticated meditations upon the terms of the debate. At a time when much that has been taken for granted or assumed to be true concerning new world history is undergoing serious reconsideration, the most interesting, and to my mind signifi-

cant, explorations of the field treat the issue of discovery as *story* and examine not only what the story says, but also what it does not say, and by whom.

To America and Around the World: The Logs of Christopher Columbus and Ferdinand Magellan exemplifies the most traditional treatment of exploration and discovery. Like the three essays ostensibly discussing the issues, these reprints of nineteenth-century editions of the logs are marred by the absolute absence of scholarly apparatus such as footnotes (perhaps because there is apparently no editor to write them). The text produces an imperial rhetoric and sensibility imbued with the breathless tone of the boy's own adventure story. The volume's evident purpose is revealed in its conclusion, which is a celebration of Italian primacy in the discovery of the new world: "Vespucci lives in the name of *America!* Thanks be to God."

In *A World Too Vast: The Four Voyages of Columbus*, a glossy coffee-table book which tells the story of Columbus' four voyages replete with illustrations and photos, Alexander McKee produces a readable and reasoned account — not of the inevitable triumph of an heroic endeavour, but rather of the jockeying for position amongst key players, and of competing interests and intrigues in a complex enterprise marked by coincidence, betrayal, and serendipity. In a field which too often treats what actually happened as inevitable simply because it did happen, McKee's account is notable. It suggests the possibility of any number of other outcomes; after all, it is only arro-

gance and a failure of the imagination which treat Columbus' place in history as inevitable.

Michael Bradley's *The Columbus Conspiracy* argues that Columbus was the agent of an international "Grail conspiracy," led by the Catholic Knights Templar and made up of Christians, Jews, and Muslims, which organised the voyage of 1492 in order to remove the Holy Grail from the religious battleground of Jerusalem to the safety of the new world. Columbus, an experienced sailor who already knew that America existed, was the obvious front man for the group. Because the facts of Columbus' life are ambiguous at best, contradictory at worst (for example, the man whose motives are assumed to be imperial Christianity may have been a Jew), Bradley's argument is as good as any I have read. It certainly makes a more interesting story than the tired and timeworn version reproduced in *To America and Around the World* and, to a lesser degree, in *A World Too Vast*.

The field of new world discovery, no less than the life of Columbus, is marked by radical uncertainty. Closer inquiry often reveals the problems and contradictions of the entire notion of 'exploration and discovery,' and that much that has been presented as 'fact' is more like speculation. It is not surprising, therefore, that the most thoughtful treatment of the issues is to be found in fiction rather than in historical writing. Both Pauline Holdstock's *The Burial Ground* and Marlene Nourbese Philip's *Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence* achieve a depth of complexity without imposing a fixed resolution. They move beyond the content of the material, or even beyond variations on a theme, and concentrate on the form. The telling rather than the story takes centre stage.

The Burial Ground presents the familiar "contact and conquest" story of new world history. A priest's well-intentioned attempt to do "God's work," to carry the Gospel and

save the heathen, results in the near-genocide of "his" tribe on the west coast of Vancouver Island. Smallpox decimates this community which is already undermined from within by his missionary efforts. In contrast to the heroic historical perspective of the Columbus texts, narrative itself is under scrutiny here: the story is familiar to the point of banality, but a different manner of telling it opens up new possibilities. The inadequacy of European forms and language to communicate new-world realities is revealed initially by the contrast between the official journal kept by the priest for the Bishop in Victoria and the interspersed unexpurgated, possibly heretical, meditations. This contrast also demonstrates the flattening effect of European discourse about non-European peoples, in which stock phrases—a kind of ideological shorthand—like "any savage" and "pagan practices" obstruct the very communication they attempt to facilitate. (The Priest's contempt for his imagined audience in Victoria makes clear that the notion of "contact" may be an illusion within, as well as between, cultural groups.) Although narrated primarily by the Priest, the novella presents multiple viewpoints, so that the other characters' perceptions mediate his, heightening the contrast between the words on the Priest's page and the reality they attempt to describe.

Not all of these characters are concerned with the ostensible subject matter, "contact." Just as the Priest considers his vocation and wonders whether he's "bartering with the sacraments," so the native characters have their own agendas. These may be intensely private (the Sister obsessed with thoughts of her lover), political (the Old Woman determined to save her people from destruction by the Father-not-Father), or spiritual (the Girl desperate to cure her idiot brother). Life did not begin for these people with the arrival of the Priest, nor does it end when he goes away;

they have concerns independent of him—although as his narrative predominance demonstrates, nothing remains unaffected by the fact of his presence. As the novella progresses, the number of viewpoints expands, so that by the final section, seven characters (one of whom is dead) are given voice. As a result, meaning expands and multiplies, possibly off the page as well: if different characters can have such different perspectives on the same situations, the same must be true for the readers who will approach the content and the language of this text in radically different ways.

Looking for Livingstone stands the whole question of contact on its head. It functions like Monique Wittig's "trojan horse" and explodes the hitherto accepted characteristics of one of its genres, the travel and exploration narrative. As the concluding Author's Note explains, the text presents an abridged edition of the "documents and records of The Traveller," the female narrator on a voyage to discover Dr. "Livingstone-I-Presume," whose motto she appropriates and transforms: "I will open a way to the interior or perish."

This transformation occurs on a variety of levels. Like *Livingstone*, the narrator travels through Africa, but the terrain is markedly different in her account; *Livingstone's* words and deeds have not brought light to the dark continent. Unlike *Livingstone*, the narrator travels alone with only a few primitive maps to guide her, nary a native guide or pith helmet or elevenses in sight. And although she travels beyond linear time, she does not use "anthropological time," in which human evolution is represented by the various stages of so-called primitive peoples. Instead, hers is a calendar which marks time with language in "the year of our word." Any comments she makes on the peoples she encounters — whose names are anagrams for the word "silence" — come after spending not a few days, but several

years with them, and these comments tell not of the people, their customs, or their beliefs about silence, but of what she has learned about her own silence from them. The Traveller learns the secrets of her own silence that cannot be appropriated or possessed even by the man with the word, "Livingstone-I-presume." Her words can be twisted, appropriated, used to possess her; silence cannot be so misconstrued. However, as she learns among the NEECLIS, her story is a tapestry woven of words as well as silence: meaning resides in the gaps between words and in the words between gaps.

Looking for Livingstone exhibits something like a quantum leap in our collective understanding of the possibilities of a language-based feminist theory and literature. Like Wittig's *The Lesbian Body*, it explores the possibility of writing the hitherto invisible and silenced and asserts the textual necessity not of recording that silence but recognising it as text, however unintelligible. This process is demonstrated by the poems interspersing the narrative, where the arrangement of words on the page is created by the blank spaces and silences between them, as essential to meaning as the words themselves.

As the saying goes, "your silence will not protect you"; it did not protect the silent ancestors to whom *Looking for Livingstone* is dedicated, and certainly women as well as indigenous peoples have suffered the consequences of the assumptions that men and Europeans have made about our/their silences. However, Philip makes the point (as does Holdstock, to a lesser degree) that what has been left out of the stories about the so-called discovery of the new world by Europeans is as crucial as what has been included, repeated, ratified, and cast in stone. Who occupies the margins of the story, on the page as well as in the material reality of historical conditions? Ultimately, the more complex and satisfactory

accounts reveal that — as for Wittig — it is only the particular that can be universal, and that the real journey of discovery is not toward the Other, but toward the Self.

Critical Agendas

Coral A. Howells and Lynette Hunter, eds.

Narrative Strategies in Canadian Literature: Feminism and Postcolonialism. Open University
n.p.

John Moss, ed.

From the Heart of the Heartland: The Fiction of Sinclair Ross. U of Ottawa, n.p.

Reviewed by Patrick Holland

In the substantial, concluding essay of *Narrative Strategies*, “‘The Presence of the Past’: Modernism and Postmodernism in Canadian Short Fiction,” Stephen Regan ponders what point contemporary Canadian writing occupies on the modernist-postmodernist trajectory. He cautions that “the demarcation between modernist and postmodernist strategies would appear to be less marked than in Europe and America.” Problems of representation in the postmodernist age were already implicit in modernism; Gallant and Laurence, for example, have “late modernist doubts about traditional methods of representation.” Finally, the Canadian short story “maintain[s] a vigorous scepticism about the representational claims of fiction and yet continue[s] to grapple with” society and politics. For a volume whose agenda seems to be to set the seal of postmodernism on contemporary literature in Canada, *Narrative Strategies* seems reluctant to take its thesis seriously. The result is a collection of ten essays (produced under the auspices of the Literature Group of the British Association for Canadian Studies, and probably intended for use as a text in British university literary courses) which assume English Canadian writing’s post-

modernity without demonstrating it, and which—with one or two exceptions—ignore the issues of feminism and postcolonialism. Much of the volume’s work, unsurprisingly, is haunted by the spectre of regionalism. The collection is framed by essays dealing with a number of writers of short fiction. In an opening gambit, Andrew Gurr situates the work of Wiebe, Richler, Laurence, and Munro alongside that of Katherine Mansfield and V.S. Naipaul. In his discussion of “whole books” (Kent Thompson’s preferred alternative to “linked stories”), Gurr is preoccupied with formal, generic issues, rather than with those of representation. Far from awarding any of his writers the postmodernist accolade, he finds that only Katherine Mansfield can claim to be even a modernist. His interesting thesis is that regional writers must keep on producing *pre-modernist* fiction, since they must describe people and places within a realist economy. Perhaps the editors chose to start with Gurr’s essay so that the following pieces might radically problematize it. Certainly, by the time Regan appears, if postmodernism, post-coloniality, and feminism are not precisely appropriate for Canadian writing, then Linda Hutcheon’s historiographic metafiction is firmly installed, for “what is crucially important in Canadian short fiction . . . is that history is interrogated, that received notions of ‘what happened’ are continually challenged, and that the struggle for meaning . . . is never abandoned.”

The work of Mavis Gallant, Margaret Laurence, Rudy Wiebe, Alice Munro, Margaret Atwood, and Michael Ondaatje becomes the canonical base of Canada’s postmodernist writing for this volume, and some interesting critical perspectives emerge, most notably in Jill LeBihan’s essay on Margaret Atwood. In it, she examines *The Handmaid’s Tale*, *Cat’s Eye*, and *Interlunar*—generically differentiated works from the same period—with a view

to modifying *The Handmaid's Tale's* reception as a feminist dystopia and opening it out to a number of (feminist) positions that "are potentially ones that can be taken, or even all occupied at once"—as against a number of limited, competing, and restrictive positions. As far as I can tell, Jill LeBihan's is the only *feminist* essay here, though Coral Ann Howells' welcome remarks on Marian Engel's *Bear* and stories from *The Tattooed Woman* make modest claims for a certain feminism, based upon "women and writing" theoretics. Howells is interested in ways in which Engel's use of fantasy complicates realist perspectives. Ultimately, however, this turns out to be a thematic concern as much as a "deliberately feminist textual strategy"; for the essay recuperates Engels' transgressivity into the spaces of prescribed limits, and notes that "the very process of transforming real life into writing subverts the mimetic function of realism," thus stripping it of any specifically feminist relevance.

Peter Easingwood succeeds in complicating Laurence's realism in his essay on *A Bird in the House*, and I think he is right in claiming that her "semi-autobiographical fiction takes so little for granted that it represents one of the strongest revisions of Western experience in contemporary Canadian writing." Readings of canonical writers are supplemented by some attention to less well-known writers like Alistair MacLeod and Daphne Marlatt; David Richards' essay on Neil Bissoondath is the only one to make a determined bid for postcoloniality, John A. Thieme's piece on Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* referring that work rather to a tradition of "quintessentially Canadian" (!) postmodernism and metafiction. The perverse feature of this collection, in fact, is that its more sophisticated essays re-establish late modernism as the preferred Canadian mode, especially in short fiction. And that might well be the point that Stephen Regan makes—some-

what equivocally, to be sure—in closing the volume.

The nine essays of *From the Heart of the Heartland*—a volume coming out of the 1990 Sinclair Ross tribute/reappraisal conference in Ottawa—seem uninterested in assigning Ross to modernism, its variants or successors, though they do seem to agree that 'Prairie realist' is no longer an adequate term. How lightly and refreshingly these essays (most of them, anyway) open out the claustrophobia of *As for Me and My House*, to let breezes play briskly around Ross and his texts. In an urbane introduction, John Moss makes no attempt to claim Ross as a consistently developing writer (the consensus seems to be that, without the one enigmatic 'classic,' there would be little point in discussing a Ross *oeuvre*); and David Stouck economically demonstrates just what a problem it always was for Ross to get published and distributed.

Accordingly, the volume offers new perspectives on *As for Me and My House* and reclaims *Sawbones Memorial* as, at the very least, a novel well worth investigating in its own right. One interesting feature of this collection, then, is that it puts just the right emphasis on the producer of what is, arguably, Canada's most-taught novel: he has arrived at affection, respect, and well-tuned critical estimation.

On the evidence here, Ross does indeed profit by being read in (lightly) theoretically-inflected ways. Helen M. Buss's feminist/reader response revisionary reading might seem somewhat heavy going, but did succeed in making me revise my own gendered response to Mrs. Bentley (and so to regret the way Dennis Cooley reverts, in his contribution, to the earlier very critical stance). Frank Davey's attention to the scrambled semiotic systems of the novel is meticulous, and complicates it in intriguing ways. In a delightfully astute consideration of *Sawbones Memorial*, Charlene Diehl-Jones invokes Roland Barthes to

interrogate the relation between storytelling and secrecy. And it is the New Historicism that, for Marilyn Rose, “calls all in doubt” in viewing Ross’s writing—not just *As for Me and My House*—as a site where margins joust with centre. Each of these essays has some lively perspective to offer, and most of them offer it in fewer than a dozen pages. There are also essays by Wilfred Cude and David Carpenter that find humour in Ross: “dark laughter” and “horsey comedy.” So much for the perpetually depressed characters and settings of anguished former criticism. These perspectives and leavenings make *From the Heart of the Heartland* a “good read,” something one cannot say about too many critical anthologies of this kind. Add to all this impeccable editing, David Latham’s Reference Guide, and an attractive format, and you have real value.

Touching Bottom

Deborah Eibel

Making Fun of Travellers. Third Eye n.p.

Geri Rosenzweig

Under the Jasmine Moon. HMS Press n.p.

Joanne Arnott

My Grass Cradle. Press Gang Publishers \$10.95.

Reviewed by Patrick Holland

“My imagination began to develop when my hands touched bottom in Brighton Bay,” Deborah Eibel remarks in prefacing *Making Fun of Travellers*. Her reconstruction of Brighton Beach in the ’fifties perhaps surpasses those of Neil Simon, at least in its suggestiveness. For middle-class people of Brighton Beach, particularly its immigrant families, “accomplishments” are everything: reading, practicing the piano, learning to swim, passing examinations. Yet travel is imperative for those who aspire beyond accomplishment to achievement. Orchestra players leave their wives and chil-

dren; writers move away; “perennial students” take private tutoring jobs in distant parts. In Eibel’s poems, though, travel is less escape than it is accommodation to limits, whether imposed by the traveller herself or by the society that has nurtured the writer/traveller. “St. Jerome / the translator / did all his best work / in Bethlehem,” because Jerusalem was overcrowded with translators; welcoming the return of travellers, someone criticizes their reliance on the advice of midwesterners, who “cannot possibly / have a feeling / for beauty.” People from home needle the expatriate writer: someone patronizes, “Is the writing community in Montreal / as stimulating as / the writing community in Brighton Beach?” The values attached to achievement (versus accomplishment) and travel (versus staying) are ambivalent. A collector of treasures might well do better “touching bottom” near the shore than venturing out, and home performances, without benefit of concert hall amenities, are accomplishments that deserve recognition:

The young man playing
a concert grand
in a room much too small
for a piano,
and the old man singing for us
in a house
without a piano
deserve applause.

In their finely-crafted “free” forms, the linked poems of *Making Fun of Travellers* recall the distinctive poetic gifts shown in *Kayak Sickness* (1972) and *Streets Too Narrow for Parades* (1985): unemphatic yet nuanced tones of voice, plain diction, metaphors scarcely needing to be lifted from the poems’ referential levels of the poems. Eibel’s continues to be a gift for understatement that *tells*.

Under the Jasmine Moon is also about journeying, but where Eibel mainly profiles those who stay, travel, and return, Geri Rosenzweig’s is the confessional voice of an

"I," ferrying between Ireland and America, lyrically connecting one with the other, the present with past and future, youth with age. The diction and imagery is lush, but what might have become a surfeit of sensuousness is held in check in disciplined short-line strophes. Travel, in these linked lyrics, is personal, celebratory and elegiac in turn. Though the writer will not go back to live in Ireland, she knows that her "hunger for [its] white cities / is a journey from which [she'll] never return": her childhood countryside drenches the poems in their images and figures.

Though Eibel is sparing with simile and explicit metaphor, while Rozenzweig is prodigal of them, their work has in common a loving attention to craft, an expertise in taut formal practice, and dictional sureness. In one of the beautiful Jerusalem poems of *Under the Jasmine Moon*, the image (heard on TV) of Israelis as a people "wrapped around each other in a small place" gets its strength from foregoing nature stanzas imaging the shoreline life of mussels as a nation,

... mussels, pebbles, grains of sand,
a strand of seaweed and periwinkles

bound together
by tough threads spun from a gland
in the mussel's ancient foot,

guy ropes by which
they attach themselves
to stones, or each other

to survive the sea's buffeting.

Rosenzweig's poems, anchored in representative personal life, are adept at such imaginative leaps and connections, the very stuff of poetry.

The stuff of poetry, however, is open to transformation, as *My Grass Cradle* shows. Its author, Joanne Arnott, is of mixed Native and European ancestry, and she quite consciously uses language as a *tool* in a "vast archaeology/reclamation project."

In the poetics ("Like an Indian: Struggling with Ogres") with which she closes *My Grass Cradle*, the words of "poem story myth" are first of all a breaking of silence by telling "the whole/gut truth with its frequently desperate edge, and/or/at the same time: the gut-level double-talk needed to keep hard truths at bay." The meanings of "lyric," "eloquence," "form," and "metaphor" must be changed in such quasi-primal utterance.

In Joanne Arnott's work, there is a doubled thematics of un/recovering Native heritage and the female body. The father has denied his Nativ-ity, and his rage has denied to his daughters any pride in their women's bodies: a cultural story, as well as a personal one. Motherhood, then, constitutes an opportunity for the writer to recognize and claim her bodily self:

as a mother I look up
past columns of thigh
flattened mound of pubis

over waxing belly
into purple-tipped fountains
of nipple . . .

Such a claiming is then implicated with recovering Native heritage, since the women—mothers, sisters, and daughter—share both the double deficit of racist/sexist denigration and the less bitter experience of bringing into life, nurturing, and sharing. Joanne Arnott's sequence, like Eibel's and Rosenzweig's, mediates between past and present, maturity and age. Much more markedly, however, its mediation is a *coming-to-terms-with* the experience of humiliation and rage. To the considerable extent it seems to me it does this successfully, *My Grass Cradle* is also a valuable reminder that to "put experience into poetry"—to lyricize, to poeticize—is not to distance or beautify it, but to give it undismissable voice.

Real Ladies

Joan Crate

Pale as Real Ladies: Poems for Pauline Johnson.
Brick \$9.95

Reviewed by Lee Briscoe Thompson

On the front cover of *Pale as Real Ladies* is a photograph of Pauline Johnson (1861-1913) in lace collar and upswept coiffure, a proper white woman. On the back cover (a little back-of-the-bus symbolism there) is Pauline Johnson aka Tekahionwake in feathers, beadwork, and buckskins, her throat now encircled by a bearclaw necklace. Alternation of the two contrasting personae—Mohawk princess, genteel Victorian lady—was the structural principle for performances by Canadian writer Johnson before Canadian, American, and British audiences in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nearly one hundred years later, Alberta-based novelist/poet Joan Crate has moved inside the private and public worlds of her colorful predecessor, using biographical materials and what appear by their italicization to be snippets of Johnson's own verse (probably skillfully simulated since there are no acknowledgements) to recover a life and generate forty-one new poems. It is a venture in some ways reminiscent of Margaret Atwood's poetic foray into pioneer Susanna Moodie's psyche and circumstances, especially in the darkness of the rendering and the "violent duality" of their experiences. But where Susanna/Margaret schizophrenically gropes through alien and often abstract territory, Pauline/Joan maps two familiar and explicit cultural landscapes. And the recurring adjective for Metis Pauline that WASP Susanna never would have countenanced is "lonely."

A prose piece, "Prairie Greyhound," introduces us to Emily Pauline Johnson, "Poet, patriot, author, actor, lover, spinster," child of a Mohawk chief and an Englishwoman who saw to it that her daughter was

"schooled white." The narrator, presumably Crate, underscores the two-headedness ("Half-blood . . . Half this and half that"), drawing herself explicitly into the duality ("I am half me and half you") and explaining her two intentions: the reinvention of Pauline, and the reconnection with Pauline.

Under a Roman numeral I that ambiguously invokes the personal pronoun I, an italicized poem introduces the body of the book, promising a necklace of words "scraped clean/of death and anger," that "will shine in your mouth/like a string of white pearls." Well, not quite. The reader is taken through many types of death, and more than a little anger, not to mention pity, fear, sorrow, claustrophobia, and humiliation. But there is a kind of shining, a pearlescence: in the beautiful images and the spare utterances, the poignant scenes and the careful layering of meaning. My favorites include the portrait of her mother:

A young woman in the kitchen, her face
bitten with guilt. She is making bread
and her white Quaker hands shape
prayers
in the dough, spill haloes of flour
through window light.
("Photograph of Mother")

and the audience of "bark-skinned" Indian chiefs with the king and queen of England:

In the palace, their images upside down
light and spirit tracked them in ceilings of
lake.
The chiefs shrank, distorted.
Wind whispered through fir boughs
as the Queen walked. It was a house
haunted with other language.
Royal lips dropped phrases
in lace panels in front of them.
The chiefs grasped at each individual
thread,
snow-blind to the need for appearances,
the repeated patterns, the white lace
flakes
falling over wolf tracks.
("In England")

Special mention is also deserved for the glimpse from a night train of a single house light (in "Another Train Ride"), which prompts her to speculate not only on sad reasons but also on the possibility that it marks "lovers holding the swollen moment/ when they are no longer alone." The thirty-five central poems, delivered in Pauline's voice, move chronologically and highly impressionistically from her childhood through her career and travels, her loves and losses, the fates of her parents and siblings, to the onset of cancer in her fifties, leading full circle to memories of childhood (expressed in an immediate present tense) in her dying days. In a sequence again reminiscent of Atwood's *Journals of Susanna Moodie*, Pauline then speaks prophetically from beyond the grave, in a poetic closure which merges native myth and the debasement of native peoples in alcohol, exploitation, and violence.

This is followed by part II, a concluding section of *Pale as Real Ladies* entitled "Legends," which fulfills her pledge to tell the tales of lost tribes and a people's beginning. Five poems concerning Beaver Woman, Blue Sky, the woman who married a ghost, the wife of Son of the Sea, and Siwash Rock seem to suggest, by the potency of their narratives and the vibrancy of their imagery, that Pauline's Mohawk heritage will have the last word. But the sixth and final poem, "My brother saw the first sailing ship," undercuts that notion: for the "moon children" (whites), with whom native peoples trade sea otter furs for mirrors and whom they try unsuccessfully to placate, nonetheless in the end seize control of her world, do violence to the natural order.

Crate's verse so constantly sets up polarities that they come to seem the myriad projections of the two cultures contending for the heart and art of Johnson (and Crate?). Pauline and her sister Eva, playing demurely with porcelain dolls, stand in

contrast to their sweaty, noisy brothers outside, as do the agencies of play (blonde dolls vs. thumping dances); the girls try to "subdue the riotous/ dresses" made by their native grandmother by applying European tatted collars, and try to subdue the Native in themselves by curling their straight hair and powdering their faces to "turn pale as real ladies" ("In the closet under the stairwell"). These are only small instances, joined by antinomies related to the seasons, temperatures, texture, the elements, dark/light, birth/death, songs/screams, joy/pain, im/permanence, sexual celebration/guilt, and growth/sterility. Overarching all of these is the unifier (pun maybe intended) of loneliness.

Crate has a subtle way of carrying an image through several incarnations, each of which reinforces or plays off the others. For instance, the porcelain dolls segue rather humorously into the chattering teeth of the tall spinster teacher as she recites dead poetry, and then into the tense chatter of "china cups and saucers/ held in trembling hands" ("Boarding School"); in her turn, as an adult, Pauline becomes the spinster reader of public poetry, reducing the legends and pain of her people to teatime entertainment for white ladies.

Later, china again chatters, now in white travellers' hands in the picnic atmosphere of a train stranded on the prairies, the light triviality of that scene darkened by the racism of the conversation and counterpointed by the bloating horse carcass and the cruel derogation of the benign Blackfoot outside the carriage ("Gleichen"). And "a china cup clattering/ roses" provides one of a number of harsh sounds signalling the religious ferocity of her sister in late middle age ("Eva, my sister"). Similar image and metaphor lines can be traced with snow, tongues, knives, paper, white, claws, and moon, among others. It makes for a tightly woven, intense, reverberative poetry.

Crate also has a effective (not over-worked) gift for alliteration, which sometimes makes the lyric difference in passages very near to prose. And she occasionally brings forth a wonderful wordplay that reminds us of the way a whole other meaning may lurk just one letter away. For example, writing tablets become the “writhing tablets” of her body (“I am a Prophet”), and the expression upside down becomes, desperately, “upside drowning” (“Encounter While Fishing”).

One small oddity in a handsomely presented text occurs in the fifth legend, “Siwash Rock”: in six of the lines the last letters vanish into whiteness, as in (line 2) “a man turned to stone by the Chang” (presumably Change); in all but one case, however, fragments of the missing letters make apparent what has vanished. The erasures are in a curve that extends from the top right to the bottom right in a convex line. A printer’s blunder, I thought at first. But then it struck me what a serendipitous one it was. Johnson’s life was a constant struggle with her (if you will) whitesidedness, and that whiteness lapping at one edge of a native legend, threatening to eradicate it, perfectly captures Johnson’s situation and the stimulus of her art. Which has become Crate’s.

Isolation as Existence

Kristjana Gunnars

The Guest House and Other Stories. Anansi P
\$17.95

Shani Mootoo

Out On Main Street. Press Gang \$12.95

Reviewed by T. Virginia Gillese

There are few of us who have not experienced profound feelings of isolation at some point in our lives. Kristjana Gunnars and Shani Mootoo both explore this universal experience in their respective collec-

tions of short fiction. Gunnars emphasizes the alienating aspect of life in a new land rather than a homeland, while Mootoo juxtaposes the disorientation of the immigrant with the added complexity of those marginalized by their sexuality. These women writers wrap their stories around ordinary characters, and the plain language they employ emphasizes the universality of their shared theme, as well as the commonality of their subjects.

Gunnars collection opens with the title story, “The Guest House.” The male character, Erling, is originally from Denmark. Erling is a guest in many senses; essentially, he is a guest in his own life. He cannot fathom why he left Denmark, he cannot comprehend why he does anything, other than that he feels things are somehow expected of him, that somehow certain actions are necessary or inevitable. The sudden introduction of a baby into Erling’s sphere of existence momentarily jolts him out of his existential stupor, but this incident is not enough to propel him into an active relationship with his world. Life is outside of him, and so his isolation, tangible in his nostalgia for Denmark, is complete.

Gunnars continues her exploration of the theme of alienation within the framework of displaced individuals throughout her collection. Although the metaphor of a lost homeland is constantly recurring, she plays with this idea somewhat. When the protagonist of “Mass and a Dance” returns to her home for a reunion, it is discovered that “home,” as such, does not exist except as something individuals create when they gather. The reader feels a certain amount of discomfort, however, when the willing exodus of a people, resulting in grief over their obvious loss, is speculated to be like the way Native Indians feel, . . . , when they have lost territories to encroaching modernity?” Nevertheless, Gunnars’ desire to communicate terrible personal, social, and physical loneliness is well-intentioned. And

she further extends her theme to explore a variety of emotions: a mother's internal disarray at her son's emergence into independent adult relationships; a family's uncertainty in celebrating the first significant holidays after the death of the father.

Gunnars' language matches the everyman quality of her characters, for it is straightforward and without pretence. Unfortunately, Gunnars herself does not seem to have confidence in this very aspect of her writing, for she constantly peppers her pages with italicized words, presumably for emphasis, but the effect is rather irritating. Unadorned, the cadence of her language contains internal emphasis, but is undermined by the over-use of her key-board for external decoration.

A similar lack of confidence may also be discerned in Gunnars' too obvious use of symbolism and imagery, though in this case the lack may extend from the writer to the reader. There is a heavy tendency to lean on externals, such as traditional holidays with their attending symbolic agenda, in order to interject into the story what it should itself naturally contain and communicate. Sometimes Christmas is a fine frame for a fictional piece, but the story should not need Christmas in order to work. Gunnars' writing is at its best when she trusts both herself and her reader. Then she gives us such jewels as this impoverished girl's startlingly negative self-image: "Her hair seems to her to be littered with leaves and goose feathers and debris from the grounds around the shack."

Mootoo explores the experience of alienation with a double-edged sword. Almost without exception her characters are openly lesbian, and all are sketched with various detailed shadings of the Indo-Trinidadian-Canadian cultural encounter. "Out On Main Street," is written in the dialect of Trinidadian English, and although the language is quirky enough to prove interesting, it is not sufficient to sustain the tension

necessary for a short piece of fiction.

Unfortunately, it is all too easy to tire of novelty and desire something of more substance. The woman protagonist, unusual in her speech patterns and obvious in her love for her female partner, does not adequately express or personify Mootoo's underlying theme. The result is dissatisfaction, a result shared at other times when Mootoo does not feel it necessary to supply the reader with much more than internal musings or the recounting of dreams.

Yet, Mootoo's women characters have substance, and they offer insight into the complexity of individuals through their extraordinary ordinariness. Often, these characters are the story; they are the tension and action. Their unique voices allow for a re-evaluation of attitudes and phrases, such as the underlying prejudice carried in the term *fishwives*. The phrase conjures up, for Mootoo's young protagonist, trips to the market full of wonderful colour, smell and sound: voices "Business-like yet excited, competing yet jovial." The young girl concludes, in being likened to sounding like a fishwife, "I failed to see the insult."

Sophisticated readers may enjoy Mootoo's female characters, but even so they will surely lament the absence of complex characterization in the males in her fiction. One abusive male, motivation unknown, constantly reappears in different stories, under different names, with different women. His eventual demise, at the hands of his battered woman, is at least a relief. Mootoo needs to recognize that female characters alone cannot bear the entire burden of fictional tension and structure.



Writing, America

Bruce Greenfield

Narrating Discovery: The Romantic Explorer in American Literature, 1790-1855. Columbia UP
\$36.50

Reviewed by I.S. MacLaren

From Samuel Hearne to Henry David Thoreau, *Narrating Discovery* offers a well-written, thoughtful reading of books by explorers and travellers on this continent during the course of the formation and alteration of American nationhood. Greenfield astutely grounds his study of Lewis and Clark, Zebulon Pike, John Charles Frémont, Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, and Thoreau in some of the foundational English-language texts of the genre as it relates to this continent: those of James Cook, Hearne, Alexander Mackenzie, and Alexander Henry the Elder. His theme is the patterns of tension/conflict exhibited by the discovery narrative.

A rich source of tension arises out of the disjunction between the traveller's individual experience and his public, published persona, which is necessarily freighted with imperial, corporate, and/or national obligations and agendas, and which aims to render a cohesive story out of daily records. Hearne, who rarely distanced himself from his native companions in an "exploring expedition [that] turned into a mere exercise in survival," published an account that met the generical expectation of an explorer authoritatively and declaratively asserting his presence both among "savages" and amidst newly conquered lands. In *Journey from Prince of Wales's Fort* (1795) the figure of Hearne becomes "the possession of what he pretends to possess" because his "actual role was that of an observer being led to his destination." By contrast, the published persona of Mackenzie unvaryingly conveys that he knows where he wants to go, that he is

"solely responsible for the venture," and that any contrary points of view merely represent sources of resistance which the explorer must overcome in an heroic plot of derring-do. Possible tension in the narrative does not arise because ambiguity is not permitted, but that solution diminishes the narrative interest of *Voyages from Montreal* (1801): "the directed energy of his journey and the clarity of his narrative fail sufficiently to recognize the complex relationships with native peoples and environments that had been required of the European fur trade empire up to that point."

An anatomy of the entire pattern of such tensions is not possible here; suffice to state that Greenfield perceptively traces similar and different tensions in the work of other early explorers; and if American readers do not appreciate the inclusion for consideration of travellers normally thought of today as Canadian, Canadianists will be grateful to Greenfield for setting their published accounts in their accurate pre-national context.

A roughly sketched paradigm might plot Hearne and Mackenzie's books as polarized alternatives to the challenge of making a coherent story out of wilderness experience, but Greenfield's is too discriminating a study for such stark generalizations. As he moves from the explorers to the travellers, he develops a criticism steeped in biographical specificity that debates earlier critical readings of particular titles. If he has not supplemented criticism with archival research, he has read the published accounts with a care that yields fresh insights. One example is his study of Washington Irving. Greenfield questions received opinion that Irving failed to articulate a romantic vision of America; indeed, by situating such works as *The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus* (1828), *A Tour on the Prairies* (1835), *Astoria* (1836), and *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville*

(1837), in the context of explorers and especially of Lewis and Clark, Greenfield shows us that “[i]n Irving’s narratives of discovery, unlike those of the later American romantics, discovering America is not equated with self-discovery.” No more than Cooper is Irving at ease erasing pre-white history in the name of spurious imperial or commercial claims; thus, his Columbus is rescued from the ignominious legacy of his explorations: “[t]he feature of Columbus’s character that is most important to his role in the discovery mythology of the nineteenth century is his devotion to the idea of discovery itself, as distinct from all the opportunities for power and profit that attended his discoveries and preoccupied his companions [L]ike his literary contemporary, Natty Bumppo, Irving’s Columbus is dogged by white men who are capable neither of a full response to the beauty and wealth of the land nor of a just treatment of its inhabitants.” Thereby, too, does Captain Bonneville’s scientific curiosity rescue him in Irving’s eyes from the acquisitive rabble that surrounds him, or that the figure of Irving himself is surrounded by in *A Tour on the Prairies*.

Close, discriminating readings are precisely what colonial studies must offer to the debate currently so heavily swayed by post-colonial criticism. Nowhere are the benefits clearer than in Greenfield’s complex, convincing discussion of Thoreau’s appropriation of the discovery narrative for the trope of romantic self-actualization that so dominates and vexes the American dream today. Greenfield patiently guides his reader through a complex reading of “Ktaadn,” Thoreau’s account of a trip made to Maine in 1846, in which, although it is patently clear from other writings that he knew discovery narratives intimately, Thoreau appropriates the form of the genre in order to transcend or obviate history in favour of the romantic impulse to discover the individual self as the first man ever to

set foot in the wilderness. That discovery introduces into the developing narrative convention of the American sense of identity the startling image of an empty continent, a *tabula rasa* awaiting the impress of white individuals seeking their personal identities. But, argues Greenfield, that is the late contribution of Thoreau, not of his precursors: “the idea of a nature stripped of all signs of human presence was not an important object of desire for the earliest travellers; it seems unlikely, in fact, that such a thought would have been comprehensible to them.” Thoreau cannot be held to account for the legacy created by his disciples, but the creation of the powerful appeal of his ahistorical, mythologized rhetoric of first contact with the land remains the powerful answer for many Americans (and for how many Canadians?) to the continent’s history of commerce and conflict.

One might have wished that Greenfield had more carefully distinguished in his early chapters between imperial and colonial motives in the explorers’ accounts, for only post-colonial criticism has rendered them synonyms; and it is regrettable that the study did not, if only occasionally, extend its reach to dip into William Carlos Williams’s *In the American Grain* (1925), with which it shares many insights, but if *Narrating Discovery* prompts such regrets it is only because it offers a rich contribution to some of our understandings of the part played by the published word in the evolution of newcomers’ relations to space and history on this continent.



Myth and Literature

Robert Major

Jean Rivard ou l'art de réussir. Idéologie et utopie dans l'oeuvre d'Antoine Gérin-Lajoie. Presses de l'Université Laval, \$32.00

Réjean Robidoux

Connaissance de Nelligan. Fides, \$19.95

Reviewed by Richard G. Hodgson

Both of these volumes reflect the growing interest in nineteenth-century French-Canadian literature, both inside and outside Québec. Robert Major's volume in the "Vie des lettres québécoises" series is a detailed study of Gérin-Lajoie's novel as a *roman à thèse* and of its many connections to some of the dominant social and political ideological currents of the time. Robidoux's book is a collection of essays he has written over the last twenty-five years on the poetry of Emile Nelligan. It is a very personal view both of the Nelligan texts themselves and of some of the most significant critical responses they have elicited in the last two decades. Both of these critical studies are major contributions to their respective fields.

In *Jean Rivard ou l'art de réussir*, Major sets out to study the various historical, cultural and literary contexts in which this complex novel was produced. To accomplish this task, he proposes at the beginning of the book to analyze its ideological content against "la toile de fond sociale et politique de son époque: luttes politiques, émigration massive, croisades de colonisation, recherche éperdue d'un avenir dans une conjoncture déprimante." This method of analysis takes Major into a long discussion of historical reality but also of a number of myths which nineteenth-century Québécois writers re-invented and adapted to their own purposes, such as the myth of Napoleon as the archetypal self-reliant and "self-made" man ("le plus illustre représentant des pouvoirs souverains d'un individu

hardi et volontaire." Major sees this myth, particularly as it was appropriated by Gérin-Lajoie, as being closely connected to the main character's status as "une incarnation magistrale de l'esprit capitaliste." One of the principal objectives of the study is to trace the influence of the nineteenth-century American novel and of intellectual giants such as Emerson on the ideological currents which *Jean Rivard* embodies. In most cases, Major succeeds in conveying to the reader a clear sense of the ideological presuppositions and concerns of Gérin-Lajoie and his contemporaries.

More specifically, this book examines the utopian dimension of *Jean Rivard* and its close links to the Utopian tradition in nineteenth-century American intellectual history. The analysis contained in the most interesting part of the book presents the novel as "un récit américain, imprégné de l'esprit américain, et même comme une utopie...qui s'avère typiquement américaine." In Major's view, much of the ideological content of *Jean Rivard* originated in an intellectual climate dominated by one of the central issues of nineteenth-century American fiction: "un mouvement de séparation d'avec la société établie et la recherche d'une communauté idéale." Major argues convincingly that Gérin-Lajoie was directly influenced by American fiction and to some extent by French novelists such as Balzac. His discussion of the utopian elements in *Jean Rivard* is based on a solid theoretical base composed of some of the most important work done on the theory of utopia in the last twenty years, including Bronislaw Baczko's *Lumières de l'utopie*.

Robidoux's book on Nelligan employs a wide variety of critical methods, from close textual analysis to psychoanalysis. It retraces one critic's long career in Nelligan studies and at the same time provides a kind of *état présent* of Nelligan criticism. As Robidoux claims in his "Avant-propos", the thirteen essays "recomposent après coup un

ensemble cohérent, concernant le message de l'oeuvre nelliganienne (1^e partie), sa lettre et sa forme (2^e partie), le destin qui a fini par devenir mythe (3^e partie), dans les traverses de son principal truchement (4^e partie)." Considerable care was taken to organize the various texts both within each part of the book and within the book as whole. For example, a short essay written in 1992, "La création d'Emile Nelligan", was placed at the centre of the book, in order to function, as Robidoux puts it, as "[une] mise en abyme au coeur de l'écu."

Some of the most interesting and controversial essays deal with recent developments in Nelligan studies, such as Bernard Courteau's 1986 book entitled *Nelligan n'était pas fou!*, about which Robidoux expresses strong reservations. Throughout the book, Robidoux emphasizes one of the major dilemmas which Nelligan specialists have had to face: the temptation to succumb to the biographical fallacy, to read Nelligan's poems exclusively in terms of the poet's own personal experiences ("enfance et adolescence urbaines, études de cancre, vie de bohème, etc."). In a text entitled "L'incommode fantôme de l'opéra," written in 1991, Robidoux discusses the transformations which the Nelligan myth underwent in the libretto of the opera *Nelligan/Un opéra romantique* (1990), by Michel Tremblay. A very short text, "Le roman de Nelligan," deals with various critical approaches to Nelligan's work, including those Robidoux sees as bringing out what he calls "l'exemplarité de Nelligan par rapport à la collectivité canadienne-française et catholique de l'époque 1900." Taken together, these essays give the reader a useful overview of critical reaction to Nelligan's work, particularly over the last ten years, but also over a much longer period of time, since the poet's "internement." As Robidoux states in his conclusion, one of the major objectives of this collection of essays is to describe in some

detail "[l]e passage météorique du phénomène Nelligan dans le firmament littéraire, avec ses répercussions durables dans les étendues de la postérité." In a number of significant ways, *Connaissance de Nelligan* provides the reader with a clear, although very personal, account of this "meteoric" passage.

The University at Issue

Harold Fromm

Academic Capitalism and Literary Value. U Georgia P \$35.00 / \$16.00 US

Jaroslav Pelikan

The Idea of the University: A Reexamination. Yale UP \$36.00

Reviewed by L. M. Findlay

Any serious debate about the role of the modern university will include reflections on what constitutes modernity as well on what the university has been, currently is, and might or ought to be in the immediate future. Such discussions have traditionally involved those outside the university as well as those who work in some capacity within it, contributions from outside being especially evident at times of socio-political and economic crisis. No institution as important as the university can expect to be exempt from scrutiny at such times, nor should it perhaps wish to be. If universities are fulfilling their mandates in a reasonably effective way, then they have little to fear from internal or external scrutiny. If they are not doing so, then their deficiencies need to be identified and aired before real improvement can occur. Given their commitment to open discussion and free inquiry, universities are hardly in a position to resent or attempt to discourage such consideration of their own operations and priorities. Universities are, however, well placed to insist that such exchange be informed and constructive, not simply exasperation looking for a place to vent

itself. As pervasive, prominent, costly operations, universities *will* inevitably be the scapegoat of choice for some people, and it should come as no surprise, especially in tough times, when volleys of invective are directed at them as bastions of privilege, or paragons of inefficiency, irrelevance, or ingratitude. Such challenges can be readily exposed for what they are. But they are usually the froth on a darker and more dangerous current of opinion mobilising notions of excellence and accountability in the interests of one or another radical change.

Canada has its own distinctive university traditions, bureaucratic formations, ways of staging debate on advanced education and publicly funded research, and university administrators and faculty have an obligation to inform themselves about the heartening as well as the cautionary features of the institutional narrative to which they all perforce contribute in one way or another. Such individual and collective education is especially pertinent when there is so much discussion underway as a result of economic recession, constitutional quandaries, the serious criticisms (especially about the undervaluing of teaching) in the *Report* Stuart Smith produced for the AUCC, the annual rankings published in *MacLeans*, the historical work of Heather Murray and other scholars, and provocations like Stan Fogel's *Postmodern University* (1988). Many of the problems faced by Canadian universities are unique to this country, but others are clearly shared with universities in the United States, Europe, and elsewhere. It is hence instructive to read Harold Fromm and Jaroslav Pelikan, especially if one happens to be a humanist hopeful that humanist language can still make a productive place for itself beside the dominant discourses of the quick fix and the bottom line. Fromm and Pelikan make a suggestive pairing for anyone interested in the future of humanist

authority inside and outside the academy, and possible future roles for the public intellectual.

Harold Fromm is a forthright, independent "man of letters" who has gathered here some of his most provocative essays under the headings of "Literary Professionalism," "Literary Politics," and "Academic Capitalism." He displays his habitual stance and tone in an opening expression of resentment at the "ways in which politics and professionalism have taken over literary studies, alienating non-specialist readers while throwing various forms of pseudo-revolutionary virtue in their faces." Fromm feels that "Since this takeover is almost entirely academic and since the revolutionary aura is almost entirely specious—the real agenda being power and success in the academy," he is entitled to "see much of it as a pretentious counterpart to the ordinary everyday exchange of mundane commodities." It is tempting for a literary scholar to dismiss such claims out of hand as the ranting of a cold warrior or cultural investor outraged by the hostile "takeover" of his favourite company; or to assert bluntly that "literary studies" have never been free from "politics and professionalism," the question being always one of *whose* politics, *whose* version of professionalism, should hold sway. However, Fromm's charge—that academic idiolects are deeply hypocritical in their combination of personal advancement with political posturing—cannot be so readily discredited. Even if we hold that literary specialists are no more obscure, no more self-serving than other experts within the academy, we still have to deal with our share of the social responsibilities and consequences of such expertise. Even if we hold that many literary scholars are more sincere than opportunistic in their support for socially progressive movements and ideas, we still have to deal with the fact that such scholars' rhetoric can often seem exces-

sively righteous and unrealistic. Even if we feel that the stance and practices of too many literary scholars is an *insufficiently* “pretentious counterpart” to non-academic forms of economic and material exchange, we still have to decide how to recreate the “ordinary” as something other or more than a sub-set of academic capitalism. We might well call for greater ethical and economic accountability in many professional and non-professional quarters inside and outside the academy, but that does not remove the obligation for literary scholars to deal with Fromm’s challenge.

Fromm’s essays strive with varying success to convince us that to be anti-academic does not mean that one is anti-intellectual or anti-aesthetic, but rather that one yearns to regain a cultural franchise in a “communal cognitive world” guided by “casual practice” rather than “the planned execution of pie-in-the-sky theories.” Fromm admits to the achievements of scholars like Stanley Fish, J. Hillis Miller, Fredric Jameson, Jim Merod, and Terry Eagleton, but he still sees their work as fundamentally tainted, so that the “Marxist obligato” of someone like Eagleton has to be separated from his clear prose, intellectual astuteness, and inescapable complicity with the status quo: “Capitalism is getting good value for the subsidy of his writings. And now that he has become an establishment literary presence, his neoconservative phase cannot be far away.” This reactionary narrative of professional success goes well with pendulum swings, degeneracy caused by inbreeding, the ivory tower, and other clichés used to confine and correct biases in the academy. Whereas de Man re-wrote Shelley’s claim that “We are all Greeks” as “We are all Hegelians,” Fromm’s variation on this totalizing theme is that “we are *all* bourgeois now” (so much for his opening commitment to “multivalent inclusiveness”). It is on the basis of this brutally simplifying social fantasy that Fromm

inveighs against the “aristocracy of critical activity” and the democratic reshaping of the canon to include *Frankenstein* and the works of black American writers. These essays are much more substantial than, say, Michael Coran’s tedious provocations in the *Globe and Mail*, and are worth considering for that reason alone. But Fromm’s highly selective sensitivity produces too many dangerous conflation, as of aesthetic and critical “free play” with something perilously close to “free lunch” as well as with the magisterial and vatic independence of “free floating ‘public intellectuals’ ... like George Eliot or John Stuart Mill, a Carlyle or an Edmund Wilson,” refusing to Derrida and many of his admirers an interest in freedom as well as play, and omitting to mention that the very Schiller whom Fromm so admires executed variations on this theme in his creative and critical writings.

Jaroslav Pelikan writes as Sterling Professor of History at Yale, and dedicates his book to the centennial celebrations of his *alma mater*, the University of Chicago. He is a distinguished historian of Christianity, and in aligning of himself with John Henry Newman’s reflections on the intellectual and spiritual traditions of the humanities, he is both personally modest and ideologically insistent on what he takes to be the enduring essence of *the* university. This alignment is appropriate also because his work derives, like Newman’s, from a series of lectures designed to instill a sense of history, duty, and creativity into a “public” who will help determine “The Future of the University.” Traces of oral delivery are everywhere evident in Pelikan’s clear, direct, and shrewdly measured prose, while the highly select nature of his first audience can be deduced from the overwhelmingly Eurocentric *gravitas* of his performance. The virtues of orality have, however, been supported in the revised text of the lectures with a “cloud of [scholarly

and artistic] witnesses” and a useful concluding “Bibliographical Essay.” No Derrida or Freire or Fogel here, nor even Northrop Frye, but this essay is a good place to start for anyone researching an academic institution or discipline.

Pelikan organizes his remarks in three sections of six chapters each, and the traditional historian’s sense of evidence and narrative are apparent throughout. He begins with Newman and never strays very far from the master’s concerns and wide but limited reading. This approach yields a version of institutional and disciplinary continuity, service, and scholarship incarnated in a canon at whose heart lies the “fact . . . that the most important treatise on the idea of the university ever written in any language was conceived and born within what Etienne Gilson calls Newman’s ‘patristic intellectual formation.’” This claim may seem excessive and dogmatic, but Pelikan justifies it in part by emphasizing that his quarry is the university as an *idea* authorizing the vast array of activities which we currently associate with this institution. As the university faces its latest “crisis,” Pelikan finds in Newman the inspiring example of someone who, while embarking on a bold new initiative, namely the establishment of a Catholic University in Ireland, and adopting the difficult role of scholar-administrator, was able to use his experience as an Oxford reformer to redefine for modernity the vocation of the university in an inclusive, compelling yet cautionary way. The regular recourse here to the grand narratives of “natural theology” and academic humanism offers a salutary reminder to postmodernists, especially aficionados of the *petit récit* (Lyotard) and “local knowledge” (Geertz), that cultural fragmentation and self-dispersal can appear both unintelligibly elitist and profoundly unattractive or irrelevant to more general publics. In addition, Newman’s and Pelikan’s arguments for the importance of

teaching (in any university worthy of the name), need to be read as attentively by those seeking radical change in canons and curricula as by those who feel otherwise. Pelikan writes as a disciple—an insufficiently critical one, in my opinion—but a disciple willing nonetheless to expose and improve upon the limitations of his master, including that antipathy or uneasy condescension towards the sciences whereby too many humanists still too readily define themselves. To be sure, Pelikan is ‘soft’ on authenticity, pluralism, transcendence, idealism, capitalism, and other Euro-universals, but that is the source of his strength as well as of his weakness. Many if not most of ‘us’ will know where we are with this book as we move with or against its grain, and if we are fatigued or outraged by the recurrent appeals to “knowledge for its own sake,” Pelikan and Newman have yet much to tell us about the origins and implications of this venerable contention, and they issue numerous challenges to those who value, pursue, and disseminate knowledge for avowedly secular reasons and *for the sake of* particular groups in society. Lionizers of the Yale School need to think more about that other Yale whose humanist analogues in other Western universities remain the rule (and even minions of our rulers) rather than the beleaguered, marginalized, heroic exception they often claim to be. Even in Canada, eh?

Wisdom Systems

Donlan, John

Baysville: Poems. Anansi \$12.95

Hilles, Robert

Raising of Voices. Black Moss Press \$14.95

Reviewed by Craig W. McLuckie

William McIlvanney uses an epigraph for his collected poems, *In Through the Head* (1988), which is germane here: “It is, of course, an operation to unblock the heart,

but a tricky one, where you have to go in through the head without getting trapped there." Both Donlan and Hilles undertake this operation.

In *Baysville*, Donlan attempts to reach "that part of our nature that exists independent of civilization, or even conscious thought [...] what has been called the 'deep unconscious wisdom system.'" Yet, it is the heart, community, that he turns to in the end. Hilles' book is a work of reclamation in which the narrator, Daniel, struggles to understand life in its abstractness and its particularities. Mr. Hilles' territory is Kenora, Ontario; the heart of his character's past.

Donlan's "wisdom system" is quite conscious in the range of reference: the personal (imaginary childhood companions), the popular (a Chuck Berry song), and the literary (Oscar Wilde, Maxine Hong Kingston, Flann O'Brien). The volume contains 50 poems arranged chronologically as well as a Coda of three more undated poems. Forty-two poems are twenty lines in length; of these, forty are single stanza poems. The remaining eight poems vary in length: three each at 19 and 17 lines, with two at eighteen lines. The Donlan poem is a single stanza poem of twenty lines in length; this point is made clear by the attempts to stretch to twenty, as in this excerpt from the strained and painful "Belle Langue, Belle Job":

Sun.
Cloud.
Sun.
Cloud.
Sun.
Cloud.

Indestructible. 13 October 89

Raising of Voices, by contrast, deserves praise for its gentle tone and slow, meandering approaches to its subject. The mature Daniel, narrating from the present, enters his memories of growing up in a household where his father was an alcoholic and his mother insane. What is left of

the past? of his mother? his father? How does one come to terms with, if not understand existence? These are the questions that Daniel's narrative embodies. In three parts—"I. The Bear," "II. The Sleeping Giant," and "III. Raising of Voices"—the narrative collects the past together through imagistic association.

The first three poems in *Baysville* set the 'mood' for the volume: how one lives—from "Park," "To be a meaning generator," from "Orderly," "You travel, free, returning to those visions / ... / forgetting to live as if the fence didn't exist;" from "'Thinking Like a Mountain,'" "It's all in your head / until it's over." The refrain is consistent; it is Donlan's mind that produces the narrative force of this book—chronological time, consistency of shape, an attempt to harness and restrict, control life for the self. While the first section of *Raising of Voices* does have a chronological narrative drive, the second section connects through incremental repetition. When Daniel's maternal grandfather dies, Daniel's response to his mother's grief is innocently naive. Yet, concerned and loving his mother, he appropriates her response when she is being taken to a mental hospital. The time difference is a matter of weeks; the change in understanding is far greater.

The tight formal stricture that Donlan places on himself is a commendable, but failed experiment. There is a dull echo of Seamus Heaney's "Squarings" experiments in *Seeing Things* (1991). However, Mr. Donlan's images frequently defy coherent communication because they flit from one image to the next, as in "Bye Bye Johnny." What this poem says about the "wisdom system" is confused. Lacking rational connections or an emotional plane, the poem offers little of imagistic value. There seem to be several poems trying to get out. Grief, loss, and people represented as animals are recurrent images in Donlan's volume; it is only therein that a loose unity is found.

Because Hilles begins with particularities and then turns the narrative to the abstract, greater unity and coherence results. These moments, originating in a craving for sense, come forth emphatically, but with the undercurrent of a plea, as in "This world does not exist just for us to enter or leave it." Mortality introduced, narrative links are made through a repetition of his mother's grief and a series of other deaths, as if the catalogue of vignettes might add up to an answer.

Donlan's Coda emphasizes a negotiation through the head to the heart. Structurally, the poems in the Coda differ significantly from the mechanistic exercises of the main part of the volume. "Wildwood Machine," a brief fourteen lines, is one of the few poems that evokes feeling, albeit a negative one—the frustration of what he has attempted to achieve in the body of the volume:

Wildwood Machine

Diving into the past to save that boy:
the old wizard's rescue mission.
What an improbable apparatus!
The boy is paper, the wizard is paper.
Between them, a real man, furiously
breathing
life into them both—mouth-to-mouth
imagination. He has to puff them up
to make them visible. See—the boy has
cried
himself hopeless: the wizard must ply his
skills
to help him contain his lack, not numb,
not relinquishing the pain of loss.
Like 'jumpers' in nuclear clean-up crews
he limits his exposure on the site,
still fearing sorrow will root and grow
wild.

The remaining poems in the Coda, continue, less successfully, in this emotional plane, contrasting the rigidity found in the rest of the volume. A sense of inclusiveness is what is sought here; it is affirmed in the last poem's title, "One of Us," and underscored in its closing lines: "He wished ... / ... / his furious magic sound would break the spell / and

place him safe again in someone's arms." One is left with the Coda's act of resuscitation, where more than a mind is present. Hilles, too, finds his answer not in the abstractions of the mind, but in the family, where

A family is a very small thing and as each new child is born it gets even smaller until it does not exist at all. The families we carry with us to the grave are not the ones we are born into nor the ones we form later in life. They are voices that come to us at night and tell us the significance of things. In this family sometimes you are the mother other times the father or the child. As parts of you are claimed by other families and pulled from you, you begin to remember your life better.

Daniel is visited by the voices of his parents; or, he conjures them forth. *Raising Voices* is two sections of various incantatory techniques and a final, jarring section of the voices themselves, God's and his mother's two personalities, or three, if the God voice is within her head too. It is jarring because Daniel is a strong narrative presence in all but the last section; the argument between mother who thinks she's God's lover, mother who thinks God raped her, and mother(?) who replies as God is a dynamic short final sequence. That the 'good' mother speaks the book's last words is significant, though not a standard resolution: "Is it so wrong to love? To be damaged by love to be left behind by love? That is all I ask." She goes on, but this is her point. The book is quite captivating, in some ways bold. Its evocation of the underlying mysteries of life is superior to Donlan's for it is convincingly and *dramatically* created. However, the sloppy proofreading is unforgivable. The reader will encounter: a short supply of commas, misused diction, singular noun rather than the necessary plural, confused syntactical direction, omission of words, omitted punctuation, redundancy, incorrect tense. The story deserves better than this.

The Road to Wholeness

Beth Brant

Food & Spirits. Press Gang \$10.95

Gregory Scofield

The Gathering: Stones for the Medicine Wheel.

Pole Star \$12.95

Reviewed by Catherine Rainwater

The characters in Beth Brant's short stories and the speaker in Gregory Scofield's poems travel over some common ground. These Métis writers chart the healing quests of people almost destroyed by alcoholism, domestic violence, poverty, and racial prejudice. Brant's characters are sometimes healers, sometimes the seekers of healing, while Scofield's authorial persona "gather[s] stones" on a medicine path away from self-destruction. Both writers track the lives of people held fast in complex webs of socially-inflicted evils, and both locate the first step on the good road to wholeness in the conscious act, and art, of assuming personal responsibility for one's own fate. In Brant's stories, a good life awaits characters willing to follow in First Woman's footsteps, while Scofield's poetry records his efforts to walk the byways of the world set down for him as "Black Bear's [Métis] Grandson." Spiritual and material assistance, these writers imply, come only to those with the courage to take the first step along their roads alone.

Brant and Scofield alike frame their works within Native cosmological schemes: the story of Black Bear and his fair-haired, blue-eyed grandson provides an archetypal context within which to read Scofield's intensely personal, autobiographical poems; likewise, Brant's finely crafted accounts of ordinary people assume mythic significance within the double context established by her opening pieces—"Telling" (the writer's personal statement on her art as a healing force for all silent victims of abuse) and "This is History" (the story of Sky

Woman and her daughter, First Woman, a traditional creation story). The lives of spiritual entities, Black Bear and First Woman, are models to be followed by earthly inhabitants such as Brant's characters and Scofield himself in the guise of his poetic speaker. Indeed, within this larger, spiritual context, all individual lives—no matter how short, violent, or sad—acquire meaning. With Sky Woman and First Woman for models, Brant's characters must locate and reassemble the scattered pieces of themselves: David, a young Indian man with AIDS in "This Place," learns how to die from a Native healer who helps him to "look for the parts to put [himself] back together. To put the earth back together." In a similar fashion, Scofield's speaker regains control of his future by following Black Bear's example and gathering, one-by-one, "stones for the medicine wheel" that is his life.

Brant began to write at age forty, and her bittersweet stories distill the mature wisdom of a woman who knows the large value of small gifts. Often surprised by unexpected love that comes at odd moments from unlikely sources, Brant's characters learn how to recognize the important "pieces" of themselves restored to them through modest acts of kindness and generosity by strangers and family alike. In "Wild Turkeys," a young woman, recently escaped from a violent marriage, is partially healed through a chance conversation with two other women in a roadside cafe. In "Food & Spirits," an unlikely friendship develops from an old Indian man's fortuitous encounter in a Detroit bus station with two inner-city black men and a prostitute who share his fry-bread and stories of home. "Turtle Gal" maps the journey away from loneliness for another old man and an orphaned Indian child whose alcoholic mother has died in the apartment across the hall.

Brant's vignettes depict ties uniting the human family that are no respecters of

race, age, or social class. In addition to this thematic emphasis connecting all of Brant's stories to one another and to the story of Sky Woman that encompasses them, a brilliantly managed strain of animal iconography unites the works. The animals in Brant's stories suggest the vast dimensions of a universe surpassing human understanding. On the one hand, some of Brant's animals are merely icons of human potentiality, as when Violet, in "Wild Turkeys," learns that she and other female victims of domestic violence resemble Turkey, a homely bird with clipped wings that sometimes, nevertheless, may "fly real high." On the other hand, some of Brant's animals are less icons than they are—like "Prophet," the healer's feline assistant in "This Place"—simply nonhuman, fellow inhabitants of a universe misruled by "two-leggeds" who ignorantly underestimate animals as powerful beings. Especially memorable for this notion of animals are "Home Coming" and "Swimming Upstream." In both stories, characters receive healing grace from messenger animals, in the first case from a dying heron bringing spiritual relief to a suffering, guilt-ridden woman and, in the second case, from a salmon struggling upstream and reminding a mother that her drowned son's spirit lives on.

A totem animal, Black Bear, likewise inhabits the universe of Scofield's poems, each one a "stone" in the "medicine wheel" of the poet's life. Each autobiographical poem recalls a part of the speaker's life and represents a piece of a shattered self drawn together toward wholeness within the meaningful pattern set by Black Bear for his "Grandson." Part Cree, part Scottish, Scofield's boyhood was apparently a painful attempt to learn what becoming a man could mean for a brutalized and frequently abandoned child belonging to neither ethnic group. Asking himself, "what is a *metis*," he answers, "If anything, we are *Katipamsoochick*"—"people who own

themselves," people whose "way is not the Indian way or white way."

Two poems are particularly memorable. The first, "Barter Tongue," self-consciously considers the value of Scofield's art from a "*kohkum's*" (grandmother's) perspective. The male speaker remarks how difficult it is to do her job—fancy beadwork—and compares it to the difficult task of "smoothing" his "barter tongue." Both grandmother's beadwork and grandson's words are for sale, but the speaker-as-poet seems to regard his marketed "bush accent" as somehow less of an art, perhaps even as complicit in the (doubtless, white) art dealer's acts of appropriating an allegedly "dying race." The poet defends the "hard work" he does for his "drinking money," but he winces as he thinks how his grandmother might "chuckle" if he simply "took up bingo" instead.

Many of Scofield's poems suggest this type of discomfort with the roles he attempts to play, whether the role is "poet," "Indian," or "*metis*." "Big Time Poaching" is a humorous statement about the uneasy relationship between the poet and non-Indian people who will sometimes pay money just to be near things Indian, even inauthentic things. The speaker recalls a time in "a downtown beer joint/ Mooching this white guy/ So impressed/ I'm a bonafide road-kill scavenger." The speaker treats the "white guy" to some "Indian knowledge" about hunting; with his "Squinted eyes so deep in thought," he "Give[s]/ Just enough time to order up another/ Pitcher/ Careful now not to blow my cover/ Sippin' slow/ Work him into the clearing/ Load-up/ Take aim/ Shoot:"—The poem ends hilariously, apparently with the failure of the speaker's effort at "big time poaching." The word "Shoot," though at first it seems to refer to the release of a well-aimed, manipulative "bullet," actually means something like "Damn"; the poet's artful "mooching" fails because, he says,

there "must be Indians tippin' them [white people] off." This and other poems by Scofield suggest the hardships involved in developing a singular, personal and artistic identity when one's cultural identity remains uncertain, but especially when one's voice is always liable to become an "exotic" commodity.

Nevertheless, Scofield's poems in *The Gathering* record the range of emotions of a young man who has recently begun to define himself and to walk deliberately in Black Bear's footsteps. By contrast, Brant's short stories in *Food & Spirits* reveal many long-pondered lessons, hard-won by a mother and grandmother who has spent many years on the path first blazed by Sky Woman and her daughter.

Societies On Stage

Dave Carley

Taking Liberties & Into. Playwrights Canada Press \$10.95

Anne Chislett

Yankee Notions. Playwrights Canada Press \$10.95

Norm Foster

The Motor Trade & The Affections of May. Playwrights Canada Press \$14.95.

Raymond Storey

The Saints and Apostles. Playwrights Canada Press \$10.95.

Reviewed by Paul M. Malone

Dave Carley's *Taking Liberties* is a cycle of monologues beginning in 1995 and going back to 1955 before returning to its present (our future). Six scenes show the impact on selected individuals—interrelated by blood, marriage or friendship—of affirmative action, censorship of Holocaust denial, fighting restricted country clubs, book banning in schools, and societal disapproval of homosexuality. Carley's polemic point is that whether our intentions are good or evil, our attempts to effect social improvement almost always result in the removal of

individual personal freedoms. In the same volume, *Into*, based on a short story by Julio Cortazar, is less contentious and more fun, even though it too deals with serious questions of social construction and alienation. A freeway traffic jam near Toronto strands a cynical nun, a young headbanger, an adulterous businessman and a romantic but removed young woman in neighbouring cars. The cause of the jam remains mysterious, but its duration results in the formation of miniature societies warring and allying along the freeway. The nun leads the onstage group, and in the course of time, it begins to function as a confederation: the boy changes from a "disaffected" youth into a purposeful warrior and the young woman becomes pregnant by the businessman. When the jam finally clears and the cars begin moving, however, this little culture breaks up, leaving the now-speeding nun to ask: "Who does all this serve? . . . Why are we doing this to ourselves? Does anyone know." Magically appearing props, stretches of blank verse and the nun's wickedly angry sense of humour make *Into* a play that can provoke both laughter and thought with a little budget.

A society is also being built in Anne Chislett's *Yankee Notions*, but this is a particular historical society. The year is 1838, and Upper Canada is riven by conflicts of class, gender, religion, nationality and colonial politics. Chislett cleverly balances the personalities and loyalties of her two protagonists both to engage and frustrate the audience. Sarah is a loyalist, fiercely protective of her family, yet naive, self-centred and snobbish: to save her father from being hanged as a rebel, she is willing to betray lower-class Maria. Maria is honest, politically committed and courageous; as she fights to rescue her husband, she longs for an American invasion to bring democracy to Canada and end the reign of that "slip of a girl," Victoria. The complementary but hardly cooperative approaches of naive

Sarah and passionate Maria are further set off against the cynical *Realpolitik* played by the Byronic Lord Durham, George Arthur, and the Robinsons of the Family Compact, and a young John A. MacDonald. In the course of their quest, Maria comes to see that “the freest parliament in the world” is no comfort for the loss of family; and Sarah, made destitute by the elder Robinson and pregnant by his son, takes on a rebellious spirit. Chislett’s non-realistic staging—scenes overlap like cinematic wipes and all the roles save Sarah and Maria are doubled—facilitates lightning shifts of tone from tragic to comic, and the long and sometimes unconvincing political speeches (mostly Maria’s and Durham’s) are leavened with confident grace and wit.

An equally sure hand with non-naturalistic form rules Raymond Storey’s *The Saints and Apostles*, in which a love story between two young men, Michael and Daniel, is set against the straight world of Michael’s roommate St. Madeleine, Daniel’s father St. Peter, and Michael’s mother St. Rita. The play’s title is taken from the *Mary Poppins* song “Feed the Birds” (“All around the cathedral, the saints and apostles look down as you call their names . . .”), and the designation of the straight characters as “saints” shows the security of their position in heterosexual society, where “a belief in a conventional God entails the acceptance of a conventional morality;” in Michael’s words, “but . . . how can I embrace a morality that denies my existence?” The scenes of the first act, bearing titles like “The Witness of St. Peter” and “The Martyrdom of St. Rita,” demonstrate the friction resulting from the interaction of Michael and Daniel with their straight surroundings, and the attraction they find for each other, complicated by Daniel’s HIV-positive status. The second act, titled “Revelations,” plays this scenario out without coming to a resolution, happy or unhappy; but this ending, far from being frustrating, perfectly symbolizes the impos-

sible difficulty of the protagonists’ position. Storey’s great skill shows in his command of a complex temporal structure, and in his ability to give his two leads grave flaws without detracting from our sympathy for them, and to show his straight characters clearly as complacent parts of the structure oppressing homosexuality without letting us forget that they have lives and fears—and great capacities for loving—all their own.

In the midst of this company, Norm Foster’s straightforwardly naturalistic plays *The Motor Trade* and *The Affections of May* somehow seem ethereal. Although adultery, divorce and untimely death lurk in the backgrounds of both these small-town plays, neither these dark phenomena nor the topical background of a chilly economy ever really defeat an atmosphere of shallow sunniness, nor do they lead to any understanding of social forces. They merely serve as motivating mechanisms for characters who have eccentricities in lieu of personalities and who mouth one-liners meant to be read as poignant self-exposure. It has become customary to damn Foster with the faint praise that his plays are perfect fodder for summer stock; frankly, however, summer stock could do a lot better than these two offerings, which, apart from *The Motor Trade*’s toothless nod to David Mamet, could easily have been written twenty years ago.

In Foster’s case, this impression is only strengthened by Playwrights Canada Press’s new cover design. The former design, white with red and black lettering, was spare but readable; the new design places black and dark green lettering on a pastel green marble pattern. Not only is it much less legible, particularly on the books’ spines, but the light green also appears to have stood in the shop window too long. The contents of three of these books are highly recommended; sadly, the books themselves look fished out of the remainder bin.

Blind Spot

J. Brooks Bouson

Brutal Choreographies: Oppositional Strategies and Narrative Design in the Novels of Margaret Atwood. Massachusetts \$27.50 U.S.

Margery Fee

The Fat Lady Dances: Margaret Atwood's Lady Oracle. ECW \$14.95

Reviewed by Lorraine M. York

These two recent additions to the voluminous critical commentary on Margaret Atwood's fiction appear to share little more than the publication date. Margery Fee's monograph is a contribution to ECW Press's Canadian Fiction Studies series and, as such, it is a detailed reading of one novel, primarily directed to high school, college, and university audiences, whereas J. Brooks Bouson's more wide-ranging work (a chapter on each novel up to and including *Cat's Eye*) addresses an academic audience, though, as one of the jacket blurbs has it, "This book will be extraordinarily useful for teachers and general readers" (Kathryn VanSpanckeren). That said, however, these two books reverse the stereotypical expectations of their publication formats; Margery Fee's study is not simply a quick warm-up of plot details, and J. Brooks Bouson's book does not quite deliver the original and striking feminist reading that its title promises.

Of course, Margery Fee's book takes into account the pedagogical intent of the Canadian Fiction Studies series. Fee's book does include the obligatory passages of expository assistance: a definition of a *roman à clef*, a one-sentence summary of Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, and so on. But *The Fat Lady Dances* offers much more. As several authors in the series have done, Fee has turned her study into a tightly-controlled examination of a central thesis—in this case, the cultural construction of identity: "We are born into a lan-

guage and culture that structures us far more than we structure it." The language is colloquial and accessible, but I found myself continually impressed by Fee's capacity to present theoretically complex issues to students using neither academese nor baby talk.

Moreover, Fee does more than simply survey or note the relevant criticism. Fee is never a detached bystander; she identifies the "blind spot in the criticism" as a disinclination to subject "Atwood's political, moral, or philosophical attitudes" to close scrutiny. Whether one agrees or not, this is a refreshingly trenchant observation to find in a volume which presents itself as a study guide.

Nothing could sound more trenchant than the title of J. Brooks Bouson's book on Atwood. The title prepared me for a theoretically dense, intricately worked feminist analysis of the novels of Margaret Atwood. Much of this study, however, is extremely general in nature, and much of the analysis therefore treads upon already-covered ground. It is not new, for instance, to hear that the *Surfacing* narrator's mother, "who is essentially silenced in the narrative, comes to represent the wordless, body-identified knowledge the narrator comes to find salvific," or that "*Cat's Eye* views the love relationship as a potential form of bondage and persecution which endangers, rather than enhances, female selfhood." There are too many such commonplaces in this study, particularly in the second chapter, on *The Edible Woman*. By far the most engaging and original chapter is the sixth, "The Brutal Reality of Power and Sexual Politics in *Bodily Harm*," despite its general and familiar-sounding title. Here, Brooks Bouson is at her best, situating *Bodily Harm*, a relatively neglected novel in the Atwood canon, in the historical context of 1980s "postfeminist" backlash and in the theoretical context of "the beauty myth" and the male gaze.

This chapter also avoids the patchwork of critical quotations found in most of the other sections of the book. Of course, any major book on Atwood needs to take into account what Brooks Bouson herself calls in the first sentence of her preface, the “regular Atwood industry among academic literary critics.” But the study seems overshadowed by these critical presences and the author’s undue reverence for the published criticism may be a factor contributing to the study’s general nature. The same dogged inclusiveness blunts the theoretical edge of *Brutal Choreographies*. The citations of theory and criticism which appear in the study are, again, so numerous and varied that Brooks Bouson’s theoretical angle gets lost in the shuffle.

I recall that I read *The Fat Lady Dances* first, thinking it a likely *hors d’oeuvre* before a heavier main course. I found, however, that the critical nibbles offered therein were more substantial than I had expected, and that *Brutal Choreographies*, a book from which, as a feminist critic, I had expected much nourishment, left me hungry still.

A Woman’s Place

Edna Alford & Claire Harris, eds.
Kitchen Talk. Red Deer College P \$18.95

Evelyn Lau

Fresh Girls & Other Stories. Harper Collins
 \$20.00

Reviewed by Maria Noëlle Ng

Two traditional household spaces are assigned to women: the kitchen and the bedroom. Food and sex. Cook and reproductive agent. Mother and wife. But *Kitchen Talk*, a collection of prose/poetry written by Canadian women, and *Fresh Girls and Other Stories*, by Evelyn Lau, put a new spin on the very idea of these conventions. Not that either work denies that these are roles women are expected to play.

But both also emphasize that there are many facets to the act of cooking and to the act of sexual engagement.

Evelyn Lau’s ‘fresh girls’ are young prostitutes, and their stories are a string of anecdotal encounters with their clients. They usually have first names, which is all the identity Lau gives them. Nothing really differentiates a Mary from a Sabina. They practice sex for a living, and the acts give them as much pleasure as digging earth with bare hands, and the experience is sometimes just as excruciating. This does not mean that they are without emotions. A novice to the trade needs a fix before she can service her client. Mary dresses up in leather and studs for her appointments; but when she gets home, she removes her makeup and puts on white lace for her married lover who does not show up. Like most people, these girls have a public working life and a private life. The only difference is, that they can not find happiness (an inadequate noun in this context), in their work or in their leisure.

One woman’s job is to perform sodomy on a client in an apartment kitchen, another is required to call someone scum while he licks one’s shoe, here emotions like love, happiness, existential satisfaction, no longer have their conventional meanings. The limits of pleasure and pain, both physical and psychological, are pushed beyond what language can describe. A reader might want to treat these stories as erotica, but the cold apathy of the act does not accord with the supposed aim of erotic literature, which is to celebrate sexuality without hypocritical or literary constraint.

Writers of erotic literature do not pretend to originality, except perhaps in their fantasies and their unbound libidinous bravura. But Lau’s writing is not celebratory or exuberant in the least. The dull, interior monologues of the girls create an airless, hopeless space, the very opposite of what is needed to encourage erotic encounters. I

am not certain if this deadening effect of Lau's prose is intentional, or merely a by-product of the as-yet unpolished technique of a very promising writer. One cannot fault her sincerity. She does not write to titillate. But like other writers who have also treated such subjects of limit-experience, and the Marquis de Sade and Georges Bataille come readily to mind, Lau teeters uneasily between serious literature and sensational prose. One is mesmerized by such off-the-edge and self-destructive behaviour, and at the same time, one is disturbed by the lack of even a hint of any solution to these very wasted lives.

In case the reader is tempted to treat *Kitchen Talk* as a literary version of *The Joy of Cooking*, one should be warned that not all the gourmet experiences in this book are rewarding, or appreciated, or voluntary. In Marlene Nourbese Philip's 'Burn Sugar', the generational gap and the mother/daughter intimacy are metaphorized by the ritual of making black cakes for Christmas. For 'mammy', a cake is just a cake and looking for meaning is 'just going to break you.' But for the enlightened daughter, she sees transformation and metamorphosis. In the end, the daughter still needs the wisdom of the older woman to help salvage her over-baked black cake. In a lighter mood, Audrey Thomas writes about a woman who sits alone in a restaurant which is filled with mothers and their relatives on Mother's Day. Defiant and unconventional, she rejects the Mother's Day special cocktail and orders carafes of wine. But even as she sneers at the enforced display of such orchestrated familial bonhomie, she admits that she has kept locks of hair and early drawings from her children: she knows what it is like to be a mother. One might not publicly celebrate one's role, but one still belongs to the mysterious order of motherhood. In a tightly-written story, Thomas skilfully shows the reader the kind of social pressure which continues to be

exerted on a woman to fulfill her role.

Not all the stories and poems are comforting to read. Pat Lowther's poem 'Kitchen Murder' is macabre: "Everything here's a weapon/ i pick up a meat fork./ imagine/ plunging it in,/ a heavy male/ thrust . . ." The combination of sex and cooking utensil is disturbingly real.

The reader is reminded of how violence is just simmering beneath the surface of domesticity. And in the excerpt from Carol Shield's *The Box Garden*, hypocrisy and emptiness are polished over by kitchen trivialities such as cutting the crusts off the toast and using a clean tea towel for every meal. An uneasy reminder of the many uses of kitchen, but in a very different way, is Inge Israel's interview with Mrs. P. from Germany. As a child, Mrs. P. came home one day to find the whole family gathered in the kitchen. In great hurry and without luggage they left the house and the country. The child wondered why there were so many groceries left on the kitchen table, and was told that it was a ploy to make the Nazi soldiers think that they were coming back. An innocent everyday still-life is subtly transformed into an historical cameo.

Being Different

King-Kok Cheung

Articulate Silences. Cornell University P \$14.95US

Karen Connelly

Touch the Dragon: A Thai Journal. Turnstone P n.p.

Reviewed by Maria Noëlle Ng

Articulate Silences interprets rhetorical silences in the works of three Asian American writers. King-Kok Cheung argues in great detail that silences do not always signify submission or absence. She chooses to use for her texts three short stories by Hisaye Yamamoto, "The Woman Warrior" and "China Men" by Maxine Hong

Kingston and "Obasan" by Joy Kogawa, and her textual analysis of these writings amply supports her thesis.

In the introduction Cheung writes, "I am in dialogue with recent feminist theories about women's poetics [but] I take issue with both Anglo-American feminists . . . and revisionist Asian American male critics . . ." As this sentence and the rest of the introduction announce, Cheung defines herself clearly along ethnic- and gender-lines before she undertakes her analysis, and readers are invited to do so as well. While Cheung speaks for a more inclusive reading of Asian American silences, she is also suggesting covertly that one might have to be a woman (non-revisionist-non-male) and preferably a non-Anglo-American critic to appreciate the empowering quality of willful speechlessness of Asian American ethnicity. (There is a distinction between using a hyphen for 'Anglo-American' and not using one for 'Asian American.' The latter term maintains the identity of the Asian ethnicity of the American, and Cheung is careful to keep this distinction throughout the book.)

Cheung is thoroughly familiar with post-structuralist, feminist and current cultural theories and applies them with vigour in her interpretation. But readers will find most instructive her sensitive response to the subtleties of the culturally-constructed world of North American Asians. In her chapter on Joy Kogawa's "Obasan," Cheung emphasizes that the most common Chinese and Japanese ideogram for "silence" also denotes "serenity," while in the United States silence is looked upon as a sign of passivity. Disagreeing with most reviewers of "Obasan," Cheung calls it a quiet book, "one that is attentive to image and to nuances of feeling." She also points out that though both Kingston in "The Woman Warrior" and Kogawa in "Obasan" use traditional martial folktales for their narratives, they either change the gender of the main character or delete battle details, thereby

subverting the traditional military ethos of patriarchal societies. Although Cheung structures her work in such a way that each chapter is centred on one type of "silence" and one writer, the crisscrossing of her analysis from one text to another prevents any impression of stylistic rigidity. Her insertion of Chinese and Japanese ideograms and texts is useful to those readers with some knowledge of these two languages.

After some very refined ethnic differentiation and gender analysis, Cheung tries to pull all the parts together in her conclusion, 'Coda.' How convincing this attempt is depends on how sympathetic the reader is to her approach, and how far she can follow what Cheung calls "crisscrossing between feminist and ethnic poetics (and politics)." *Articulate Silences* certainly reminds the reader that ethnicity is something to be learnt and understood and not a static category in human interaction. Perhaps one way to read Cheung and other critics concerned with ethnic differentiation in texts is to suspend all ethnic (and gender) affiliation to allow for maximum intellectual empathy. After all, ethnographers do that in field work.

'Field work' was something which Karen Connelly undertook when she was seventeen and lived for a year in a Northern Thai village. She did not speak the Thai language, and from her journal, *Touch the Dragon*, there was no indication that she knew much about the Thai people before she left Canada. So it comes as no surprise when for the first part of her stay, she suffered all the manifestations of culture shock.

Connelly describes with candour her many physical ailments, the non-sanitary conditions of the Thai house she bivouacked in, and the strange, and to her, repulsive variety of insects the Thai ate. As in all travel writing dealing with adventures into unknown territories, the overcoming of such travails indicates the traveller's heroic quality or her coming-of-age of the

traveller. Typically, such self-exploration (*Touch the Dragon* is in the same category as Graham Greene's *Journey Without Map*) centres on the development of the traveller/writer against the backdrop of an exotic culture. Like many Western travellers before her, Connelly comes to prize the 'other' culture over her own. (Her criticism does not seem to extend to her Anglo-Canadian heritage.) Though some aspects of the Thai culture disturb her, such as lack of education and the lowly position of women in society, not to mention adolescent prostitution, she also claims that she cannot understand why a young Thai servant would prefer an American way of life to drudgery in a remote village. A traveller tends to live within an existential context unique to herself. She is in-between cultures. The problems of the people she is visiting are not really her concerns. Therefore, it is not unusual that Connelly's narrative has more than its share of ambivalent value judgements. She might start one journal entry writing ecstatically about Thai serenity and in the next bemoan the cruel treatment of animal lives by the villagers. On January 20th, five months after her arrival in Thailand, Connelly wrote, "I'm sick of whispering and smiling and bowing. Sometimes I could almost say I hate Thailand, yet I know that's not true . . ." Perhaps that is the foremost personal experience in travelling—the freedom to re-evaluate oneself and one's surroundings without lasting consequences. However, this freedom also requires that the writer have a sense of responsibility to her subject, be it in her comments on exotic costume or the inedible cuisine. Connelly's writing is spontaneous. Even if her journal underwent considerable polishing before publication, it still has the charm of un-prejudiced youthful writing. Sometimes, however, one wishes she had been more self-reflexive: Connelly complains of being exploited at a

local beauty pageant, or of being stared at by the Thai villagers. Is she aware of the irony of such statements?

Italianità

Pietro di Donato

Christ in Concrete. Penguin Books Canada \$6.99

Caterina Edwards

The Lion's Mouth. Guernica n.p.

Reviewed by Petra Fachinger

Although both *Christ in Concrete* and *The Lion's Mouth* describe the experience of Italian immigration to the New World and draw on autobiographical material, they could not be more different in subject matter, style and narrative technique. Published in the same year as John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Christ in Concrete* was hailed by the critics of its time but did not receive much further attention until it was rediscovered with the surge of interest in "ethnic" literature.

Christ in Concrete tells the story of an Italian immigrant bricklayer and his family in the New York of the 1920s. Geremio dies on Good Friday when the building which he is working on collapses, burying him alive under settling concrete. With his death, the responsibility to support the family falls on twelve-year-old Paul, as the government refuses to assist recent immigrants. After two more tragic accidents involving his uncle and his godfather, Paul loses his faith in God. As a consequence of her son's religious crisis, his mother Annunziata, image of the suffering madonna which haunts Italian-American fiction, dies from a heart attack.

The dramatic plot, the presentation of the story in five parts, the lack of psychological development in the characters and the large proportion of dialogue in the narration bring the novel close to dramatic presentation. As well as combining narra-

tive and dramatic techniques, *Christ in Concrete* borrows from social realism, futurism and also from expressionism which made its way from Germany to the United States in the 1920s. Realism is transcended in the representation of the distorted human body in the various death scenes and the carnivalesque mock crucifixion, in the stylistic patterns of futuristic prose and the allegorical presentation of the characters with Job as their god-like antagonist.

Although the book ends with the mother's death, Di Donato leaves the reader without any doubt that Paul will make it in the New World. Despite its criticism of American institutions, a fierce nostalgia for the Old World and an awareness that for some ethnic groups there is no equality in the Melting Pot, *Christ in Concrete* does not attempt to refute the idea of Americanization. By the end of the novel Paul has become assimilated. "The little American," as his father's colleagues call the boy, forgets his Italian, rejects Catholicism and is an observer of, rather than a participator in, the communal life. At the same time, however, he remains a loving son, a caring older brother and a hard worker, ambitious to move upward on the social scale. Apart from its interest to the literary historian as one of the first landmarks in Italian-American writing, the contemporary reader will find *Christ in Concrete* a more stimulating read than most other immigrant novels of the same period.

Caterina Edwards' *The Lion's Mouth* describes the Italian immigrant experience from a 1980's female Canadian perspective. *The Lion's Mouth*, a skilfully written first novel, has not received the attention it deserves. It is written in a self-reflexive manner and employs various metafictional strategies as, for instance, the framing of the main story by a prologue and an epilogue which are both situated in the present at the narrator's house in Edmonton. Bianca, the narrator, left Venice as a child

when her parents decided to emigrate to Canada. She describes her younger self as being "split into two seemingly inimical halves, not only between the time before and after, but through all my growing years: Italy in summer, Canada in winter."

In the main story, Bianca recounts her Italian cousin's present life in Venice. An unhappy marriage, his little son's heart disease, his own poor health, and, above all, his involuntary involvement in a terrorist killing lead to Marco's nervous breakdown. The account of three days in his life is interspersed with flashbacks to the time when Bianca fell in love with him during her summer visits, as well as comments on the process of writing Marco's story. Through this writing Bianca overcomes the loss and the disruption which she suffered in emigrating to Canada. Just as Venice and Edmonton are both part of Bianca—she calls Venice her "inner city" and Edmonton her "outer city"—Marco can also be seen as part of her inner self, her male/Italian double. Bianca's/Edwards' writing, however, is not a simple telling of the (traditional) story, but a telling with a twist—a strategy which has become a trademark of both migrant and post-colonial writing. As Robert Kroetsch has pointed out, "in ethnic writing there is often an attempt at healing by the rewriting of myths." Edwards not only rewrites parts of the gothic novel and the detective story but also reverses the traditional gender pattern of the *Bildungsroman*. The hero's career ends with his breakdown in the Old World, while the heroine comes to terms with her double life as an immigrant in the New World. Marco's conviction that he has betrayed both his family and his city drives him to *La bocca di leone*, "receptacle of denunciation" and "purveyor of justice," from which he seeks redemption. On the other hand, by acknowledging both her Italian and her Canadian self and by possessing both Venice and Edmonton through her imagination, Bianca remains

faithful to herself and to both her native and her adopted country.

If the book has a weakness it is the somewhat clichéd representation of the Old World and the New. While Italy/Venice is depicted as a complex society with an old culture—Edwards did much research on Venetian art and architecture for her novel—and many social problems, Canada is described as a young and innocent society without much of a history. Only the landscape is threatening.

The Lion's Mouth is a uniquely (white) Canadian consideration of the immigrant experience. Unlike many American immigrant novels, in which the protagonist has to renounce her own language and culture in order to become a successful member of society, *The Lion's Mouth* demonstrates the importance of double cultural allegiance. In *The Lion's Mouth*, the "return" to Italy is not an act of nostalgia but a never ending critical dialogue.

Where the Boys Are

David Porter, ed.

Between Men and Feminism. Routledge

\$19.95/62.50

Kaja Silverman

Male Subjectivity at the Margins. Routledge

\$68.95

Reviewed by Peter Dickinson

Between Men and Feminism brings together several essays first presented at a 1990 "Men and Feminism" colloquium organized by David Porter at St. John's College, Cambridge. Although Porter admits in his introduction that critical and theoretical explorations of the discursive spaces between men and feminism are nothing new, he is at great pains to distinguish his volume of essays from its most notable predecessor, Alice Jardine and Paul Smith's 1987 *Men in Feminism*. Much of his argument in this regard centres on a suitably

self-reflexive use of prepositions. Commenting on his decision to add "between" to the title of the printed version of the original colloquium proceedings, Porter writes: "'Between' connotes . . . the space of intimacy, of dialogue. . . . If pro-feminist men don't belong *in* feminism *per se*, neither are they banished beyond its pale."

Following from this pronouncement, then, the text opens with an essay by Joseph A. Boone reprinted from *Engendering Men*, Boone and Michael Cadden's 1989 foray into the contestatory waters of "male feminist criticism." Beginning with a systematic critique of *Men in Feminism*, Boone concludes his essay with a prescriptive political agenda for his male academic colleagues aimed at subverting traditional masculine networks of power and creating "[a] community with phalluses, rather than the community as Phallus." The two essays which immediately follow Boone's are by the sole female contributors to the volume and are decidedly less optimistic in tone. Naomi Segal traces the politics of feminist heterosexual desire from Freud to Cixous and across a wide range of female subjective experiences, including sexual pleasure, marriage, and motherhood. Her conclusions on the masculine and feminine libidinal economies lead her to question the viability of male partnership in these experiences. Andrea Spurling turns her attention to the supposed dialogic spaces of the academic classroom. Based on research conducted at Cambridge, Spurling's essay concludes that male students not only tend to dominate classroom discussion, but also that they do so in a manner that frequently silences their women counterparts.

The remaining six essays in the volume offer a compendium of possible responses to the project of reinscribing maleness within the spaces of feminism and then daring to go forth into those spaces. These responses range from the highly theoretical, as in Greg Bredbeck's analysis of the

heterosexually coded body in *écriture féminine*, to the more personal narrative evoked by Martin Humphries in his comparison of homophobia and sexism.

As a gay male academic interested in feminist theory and criticism, I welcome men's mutual re-examination and reconstruction of masculinity and our own deeply gendered histories through feminism. However, heeding Porter's own cautionary warning about the appropriation of feminist space, I cannot help wondering if the academic muscle mustered in this collection does not merely belie a jockeying for position in a discursive field of inquiry that is already cluttered with (predominately male) players, a (predominately male) tendency to fill all available spaces.

A re-examination of contemporary crises in masculinity also serves as the focus of Kaja Silverman's *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*. However, Silverman is most concerned with exploring so-called "deviant" or "non-phallic" masculinities, those masculinities "that eschew Oedipal normalization," that "say 'no' to power." Drawing from the disciplines of psychoanalysis, gender studies, semiotics, film studies, post-colonial theory, and queer theory, Silverman seeks to articulate what she calls a "libidinal politics" of male subjectivity. In as much as this politics necessarily impinges on related notions of femininity, Silverman sees it as "an urgent feminist project."

Indeed, throughout the text Silverman repeatedly seeks to locate in male subjects those characteristics which are typically designated as feminine. In so doing Silverman demonstrates that she is adept at re-interpreting concepts as complex and diverse as Althusser's theory of interpellation and ideology and Freud's notion of "feminine" masochism. However, it is in her discussion of such "non-phallic" individuals as T. E. Lawrence, Henry James, Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Marcel Proust that Silverman's analysis is most convincing.

For example, in chapter 3 Silverman re-contextualizes Lacan's notion of the gaze and its relation to female spectatorship through the films of Fassbinder. Arguing against the dominant notion in feminist film criticism (first espoused by Laura Mulvey) that women in film function as the object of the male gaze, Silverman insists that we are all always already simultaneously subjects and objects of desire, and that the real problem in most films is that "male desire is so consistently and systematically imbricated with projection and control." Distinguishing the penis from the phallus and the male "look" from the male "gaze," Silverman claims that rather than focusing on "overturning" the scopic regime in dominant cinema and "giving" women the gaze, we would be better served "by exposing the impossibility of anyone ever owning that visual agency, or of him or herself escaping specularly." For Silverman this impossibility is most ably demonstrated in the films of Fassbinder, which "refuse simply to resituate the terms of phallic reference."

In the second half of *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* Silverman deals primarily with masochism, moving deftly from the "psychic shattering" of subjectivity proposed by Leo Bersani in "Is the Rectum a Grave?" to the "double mimesis" articulated by Lawrence in his autobiographical writings. However, in the text's final chapter Silverman announces "a return to a number of the more explicitly feminist issues addressed earlier in the book." She does so, oddly enough, through a discussion of the place of femininity within male homosexuality. This perhaps has more to do with Silverman's "own connection to these 'deviant' masculinities," as announced in the text's afterword, than with any theoretical investment in re-examining femininity "from within a male body." And yet, it is precisely this destabilization of the boundaries between male and female, masculine and feminine,

homosexual and heterosexual that gives the "libidinal" aspects outlined in Silverman's text such "political" currency.

Response & Responsibility

Terry Castle

The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture. Columbia UP \$29.95

Judith Laurence Pastore, ed.

Confronting AIDS through Literature: The Responsibilities of Representation. U Illinois P \$12.95/\$39.95

Reviewed by Dennis Denisoff

The adaptation of theory to current social issues and perspectives has been a particularly complicated academic endeavour during recent years, with the urgency of the problems often magnifying the shortcomings of the theories themselves. Both Terry Castle's *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* and the collection *Confronting AIDS through Literature: The Responsibilities of Representation*, edited by Judith Laurence Pastore, address this dilemma, though they approach it from different angles. One of the strongest aspects of both these texts is the insight they offer into the conflict between theory and social practise.

In *The Apparitional Lesbian*, Castle acknowledges her own apparitional presence in the theoretical aspects of her text by framing the collection of writings (save for the introduction) between two personal essays, the first recollecting an early lesbian experience at a San Diego YWCA and the second discussing her attraction to the opera singer Brigitte Fassbaender. Castle, observing that she has never actually heard Fassbaender sing live, notes that "Fassbaender remains for me a singing simulacrum: a creation of digital and analog and video tape, a sort of auditory hallucination, or disembodied (though always musical) electronic emanation." This

metaphor of the apparition dominates Castle's cogent and enlightening historicization of the representation of lesbians throughout Western culture. Offering numerous examples of the "ghosting" of lesbians, Castle writes: "The law has traditionally ignored female homosexuality—not out of indifference, I would argue, but out of morbid paranoia." A central purpose of her text, therefore, is "to call up, precisely by confronting the different kinds of denial and disembodiment with which she is usually associated, the much-ghosted yet nonetheless vital lesbian subject." Arguing that "within the very imagery of negativity lies the possibility of recovery," Castle proceeds to materialize the lesbian.

Castle's claim that the lesbian, as represented, has fulfilled a more important role in Western European society than is generally acknowledged, echoes Jonathan Dollimore's argument, in *Sexual Dissidence* (1991), that "the negation of homosexuality has been in direct proportion to its symbolic centrality." Castle makes it clear, however, that the notion of the lesbian and the notion of the male homosexual do not pose identical threats to the heteronormative social model, nor do they fulfil identical roles of alterity. In the essay "Sylvia Townsend Warner," Castle adapts the Girardian model of triangulation, as presented by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, to a notion of lesbian bonding. Using Warner's *Summer Will Show* (1936) as her example, Castle argues:

What makes this novel paradigmatically "lesbian," in my view, is not simply that it depicts a sexual relationship between two women, but that it so clearly, indeed almost schematically, figures this relationship as a breakup of the supposedly "canonical" male-female-male erotic triangle.

The lesbian is made apparitional precisely because lesbian bonding does not function

simply as an Other against which the Self is validated, but as a challenge to the need for a male Self at all. It is for this reason that the lesbian, while she cannot be denied a presence in modern culture, has been given the apparently ineffectual and negatively-defined role of ghost. Exposing part of the history of this role, Castle offers an important contribution to the process of busting through the delegitimation of the lesbian.

Confronting AIDS through Literature also addresses the subject of denial and erasure, focussing on the cultural representation of AIDS and AIDS-related issues, and the public reception of these representations. The text is divided into three sections. The first half consists of various discussions of AIDS literature since 1982, the second section consists of a sampling of AIDS writing, and the third section has three essays on teaching AIDS literature. The essays in the final section are all well-researched and pragmatic, and include some brief reading lists. They present an important and necessary component to this collection.

The most interesting and provocative work, however, occurs in the first section. The introduction and the first essay are both written by the editor, who makes an excellent synopsis of the general response to AIDS and AIDS literature in the United States. Pastore also makes the problematic suggestion, however, that a conventional humanist paradigm encompasses all AIDS literature. In the introduction she states:

Literature about AIDS does not make us feel better because someone else is in pain; rather, the imaginative depiction of other people exhibiting a nobility of spirit makes us proud to be human and willing to imitate their endurance and strength of character. Tragedy also reminds us of our frail mortality when it dramatizes instances of weakness and evil.

Pastore's claims that all AIDS literature depicts a "nobility of spirit," that this literature makes "us proud to be human," and

that nobody feels malice are doubtful, to say the least. Though she mentions human weakness and evil, she suggests that AIDS literature does not offer anything other than some sense of ultimate triumph.

Oddly enough, Pastore occasionally does challenge such a homogenizing view of AIDS literature, noting, for example, that one aim of the collection "is to show that, in spite of the short time people have been aware of the disease, much variety and breadth already exists in literature of this kind." While *Confronting AIDS through Literature* does not itself present or discuss a notably wide breadth of diverse writing, there is indeed a variety. The best acknowledgement of literary diversity occurs when the pieces historicize AIDS literature and its reception, as in Michael Denny's "AIDS Writing and the Creation of a Gay Culture," Paul Reed's "Early AIDS Fiction," and Pastore's own "What Are the Responsibilities of Representing AIDS?" Thanks to these thorough, focused essays, *Confronting AIDS through Literature* is a good source of information on the mainstream production and reception of AIDS literature in the United States.

Voices of Displacement

Yvette Edmonds

Beyond the Snowstorm: Short Stories. Borealis Press \$13.95

Maureen Moore

The Illumination of Alice Mallory. HarperCollins \$12.95

Caroline Woodward

Alaska Highway Two-Step. Polestar \$14.95

Reviewed by Lesley D. Clement

Women timid and courageous, determined and acquiescent, insecure and confident, petty and noble come alive in the pages of these three recent publications by British Columbia writers. *The Illumination of Alice Mallory* is Maureen Moore's first publica-

tion. Alice Mallory's home is a squalid, unkempt house in an "utterly loathsome and desolate" part of North Vancouver. Here twenty-year old Alice lives with a younger brother, David, "mesmerized" by television's "regular rhythmic revolutions," and Beryl, Alice's deranged mother. Neither family nor co-workers at Woolworth's provide Alice with an emotional home.

Other than Mr. Goldman, David's father, Alice's sole source of comfort is her reading, especially of the "sacred texts" of D.H. Lawrence. Through art Alice feels she will be "borne up" and made ready for "a radiant, new era" that the late 1950s promise. But in her present life, the only person outside of novels whom Alice can emulate is her best friend, Wendy Gregg, clerk at the cosmetics counter, whose "eyelids were streaked with blue" and who had "chased her older brother with a broom and had broken the handle over his back." Such juxtapositions of people and experiences in Alice's actual life with those of Alice's perception of Laurentian life—immune from unworthy boyfriends and unwanted pregnancies—create much of the irony and pathos of the earlier part of this novel. Meanwhile, Alice awaits the "dazzling illumination" of sexual joy that will transform her into Lawrence's ideal natural female.

Into her life comes James Chant, professor of Alice's evening class on "The Prophetic Novel" and Lawrence scholar. Now Alice sees "herself nobly following a column of fire while others stumbled into error and darkness." Woolworth's is the equivalent of Lawrence's dehumanizing and deadening industrialization, but Alice feels that she has risen above such degradation and discovered a "true family" in James and his intellectual friends. Predictably, this pseudo-passion and pseudo-culture are discredited ultimately, but unpredictably, Alice emerges illuminated and fortified by genuine human emotions and a more balanced perception of what literature may

inspire. Her redefined relationships with her brother, David, and with her friend, Michael Halek, point to the discovery of the home she has sought.

Of a much more robust and assured character is the thirty-four year old heroine of Caroline Woodward's first published novel, *Alaska Highway Two-Step*, a worthy successor to her short fiction collection, *Disturbing the Peace* (1990). Although Mercy Brown knows "damn well who I am" and feels comfortable in the cottage on Kootenay Lake that her Aunt Ginger, a dancer, has bequeathed her, her life is incomplete because it is without a network of human relationships. From her aunt, Mercy has also inherited "an adventurous streak that made us both unfit for conventional employment or marriage." Woodward interweaves several intriguing narrative threads into this intense first-person tale of Mercy's actual and mental journeys to discover family, past and present, that will give her life wholeness.

Mercy's actual journey begins in the capacity of her work as freelance photo-journalist gathering material for a feature article on the Alaska Highway. With her is her one loyal friend: a half-blind, diabetic dog, Sadie Brown. Mercy's mental journey is two-fold: a journey through Aunt Ginger's diaries and a journey through her own precognitive dreams. The diaries, which Mercy has discovered just before leaving on her Alaska Highway expedition, take her through the life of her Aunt Ginger beginning in 1929 (when the agent for the dance troupe with which she is currently on tour absconds with the funds) through her aunt's struggle to establish herself as a Canadian choreographer and to found the Duncan School of Dance. The major discovery that Mercy makes in these diaries, however, is a cousin, a friend who understands Mercy's greatest source of discomfort, even fear: her dreams that forecast disaster. As her aunt before her, Mercy Brown finds in her own life a

small group with whom she may commune and find joy.

The gritty realism and rather predictable unfolding of *The Illumination of Alice Mallory* contrast with the imaginative flights and quirky narrative turns that bring all the journeys together in the concluding chapters of *Alaska Highway Two-Step*. Enhancing this narrative is the delightfully witty voice of Mercy Brown through a combination of her thoughts, lists, and recipes. *Beyond the Snowstorm*, the first collection of short stories from novelist Yvette Edmonds, is skilfully arranged to expose the forces—external and internal—that transformed the Inuit from identifiable groups of nomadic hunters with their own systems of kinship and collaboration adapted for survival to citizens of the modern world, products of Christian churches and government schools. The women have tended to suffer most in this rapid acculturation as neither the traditional nor the modern world grants a place of belonging.

Edmond's most powerful stories are those that unobtrusively reveal this suffering in an appropriately vibrant, crisp style. Only one story—"The Man Who Exchanged His Wife"—fails because of the blatant editorializing and unsuitable slang. Generally, however, the language, especially the metaphors, are compatible with the subject. A white fur trader has a "thick mop of curly hair the colour of the setting sun;" "silent and imperturbable" women have "faces as impassive as the granite bluff they were traversing;" as fighters fall during a battle, they leave "gaps in the two rows . . . as large as the gaps in the teeth of old crones."

Adherence to the traditional way of life is no guarantee against suffering for the women. In the title story, "Beyond the Storm," for instance, aged Quertiliq, "who had borne eighteen children, suckled and raised them into capable wives and hunters," now seeks death because a "burden," "an

inactive member of the household." And Ulik, in the collection's first story, "The Woman of the Seal," is branded barren and "no longer a woman" because her husband—not herself as is assumed—is infertile. As the last story, "A Heritage Passing," illustrates especially well, the greatest suffering afflicts those who are caught in the transition between the traditional and modern worlds, especially those whose temperament prevents their developing the "emotional control and equanimity" prized by the Inuit. The displacement of these women is most clearly demonstrated in the final story, "A Heritage Passing," with Qijuk's need to confess her mortal sins to the white priest so that she can partake of the "pocket of warmth" found in the church, yet her confusion because her own people condoned sex before marriage as a means of survival.

Lines & Angles

Cary Fagan

The Little Black Dress. Mercury Press \$11.95

P. Scott Lawrence

Missing Fred Astaire. Véhicule \$13.95

Reviewed by Lorna Marie Irvine

The twelve short stories collected in *The Little Black Dress* were written, Cary Fagan tells us, on a trip to France in January of 1991. I was in Europe that same January. It was a time of tension and fear. The Iraqis were threatening warfare and the United States was responding belligerently. Caught in the middle, Europeans were nervous, unsettled. Tourism plunged. Airplanes and airports, their enormous security forces operating at full force, seemed terrifying places, and in London and France, bomb threats were a daily occurrence.

In the midst of this contemporary turmoil, Fagan's stories seem like small, glissening moments holding back, even if only temporarily, the violence pushing at their

edges. They demonstrate, by their very existence, their author's belief in the power of narrative to create meaning and dialogue, even in situations close to despair. All of the stories are connected by an ambiguously narrated passage draws attention to moments of violence so that the conversation between these passages and the story to follow forms one of the interesting motifs of the collection. For example, the passage prior to the title story evokes curtains closed against a dark night, thus situating the events of "The Little Black Dress" in an apparently sheltered space. Part of this very short story takes place in a room protected against the outside world, where the narrator, a female optometrist, experiences desire in facets of vision. For her, the desired objects are clothes, and although her husband imagines she uses this desire to keep death at bay, a particularly female vanity, the narrator understands the sensual effects of beautiful clothes, their ability to stimulate her husband's imagination and to open up closed spaces. The passage before "The Boy Who Read 'The Simple Heart,'" a story about Flaubert, reminds us that this autobiographical moment is being recounted on "the eve of a new war," and the passage before "Domesticity," a story of the intimate tensions between a rather rigid husband and his spontaneous, somewhat disorganized, wife, describes one of Paris's anti-war marches. The strangeness of travelling through the French countryside while elsewhere bombs are falling or the recollection of an elderly woman's placing flowers at the Mémorial de la Déportation behind Notre-Dame in Paris lead the author to the final passage's admission, appropriately enough taken from Virginia Woolf's work, "as if to be caught happy in a world of misery was for an honest man the most despicable of crimes."

The stories themselves catch happiness, although none of them is particularly optimistic. Rather, each focuses on daily and

often sensuous detail, stressing the importance of careful observation so that, as memory of feelings evaporates, recollection of the physical particulars might remain. They are narrated from different perspectives, some by women, some by men, and several in the third person, so that the reader receives an androgynous impression of relationships between men and women, parents and children, all of different ages. As "Are They Really Cezanne's Apples?" shows, one never really knows what another person sees; nonetheless, these stories show how narrative opens eyes. Fagan is concerned, too, with what it means to narrate, as Flaubert did, or the journal writers of "The Other Journal." Often, humor rescues the moment, as in "A Melancholy Bride," where the female protagonist sees a Parisian bride, "rounded and generously freckled," laugh at herself in a mirror. At that moment, Paris is transformed; no longer indifferent, the city becomes human. Vision dominates Fagan's narratives. He gives us aesthetic and political foci on a Europe balanced on the edge of war.

P. Scott Lawrence's eight stories in *Missing Fred Astaire* share some of Fagan's concern with detail and with encroaching violence. They also look at events through both male and female eyes. On the whole, however, Lawrence's stories are denser, as if about to burst into more complicated narratives. While Fagan often illuminates the miniscule and precise, Lawrence is more concerned with layering details, suggesting the emergence of a larger picture. These stories variously demonstrate illusion colliding with actuality. Many of the characters possess complicated pasts which dramatically affect the current events of the story. Thus, rather than highlighting the present, as Fagan's stories do, these tend to confuse it, transforming sharp edges into vaguer, more impressionistic, outlines. In "After the Wedding," an angry wife, talking with a female friend, describes her mar-

riage and, while the friend's husband listens, strips away appearance, replacing blank spaces with transformed events and people. At the end, the two women make angels in the snow, objectively demonstrating temporary structures and the significance of process. Another story, "Famous," contrasts the movie image of one of the town's sons with what is known of his past. It too ends objectively. The star's apparently accidental death in a robbery attempt seems, to the narrator, more likely a suicide.

And so the collection progresses, suggesting simplicity, but contradicting easy interpretations. The title story, the most representative of the collection, is told in the first person by a male character. The narration sinuously winds its way from southern to northern Ontario, from dancing to economics, from Newtonian mechanics to ecology, from father to daughter. At its center, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle sends out messages, confusing waves and particles, and complicating the nature of the narrator's involvement in his story. Gradually, the Laurentian summer house where he is editing a textbook on Newtonian mechanics warps and bends, spatially and temporally separating him from his normal urban existence. In this new space, he makes friends with the game warden and his cat, a friendship that, in turn, evokes a distant summer when, at the age of nine, the narrator learned to float. In some ways, the story seems to be about floating, its measurability, so that, in the final description of Fred Astaire's dancing, the narrator sees that suspended lines and angles can "express a kind of formal geometric elegance."

All the stories of *Missing Fred Astaire* have a similar structural and contextual elegance. They are also politically engaged. The father of "Days of Home" worries about Montreal's future, while the narrator of "Pursuit" explores the terrible story of the Montreal Massacre as it sends out

waves of fear among the women he knows. In the process, he discovers his own proclivity for violence. The male protagonist of "Trespassers" thinks about Salman Rushdie as, like other divorced fathers, he waits in a bar to meet the almost-grown-up daughter he hardly knows. Speaking for many men, he admits that "he's holding on for dear life." Told from a female perspective, "Saying Grace" exposes the despair of a fifty-seven-year old Canadian mother who, looking forward to five months of freezing winter, recognizes that the family's demands are sucking life out of her. The final story, "How Do You Talk," vividly evokes the male narrator's suffering and fear as he tries to come to terms with his wife's cancer. Associating with his dog, he comes to understand that "language can be spent. Language can end."

Both collections of stories are evocative. Their authors have constructed themes fugally, whether they focus on the ecology, families, male-female relationships, connections between animals and human beings, war, and so on. Although neither uses a first-person female narrator, both do show events from female, as well as male, perspectives. Contrasting thoughts and actions to occasion subtle epiphanies, the stories use objective correlatives, often to demonstrate the break-down of contemporary communication. Ironically, their own eloquent existence counsels against despair.



Ethical Postmodernism

Barry Smart

Postmodernity: Key Ideas. Routledge US\$12.95

Patricia Waugh, ed.

Postmodernism: A Reader. Routledge \$74.95/\$19.95

Reviewed by Stephen Milnes

Cheaper than U2's *Zooropa* extravaganza and more challenging, Barry Smart's *Postmodernity* and Patricia Waugh's *Postmodernism: A Reader* are examples of a postmodernism of resistance. Smart and Waugh repudiate the notion of postmodernism as an institutional retreat into selfishness, irony, complicity, contingency and passivity during a period in which various conservative governments held sway. Although Smart is concerned with sociology and Waugh with literary criticism, both argue for what some would consider an oxymoron: ethical postmodernism. Postmodernism, Waugh states, "does not necessarily entail . . . a withdrawal from political commitment or ethical concern." This is a welcome development, given that a postmodernism of least resistance is big business and in vogue. Why else would unctuous and studiously traditional rock band U2 jettison *Joshua Tree* authenticity, discover irony, spend loads of money on big television screens and then monopolise the remote control button?

Postmodernity is an accessible, readable and practical introduction to the difficult problems concerning the practice of sociology under postmodern conditions. Smart's book is a positively utopian and ethically accountable synthesis of recent debates within contemporary sociological theory. Influenced by the work of Michel Foucault, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Zygmunt Bauman and Anthony Giddens, Smart assesses the feasibility, legitimacy and relevance of contemporary sociology, arguing that the regeneration and reconstitution of the discipline depends upon the deployment of a

particular form of historical consciousness: a critically reflexive and imaginative postmodernism. In the words of the oft-quoted Bauman: "Postmodernity is modernity coming to terms with its own impossibility; a self-monitoring modernity, one that consciously discards what it was once unconsciously doing."

The twentieth century has seen an erosion of the integrity and plausibility of grand emancipatory narratives (liberalism and socialism) and, its corollary, the proliferation of cultural heterogeneity and the plurality of cultures and discourses. A critical evaluation and postmodern reconstitution of modernity, especially its doctrines of progress and development, "its benefits and its problematic consequences, its limits and its limitations," is therefore necessary.

Where many critics see the condition of postmodernity signalling a descent into the abyss of moral relativism and nihilism, Smart sees it as an imaginative opportunity for re-conceptualizing and responding to the political, cultural and philosophical questions of social life: "it is necessary to respond positively, with imagination, to the prospect of living *without* securities, guarantees and order, and *with* contingency and ambivalence." The loss of security, for Smart, is emancipatory: "The irretrievable loss of trust in the project of modernity and its ability to manage, enhance and ultimately fulfill human potential, raises the prospect or more responsibility being restored to human agency." Smart's hopeful and problematic vision raises a number of questions. Ambivalence, contingency and reflexivity are integral components of his conception of postmodern experience. The question is how different communities will cope and live with these global conditions. If exploitation occurs across numerous and disparate social institutions and formations, how exactly does contingency help? Do localised critiques of power, in the manner of Foucault, conserve a global sys-

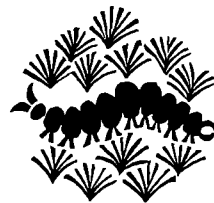
tem of transnational exploitation?

In *Postmodernism: A Reader* Patricia Waugh aims "to return the postmodern debate to a specifically aesthetic tradition." *Postmodernism* is a satisfying if occasionally predictable gathering of the central philosophical and aesthetic texts that have critiqued the foundations of enlightened modernity; postmodernism's greatest hits, in other words. Nostalgia buffs will quibble over Waugh's selections. Why no Jacques Derrida, why not Fredric Jameson's "Marxism and Postmodernism" instead of "Periodising the Sixties," and so on. The anthology is divided into five useful sections: modernism and postmodernism, postmodernism and literary history, philosophical critiques of enlightened modernity, the current debate and, lastly, postmodern readings in action. In addition to the introductory notes that preface each section, some editorial footnotes would have been helpful because many extracts are extrapolated from larger studies and, on occasion, their specific context and references require elaboration and clarification. For example, when Alan Wilde rejects "Brooks's criterion of maturity," which Brooks is he referring to? The Select Bibliography and Index provide no clues. Is it Van Wyck, Cleanth or . . . ?

Reading the section on literary history, I was struck by the dated nostalgic charm of many of the essays. The revolutionary, eclectic and energetic force of Ihab Hassan's contribution is tied to a specific point in cultural history. Some speed would have enhanced my enjoyment of the Nietzschean psychedelic exuberance that characterises Hassan's piece. In "Cross the Border - Close the Gap" Leslie Fiedler's attempt to erase the distinctions between High art and Low popular culture is compromised by Fiedler's creation of a High Art hierarchy within popular culture, one that valorises Rock over Pop: for example, the serious and sardonic Beatles circa *Revolver* are con-

sidered more credible than the chirpy pop fun Beatles circa "She Loves You." "For the cinema, unlike the novel, possesses a vocabulary of forms," a comment in Susan Sontag's "Against Interpretation," suggests pre-Bakhtinian days.

The current debate over postmodernism is represented by Lyotard, Jameson, Terry Eagleton, Jurgen Habermas, Richard Rorty, Jean Baudrillard and Waugh, and occupies a considerable part of *Postmodernism*. In "Modernism, Postmodernism, Feminism: Gender and Autonomy Theory" Waugh, as Smart does in *Postmodernity*, argues for the restoration of efficacy to human agency. Ethics and history are central to Waugh's feminist reading of postmodernism. An unreflective celebration of fragmentation, a la U2, results in the destruction of "the human subject as an ethical, affective and effective historical agent." Unlike Smart, Waugh favours Habermas' reading of modernity over Lyotard's and argues that feminism "cannot repudiate entirely the framework of Enlightened modernity without perhaps fatally undermining itself as an emancipatory politics." Postmodern metaphors of "femininity" and "otherness" Waugh concludes are very patriarchal: "a 'feminine' space has always been used to deny the *material* existence of actual women." Developing this idea, Waugh argues that the postmodernist obsession with the collapse of grand metanarratives registers "unconsciously and metaphorically, a fear specifically of the loss of western *patriarchal* grand narratives." Waugh's implication is clear: when using postmodern theory, use with care. Et tu, Bono.



Warren Tallman, 1921-1994

Fred Wah

I first met Warren Tallman in his English 406 class at UBC in 1960. I was a music major and I was taking his class on a survey of English poetry because my girlfriend Pauline Butling was taking it. He came into the Buchanan classroom wearing a black suit and looking very serious and preoccupied. He started writing notes on the blackboard and at a certain point he stopped, squinted, lit a cigarette, and quizzically asked some invisible figure floating around the ceiling: "Is this rose sick because the worm is invisible, or because there's a howling storm?" And then he wondered out loud, to no one in particular, how would it feel to be a sick rose. Well, I bit and so did a few others. And I was hooked. He wasn't talking "about" poetry, he was "inside" the poem. It wasn't about Blake, it wasn't about what the hidden meaning in the poem, it was about the mind and how, if we pay attention to the way the mind moves, no matter how simple, weird, or illogical, we, too, can participate in the energy of poetry. My naiveté in the face of language (partly a class and race thing) was lost. I soon dropped out of music and it's been poetry ever since. Warren's respect for the outrageous responses of students and for language and its availability to the improvisations of the senses opened the word-doors for a lot of students during his years at UBC.

And beyond. At his and Ellen's home too. I met most of the major writers in my life at 3707 West 37th. I remember I talked to Lionel Kearns, a hometown jazz chum and budding writer, about starting a magazine. Lionel introduced me to George Bowering and George said we should all go over to Warren's and talk to him about it. Warren said we shouldn't be in too much of a hurry and he set up a meeting at his house and invited a few other young UBC writers he knew (Gladys Hindmarch, Frank Davey, Jamie Reid, Dave Dawson) and then we each put in \$20 to bring Robert Duncan to Vancouver for a series of three seminars with us. After those sessions we decided to start TISH and Warren was totally supportive with money and getting us addresses of some of the writers in *The New American Poetry*. He also set up a reading group for those who were interested in tackling Pound's *Cantos*. In 1962 he brought Creeley to Vancouver and that snowballed into the 1963 poetry conference and I met Olson, Levertov, Avison, Ginsberg, Whalen and, later, Dorn and Blaser—all because of Warren's continual insistence on the new.

All this was done with intensity and order. The big teak table in his study was always neat with piles of student papers and a sheaf of yellow paper for him to write out in pencil entirely legible commentary and encouragement. As well as his own essays on Kerouac, James, Ginsberg, Lawrence, Richler, Creeley. Plus his many letters to Naim Kattan at the Canada Council supporting young west coast writ-

ers and trying to raise funds for Vancouver literary marathons like his "Writing in Our Times" Vancouver Poetry Centre series. *He* (along with a few dedicated helpers) was the Vancouver Poetry Centre. His organization and vision (he actually sold tickets to poetry readings) was unrelenting and singular. And he simply smiled mischievously at insidious opposition from the "establishment."

Plus he was the first academic I met who made me conscious of class. He was a refugee from the Pacific Northwest Puget Sound depression and he gave away whatever he had to those who needed it. Money and advice. Help. But he didn't ride that. He just made you value yourself, for whatever. Most of our TISH group were non-city kids and working class. We weren't Brock Hall. I think he felt comfortable with that sense of "working" at it. He certainly made social space larger for us.

So, because of Warren, literature became writing became community. Our get-togethers at his house to read and talk about literature always had the poignancy of a meeting rather than a class. It was a contact zone, a scene. There were a few of his academic Yanky upstarts like the Goses and Stockholders. The awesome and mysterious Phyllis Webb. The downtown crowd of Bill Bissett, Gerry Gilbert, Roy Kiyooka, Maxine Gadd, Judith Copithorne. The younger writers like Daphne Buckle (Marlatt), Bobby Hogg, Dave Cull, Dan McLeod, Pete Auxier. Later on Stan Persky and George Stanley, San Francisco expatriates. Every week Frank Davey would go home to Chilliwack and get a few gallons of home brew saki that he would sell us green for \$2.50 a gallon. As Warren could afford it he would have a case of Black Label beer around. And then they opened the Faculty club at the university and Warren could run a tab. That then, sadly, the booze, took over.

But he was the first teacher to give me an A in English and one of the few people who

would really listen to what I had to say and write. And his care, attention, and intensity always felt more like music than literature. In fact, I don't think I dropped music because of Warren Tallman. He just helped me play it in a different way.

Michael Cook, 1932-1994

Malcolm Page

Michael Cook, who arrived in Newfoundland from Britain at the end of 1965, and who soon after found work at Memorial University, had a curiously shaped career as a dramatist. Between 1971 and 1978 four full-length and six one-act plays were staged. Though he continued to write for the theatre, no more were performed. He persevered, and records that he had trained himself to sit at his typewriter for six hours a day. Unfortunately, he faced a string of disappointments - *The Great Harvest Excursion* was twice nearly produced, at Stratford Festival and later at the Citadel, Edmonton. Cook advanced quickly to national fame in the 70's, then descended equally abruptly to near-obscurity.

I first met Michael when he read at Simon Fraser University during the winter in the 70's when he stayed with George Ryga at Summerland. Allotted fifty minutes for his reading, I tried to interject when time was up. "Nonsense, I'm just getting going," he replied, and continued for another hour, astonishingly, almost all his student audience stayed. He was a great reader, master of many accents, appearing from time to time on stage and radio.

I recall a convivial meal at his Stratford home in the mid-80's (ironically, his passionate love affair with Newfoundland cooled after some 15 years, and he came to prefer southern Ontario); his wife, Madonna, provided lots of crackers, cheese and pate, with white wine, mixed half

home-brew and half cheap Ontario wine. He described to me the factual basis of an incident mentioned in *Jacob's Wake*; in a turn-of-the-century outport, a pregnant single woman was turned out into the February cold by the two brothers she lived with. Her body was found when the thaw came. I said, "You sound as though you approve," and Michael answered: "They knew absolutely what they believed in in those days."

Though Cook began with the Beckettian absurd of *Tiln*, and had a vein of black comedy (best seen in the unpublished, unperformed *The End of the Road* and *The Apocalypse Sonata*), his finest work is about Newfoundland, past and present. He shows the people of the outports, their language, their way of life, in *Quiller*, *Therese's Creed* and *The Head, Guts and Sound Bone Dance*; *Jacob's Wake* depicts change from the great days of sealing to a decadent present.

Cook was also the outstanding radio dramatist of his generation. John Juliani had a fine record from 1982 on of commissioning work. Juliani praises especially *The Ocean Ranger* (1985) in the Disasters series, *The Decline and Fall of the Second Roman Empire* (1989), and pieces which extended Cook's Range, about James Joyce, Pablo Picasso and the American composer, Charles Ives. "He would write in a passion," says Juliani, "often delivering before deadlines." Cook wrote over fifty radio plays and remarked to me that they were made up of "potboilers, mediocre plays and excellent plays"—but he wasn't going to tell me which were which. *Apostles for the Burning* (1973) and the three-hour *This Damned Inheritance* (1984), his final view of the wonder and the horror of Newfoundland, should certainly be in print. Some of his fluent, rich prose in essays and reviews, seen only by readers of the St. John's Evening Telegram, also merit publication.

Cook can be traced in the Special Collections at the University of Calgary—

unpublished texts, almost illegible handwritten manuscripts, programmes, correspondence with an archbishop about a return to the Church, and notices of unpaid fines from Stratford Public Library.

Cook's dramaturgy was derived from such sources as Shaw, Brecht, and Irish peasant comedy. But his bleak world-view was shaped by a Catholic background, Irish ancestry and by experiences in the Korean War (as the unpublished autobiographical novel at Calgary reveals).

Though Cook's old men, more defiant than despairing, have a universality, his outstanding value is his painting of what is special about Newfoundland, from the rite-of-passage seal-hunt to a climate "which would kill you if it could." A dreary, treeless place of fogs and icebergs appealed to his sensibility; he perhaps preferred his home in barren Fogo Island to sheltered Random Island. An already pessimistic outlook was strengthened by the Newfoundland to which he came in the mid-60's—the outports disrupted, sealing and then fishing declining. He celebrated the survival of a poetic, almost Elizabethan, language, often citing the fisherman who remarked to him of a dead tree, "I remember her when she lifted her skirts to the wind." The Lieutenant in *Colour the Flesh the Colour of Dust* speaks of the struggle for survival as Cook saw it, a battle which made it stimulating, genuine, unique in the enfeebled late 20th century: "We are stranded on some island at the edge of time. There's the sea. And the fog. And occasional sunshine. But nothing grows without the consent of nature. We're captive in a peculiar zoo."

Now he is gone. Surely soon the Canadian theatre will re-discover these powerful, unsettling dramas, and give him the recognition he deserves.

On the Verge

Mitchell Sharp. *Which Reminds Me...* UT, n.p. With the re-entry into power of the Liberals under Jean Chrétien, Mitchell Sharp as the Prime Minister's adviser is probably our senior active politician. His experience—many years as civil servant followed by many years as an active politician—has meant an unusually long and varied immersion in Canadian public life, and now he has written, in *Which Reminds Me...*, his story of those years. And I mean *his* story, for unlike such flamboyant figures as Pierre Trudeau he has not called in a team of political journalists to do the work for him but has written it himself. And a graceful, modest book it is, with a dry eloquence and filled with the ironic humour of a man who may have taken his tasks seriously but never had too great an idea of himself. Occasionally a politician surprises one by looking like a decent being; Sharp has been one of these exceptions. How can one feel other than warmly towards a man who counts having played Mozart with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra as a higher point in his life than any ministerial appointment? G.W.

Mary Weekes. *The Last Buffalo Hunter.* Fifth House, \$12.95. **Bill Waiser.** *The New North West.* Fifth House, \$14.95. **Ralph Maude.** *The Porcupine Hunter and Other Stories: The Original Tsimshian Texts of Henry Tate.* Talonbooks, \$16.95. **David**

Thompson. *Columbia Journals.* Edited by Barbara Belyea. McGill-Queens, \$49.95. This is a batch of revivals and small discoveries that will be interesting to the historically inclined. *The Last Buffalo Hunter* is a book that should have been a minor classic but slipped into oblivion after it was first published in 1939. In 1931 Mary Weekes encountered the Métis hunter and trader Norbert Welsh, then blind and 87 years old. Patiently she took down his recollections, and now they are republished and should take their place in the history of the Prairies as a direct account of the Old West, and an interesting one, since Welsh disagreed with Dumont and Riel and did not join the Métis rebellions. The book carried a wonderful flavour of the free Prairie life in the years before 1885.

The surveyor **Frank Crean** is the central figure of *The New Northwest*. He undertook a series of expeditions in the country north of the North Saskatchewan River in 1908-9, and brought back optimistic reports of its potential fertility which later experience has not entirely confirmed. Crean's reports were published at the time, but now Bill Waiser has salvaged and put together many of the photographs which Crean took as he made his way across the northern stretches of the Prairie Provinces, which the great immigration wave of the 1900s had not reached. They are images of hard travel, of people in transition, like the Indians and the Métis, and somehow they reflect the pre-Great War optimism that took so many men like my own father—and not a few

women—seeking a future in what Crean called, in the title to his own report, *The New Northwest*.

A few years ago **Ralph Maud**, who is also an expert on Welsh poetry in English, put together a fine four-volume collection—*The Salish People*—of the writings of that extraordinary self-taught ethnologist Charles Hill-Tout. Now he is again calling on the resources of the unacademically trained by producing, under the title of *The Porcupine Hunter and Other Stories*, a series of texts by the Tsimshian Henry Tate who worked as informant for Franz Boas; they are “newly transcribed from the original manuscripts.” It is obvious that Tate was influenced by and partly dependent on Boas, with his voracity for material, but there is equally obviously enough of the pristine and authentic to make this a valuable compilation of Coast Indian legends.

There are two sharply different aspects to the writing of the fur trader and explorer William Thompson. One, a dry day-to-day, step-by-step diary of travels, forms the substance of **Barbara Belyea**'s *Columbia Journals*, and those who have come to Thompson through Tyrell's or Glover's or Hopwood's editions of *Narrative of Explorations in North America* will be disappointed by the lack of the narrative flow and descriptive eloquence that made Victor Hopwood write with such justified enthusiasm on Thompson's literary virtues. The *Journals* may have been the raw material of literature, but they are so laconic in their recording of daily events and their deliberate ignoring of the grandeurs of the country that only a historian is likely to find them eloquent or even interesting reading.

G.W.

Books Received

Anthologies

- Auerback, Nina et al, eds. *Forbidden Journeys: Fairy Tales and Fantasies by Victorian Women*. Chicago UP, \$11.95.
- Bayard, Caroline et al, *Exil et Fiction*. Humanitas, np.
- Begamudré, Ven, ed. *Lodestone: Stories by Regina Writers*. Fifth House, \$12.95.
- Cohen, Matt, ed. *Parallel Voices*. Quarry, n.p.
- Crosbie, Lynn, ed. *The Girl Wants To: Women's Representations of Sex and the Body*. Coach House, \$19.95.
- Dodge, William, ed. *Boundaries of Identity: A Quebec Reader*. Lester, \$18.95.
- Dunsford, Cathie, ed. *Subversive Acts: New Writing by New Zealand Women*. Penguin, \$24.95.
- Greenblatt, Stephen et al., eds. *Redrawing the Boundaries*. MLA, \$45.00.
- Lafontant, Jean, ed. *L'Etat et les Minorities*. UP Saint-Bonafice, \$34.95.
- Lee, Allyson C and Makeda Silvera, eds. *Pearls of Passion*. Sister Vision, \$14.95.
- Metcalfe, John, ed. *The New Story Writers*. Quarry, \$18.95.
- Neilsen, Philip, ed. *The Sting in the Wattle: Australian Satirical Verse*. UQP/Penguin, \$16.95.
- Stanford, Judith A. *Connections: A Multicultural Reader for Writers*. M & S, \$30.95.
- Suthren, Victor, ed. *Canadian Stories of the Sea*. Oxford, \$17.95.
- Tefs, Wayne, ed. *Hearts Wild: An Anthology of Stories*. Turnstone, \$14.95.

The Arts

- Blackbridge, Persimmon & Sheila Gilhooly. *Still Sane*. (Photo. Kiku Hawkes.) Press Gang, \$12.95.
- Gaechtgens, Thomas W & Heinz Ickstadt, eds. *American Icons, Transatlantic Perspectives on Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century American Art*. Getty Centre for the History of Art, n.p.
- Murray, Joan. *Northern Lights: Masterpieces of Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven*. Keyporter, \$50.00.

Children's Literature

- Alexander, Wilma. *And the Boats Go Up and Down*. General, \$5.95.
- Alice, Mary & John Downie. *Honor Bound*. (Illus. Wesley W. Bates) Quarry, \$9.95.
- Ammann, René. *Des Castors gros comme des Bisons*. Editions du Blé, \$9.95.
- Anfousse, Ginette. *Le père Noël. la courte échelle*, \$4.95.
- Austen, Jane. *The Beautiful Cassandra*, ed. Juliet McMaster. Sono Nis, \$9.95.
- Beeler, Cecil Freeman. *Girl In the Well*. Red Deer/Raincoast, \$8.95.
- Brooks, Martha. *Two Moons in August*. Groundwood, \$14.95.
- Brouillet, Chrystine. *Les chevaux enchantés. la courte échelle*, \$7.95.
- Choyce, Lesley. *Wrong Time, Wrong Place*. Formac, \$16.95/8.95.
- Cote, Denis. *Aux portes de l'horreur. la courte échelle*, \$7.95.

- Crook, Connie Brummel. *Flight*. Stoddart, \$9.95.
- Croteau, Marie-Danielle. *Le chat de mes rêves*. la courte échelle, \$7.95.
- Croteau, Marie-Danielle. *Un monde à la dérive*. la courte échelle, \$7.95.
- Dale, Mitzi. *On My Own*. Groundwood, \$7.95.
- Desrosiers, Sylvie. *Faut-il croire à la magie?* la courte échelle, \$7.95.
- Dufresne, Marie-Andrée. *Le secret de la bouline*. Editions Hurtubise, n.p.
- Eirik, Sten. *Géline of Acadie*. Nimbus, n.p.
- Ellis, Sarah. *Pick-Up Sticks*. Groundwood, \$14.95.
- Erbach, Janice. *Wanderer's First Summer*. Polestar, \$9.95.
- Eyvindson, Peter. *Backward Brothers See the Light*. (Illus. Craig Terlson.) Red Deer College P, \$9.95.
- Gauthier, Bertrand. *Zunik dans le rendez-vous*. (Illus. Daniel Sylvestre.) la courte échelle, \$4.95.
- Gauthier, Gilles. *Edgar le voyant*. la courte échelle, \$7.95.
- Green, John. *The House That Max Built*. General, n.p.
- Groteau, Marie-Danielle. *Un vent de liberté*. la courte échelle, \$7.95.
- Haffner, Margaret. *Mary's Tree*. (Illus. Marion Taylor.) Black Moss, \$4.95.
- Hébert, Marie-Francine. *Un crocodile dans la baignoire*. la courte échelle, \$7.95.
- Hébert, Marie-Francine. *Venir au monde*. (Illus. Darcia Labrosse.) la courte échelle, \$4.95.
- Hébert, Marie-Francine. *Vive mon corps!* (Illus. Darcia Labrosse.) la courte échelle, \$4.95.
- Horveno, Gregoire & Marie Page. *La peur bleue*. Editions Hurtubise, n.p.
- Hutchinson, Charlotte. *My Mom's Purse*. (Illus. Kathy R. Kaulbach.) Black Moss, \$4.95.
- Jam, Teddy. *Doctor Kiss Says Yes*. (Illus. Joanne Fitzgerald.) Groundwood, \$13.95.
- Kasper, Vancy. *Escape to Freedom*. Stoddart, \$9.95.
- Leblanc, Louise. *Le tombeau mystérieux*. la courte échelle, \$7.95.
- Leblanc, Louise. *Sophie part en voyage*. la courte échelle, \$7.95.
- Macdonald, Thomas A. *The Time of the Wolf*. Maxwell MacMillan, \$9.95.
- Martchenko, Michael & Andrea W-Von Konigslow. *Les Grenouilles*. la courte échelle, \$4.95.
- Oberman, Sheldon. *This Business with Elijah*. Turnstone, \$14.95.
- Paré, Roger. *Les chiffres*. la courte échelle, \$4.95.
- Paré, Roger. *Un chat*. la courte échelle, \$4.95.
- Paré, Roger. *Un éléphant*. la courte échelle, \$4.95.
- Péan, Stanley. *L'emprise de la nuit*. la courte échelle, \$7.95.
- Peers, Judi. *Home Base*. General, \$5.95.
- Plourde, Josée. *A Forest of Suspicion*. Quintin, n.p.
- Plourde, Josée. *Penelope's Eyes*. Quintin, n.p.
- Poupart, Jean-Marie. *Des crayons qui trichent*. la courte échelle, \$7.95.
- Sarfati, Sonia. *Chalet, secret et gros billets*. la courte échelle, \$7.95.
- Sarfati, Sonia. *Crayons, chaussons et grands espions*. la courte échelle, \$7.95.
- Skogan, Joan. *Grey Cat At Sea*. (Illus. Claudia Stewart.) Polestar/Raincoast, \$14.95.
- Seeley, Patricia. *L'Ouragan*. (Illus. Micheal Martchenko) la courte échelle, \$4.95.
- Sikundar, Sylvia. *Circling Vultures*. Quintin, \$5.95.
- Smyth, Donna. *Loyalist Runaway*. Formac, \$16.95/8.95.
- Stephenson, Anne. *Paper Treasure*. General, \$5.95.
- Vidal, Nicole & Benoit LeBlanc. *Compte à rebours*. Hurtubise, n.p.
- Wilson, Budge. *Lorinda's Diary*. General, \$5.95.
- Wilson, Eric. *The St. Andrews Werewolf: A Liz Austen Mystery*. HarperCollins, \$14.95.
- Woodbury, Mary. *The Invisible Polly McDoodle*. Coteau, \$4.95.
- Yashinsky, Dan. *Next Teller: A Book of Canadian Storytelling*. Ragweed, \$12.95.

Criticism

- Bharucha, Rustom. *Theatre and the World: Performance and the Politics of Culture*. Routledge, \$22.50.
- Caponi, Gena Dagel, ed. *Conversation With Paul Bowles*. UP Mississippi, US\$15.95.
- Coleman, Patrick. *The Limits of Sympathy: Gabrielle Roy's The Tin Flute*. ECW, \$14.95.
- Cox, Jeffrey N and Larry J Renolds, eds. *New Historical Literary Study: Essays on Reproducing Texts, Representing History*. Princeton UP, US \$45/\$14.95.
- Dahlie, Hallvard. *Isolation and Commitment: Frederick Philip Grove's Settlers of the Marsh*. ECW, \$14.95.
- Demers, Patricia. *A Seasonal Romance: Louis Hémon's Maria Chapdelaine*. ECW, \$14.95.
- Duffy, Dennis. *A Tale of Sad Reality: John Richardson's Wacousta*. ECW, \$14.95.
- Gane, Mike. *Baudrillard: Critical and Fatal Theory*. Routledge, \$18.95.
- Glaser, Marlies and Marion Pausch. *Carribean Writer: Between Orality and Writing*. Rodopi, US\$46.50.
- Guerin, Wilfred L. et al, eds. *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature, 3rd Ed*. Oxford UP, US \$24.95.
- Harrison, Dick. *Intimations of Mortality: W.O. Mitchell's Who Has Seen the Wind*. ECW, \$14.95.
- Hart, Lynda. *Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark of Aggression*. Princeton U, US \$35.00/14.95.
- Hoffmann Leonore and Margo Culley, eds. *Women's Personal Narratives: Essays in Criticism and Pedagogy*. MLA, US \$37.50/19.75.
- Kanaganayakam, Chelva. *Structures of Negation: The Writings of Zulfikar Ghose*. UTP, \$50.00.
- Keith, W.J. *Life Struggle: Hugh MacLennan's The Watch That Ends the Night*. ECW, \$14.95.
- Kincaid, James R. *Annoying the Victorians*. Routledge, US\$16.95.
- Kramer, Jürgen. *Cultural and Intercultural Studies*. Peter Lang, n.p.
- Lecker, Robert et al. *Canadian Writers and Their Works: Poetry Series, Volume One*. ECW, n.p.
- Lecker, Robert et al. *Canadian Writers and Their Works: Poetry Series, Volume Two*. ECW, n.p.
- MacKendrick, Louis K. *Some Other Reality: Alice Munro's Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You*. ECW, \$14.95.
- Mallgrave, Henry Francis & Eleftherios Mallgrave. *Empathy, Form and Space, Problems in German Aesthetics 1973-1893*. U Chicago P, n.p.
- Metcalf, John & J.R. (Tim) Struthers, eds. *How Stories Mean*. Porcupine's Quill, \$18.95.
- Orange, John. *Orpheus in Winter: Morley Callaghan's The Loved and the Lost*. ECW, \$14.95.
- Perloff, Marjorie & Charles Junkerman, eds. *John Cage:*

Composed in America. U Chicago P, US \$45.00/16.95.
Potvin, C and J Williamson. *Women's Writing and the Literary Institution*. Research Institute for Comparative Literature, n.p.

Pyrrhonen, Heta. *Murder from an Academic Angle: An Introduction to the Study of the Detective Narrative*. Camden House, n.p.

Richman, Paula, ed. *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*. U California P, US \$40.00/\$14.95.

Shawcross, John T. *Intentionality & the New Traditionalism: Some Liminal Means to Literary Revisionism*. Penn State P, US \$33.50.

Slade, Mark. *Lakshana: Autopsy of a Century*. Cross Cultural Publications Inc., \$39.95.

Sternberg, Meir. *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction*. Indiana UP, US \$35.00/14.95.

Stovel, Nora. *Stacey's Choice: Margaret Laurence's The Fire-Dwellers*. ECW, \$14.95.

Stull, James N. *Literary Selves: Autobiography and Contemporary American Nonfiction*. Greenwood, US \$49.95.

Warwick, Susan J. *River of Now and Then: Margaret Laurence's The Diviners*. ECW, \$14.95.

Waterston, Elizabeth. *Kindling Spirit: Lucy Maud Montgomery's Anne of Green Gables*. ECW, \$14.95.

Woodcock, George. *Moral Predicament: Morley Callaghan's More Joy in Heaven*. ECW, \$14.95.

Yeatman, Anna. *Postmodern Revisionings of the Political*. Routledge, \$15.95.

Cultural Commentary

Burn, Ian. *Dialogue: Writings in Art History*. Allen & Unwin, US\$19.95.

Czernis, Loretta. *Weaving a Canadian Allegory*. WLU, n.p.

Drama

Garebian, Keith. *George Bernard Shaw & Christopher Newton: Exporation of Shavian Theatre*. Mosaic, n.p.

Education

Graff, Gerald. *Beyond The Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education*. Norton, \$9.95.

Myrsiades, Kostas and Linda, eds. *Margins In The Classroom: Teaching Literature*. Minnesota UP, \$17.95.

Fiction

Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. Anchor, US\$4.95.

Ashokamitran. *Water*. Heinemann, \$9.95.

Bandelet-Thomas, Biyi. *The Man Who Came in From the Back of Beyond*. Heinemann, \$5.99.

Bedi, Susham. *The Fire Sacrifice*. Heinemann, \$9.95.

Bissonnette, Jacques. *Sanguine*. VLB Editeur, \$14.95.

Botha, W.P.B. *The Reluctant Playwright*. Heinemann, \$5.99.

Carpentier, Andre. *Bread of the Birds*. (Trans. Michael Bullock.) Ekstasis, n.p.

Costain, Thomas B. *High Towers*. Harper Collins, \$14.95.

Craig, Christine. *Mint Tea*. Heinemann, \$5.99.

Fatima, Altat. *The One Who Did Not Ask*. Heinemann, \$10.95.

Fontana, James. *No Cause of Death*. Mercury, \$15.95.

Forrester, Helen. *The Liverpool Basque*. Harper Collins, n.p.

Giangrande, Carole. *Missing Persons: Short Stories*.

Cormorant Books, \$12.95.

Graham, Candis. *Imperfect Moments*. Polestar, \$14.95.

Harris, Wilson. *Resurrection at Sorrow Hill*. Faber & Faber, \$14.99.

Hartog, Diana. *Polite to Bees*. Coach House, \$12.95.

Hood, Hugh. *Around the Mountain: The Collected Stories IV*. The Porcupine's Quill, \$12.95.

Karodia, Farida. *Coming Home*. Heinemann, n.p.

Konrad, Anne. *Family Games*. Netherlandic, n.p.

La France, Micheline. *Le Visage D'Antoine Rivière*. L'Hexagone, \$18.95.

Levine, Norman. *From a Seaside Town*. Porcupine's Quill, \$12.95.

Maguire, Dianne. *Dry Land Tourist, and Other Stories*. Sister Vision, n.p.

Metcalf, John. *Shooting the Stars*. Porcupine's Quill, \$14.95.

Moore, Charles W. et al. *The Poetics of Gardens*. MIT P, \$17.50.

Nickson, Elizabeth. *Monkey Puzzle Tree, The*. Knopf, \$27.00.

Norcliffe, James. *The Chinese Interpreter*. Hagard P, n.p.

Osman, Shaikat. *Janani*. Heinemann, \$9.95.

Pillai, Sivasankara. *Scavenger's Son*. Heinemann, \$9.95.

Poulson, David. *Don't Fence Me In*. Raincoast, \$12.95.

Powell, Patricia. *Me Dying Trial*. Heinemann, UK£5.99.

Proulx, E. Annie. *The Shipping News*. MacMillan, \$25.50.

Roberts, Anita. *The Last Chance Café: And Other Stories*. Polestar, \$14.95.

Roberts, Michèle. *Daughters of the House*. Virago, \$12.00.

Roberts, Paul William. *The Palace of Fears*. Random House, \$27.00.

Roscoe, Patrick. *Love Is Starving for Itself*. Mercury, \$16.50.

Ross, Oakland. *Guerrilla Beach*. Cormorant, \$14.95.

Scheier, Libby. *Saints and Runners*. Mercury, \$14.95.

Spruce, Vanessa. *The Roads Are Down*. Heinemann, \$4.99.

Stead, C.K. *The Singing Whakapapa*. Penguin, NZ\$24.95.

Tagore, Rabindranath. *Quartet*. Heinemann, \$9.95.

Tefs, Wayne. *Dickie*. Anansi, \$14.95.

Tuma, Hama. *The Case of the Socialist Witchdoctor*. Heinemann, \$5.99.

General

Berton, Pierre. *Pierre Berton's Picture Book of Niagara Falls*. M&S, \$34.99.

Clayoquot & Dissent. Ronsdale P, \$9.95.

Garebian, Keith. *The Making of Gypsy*. ECW, \$14.95.

Donne, John. *Pseudo-Martyr*, ed. Anthony Raspa.

McGill-Queen's UP, \$65.00.

Melançon, Joseph, et al. *La Littérature au Cégep (1968-1978): Le Statut de la Littérature dans l'enseignement Collégial*. Nuit Blanche, \$29.95.

Pierre, José, ed. *Investigating Sex: Surrealist Discussions, 1928-1932*. (Trans. Malcolm Imrie.) Routledge, \$31.50.

Terras, Victor. *A History of Russian Literature*. Yale UP, \$45.00.

Geography

Kalman, Harold et al, eds. *Exploring Vancouver: The Essential Architectural Guide*. UBC P, \$19.95.

History

- Arbour, Pierre. *Québec Inc. and the Temptation of State Capitalism*. Robert Davies Publishing, \$18.99.
- Bannerji, Himani. *The Writing on the Wall: Essays on Culture and Politics*. Tsar, \$14.95.
- Bell, Michael Davitt. *The Problem of American Realism: Studies in the Cultural History of a Literary Idea*. Chicago UP, \$29.95.
- Grant, Don & Graham Seal, eds. *Australia in the World: Perceptions and Possibilities*. Black Swan, n.p.
- Israel, Milton. *Communication and Power*. Cambridge UP, n.p.
- Lahaise, Robert. *La fin d'un Québec traditionnel, 1914-1939*. L'Hexagone, n.p.
- Lemco, Jonathon. *Turmoil in the Peaceable Kingdom: The Quebec Sovereignty Movement and Its Implications for Canada and the United States*. UTP, \$17.95.
- Moore, Christopher. *The Loyalists: Revolution, Exile, Settlement*. M & S, \$19.99.
- Rippen, Andrew. *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices, Volume I & II: The Contemporary Period*. Routledge, \$59.95/17.95.
- Rudwick, Martin J.S. *Scenes from the Deep: Early Pictorial Representations of the Prehistoric World*. U Chicago P, \$45.00.
- Sadlier, Rosemary. *Leading The Way: Black Women in Canada*. Umbrella P, \$18.95.
- Saint-Martin, Fernande. *Litterature et le non-verbal, La Typo*, \$12.95.
- Stackhouse, John G., Jr. *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century: An Introduction to Its Character*. UTP, \$55.00/19.95.
- Strohm, Reinhard. *The Rise of European Music: 1380-1500*. Cambridge UP, US \$95.00.
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Last Page

Notes from a reader's journal: is it because of my own interest that I find everyone else these days is writing somehow about the land? It's not just an ecological preoccupation. I am surrounded by atlases, books on gardens, affirmations and deconstructions of nature, in theory, in the lives of pioneers, in myth and economics. They range from biographies—Katie Cochrane's popular, detailed tribute to the Australian poet *Oodgeroo* (UQP, A\$16.95); Patricia Clarke's informative but altogether overly earnest life of the Australian novelist and naturalist Louisa Atkinson, *Pioneer Writer* (Allen & Unwin, A\$29.95, both books hampered by awful paper and awful type—to fiction and commentary. Masani Montague's *Dread Culture: A Rastawoman's Story* (Sister Vision, \$12.95) is a playwright's novel about sexism and youth, most interesting for its analysis of social institutions; Vincent O'Sullivan's *Let the River Stand* (Penguin, NZ\$24.95), the writer's first novel, concerns a hardworking but dull boy, in a farming community—I like O'Sullivan's plays and poetry better. Jennifer Gribble's *Christina Stead* (Oxford, \$22.95) is a useful brief introduction. R.G. Geering and A. Segerberg's *Christina Stead* (UQP, A\$22.95) anthologizes excerpts from the novelist's works (including her letters: at one time when she contemplated writing three related novellas, someone commented that, if she'd been Dante, they'd have been called "Hell, Heller, and Hellest"). In the same series, Alan Lawson edited *Patrick White* (UQP, A\$22.95), in an original selection of stories, poems, theatre pieces, letters and essays, many previously uncollected, which illuminatingly (and correctively) emphasize White's involvement in social causes.

Bill Manhire's *South Pacific* (Carcenet, n.p.) samples this NZ writer's work, including a tour-de-force about poetry readings

at a Malaysian festival, stories on parenting, and comic turns on coming to terms with irony. Manhire's wonderful experimental anthology *100 New Zealand Poems* (Godwit, NZ\$29.95) focuses on texts rather than authors. Two contemporary NZ poets Alan Loney with *The Erasure Tapes* (Auckland UP, NZ\$19.95), "alphabet" + "autobiographical" meditations, and Michele Leggott's *Dia* (Auckland UP, NZ \$19.95), a book of L-A-N-G-U-A-G-E poems [in one instance, two poems, words and X's, "kiss" each other when the pages close]—draw attention to the "site" of power in the formal choices that poems make. Maryanne Dever's *Wallflowers and Witches: Women and Culture in Australia 1910-1945* (UQP, A\$16.95) declares itself to be a "recuperative" book about painters, diarists, political activists, writers, etc. Gina Mercer's *Janet Frame: Subversive Fictions* (UQP, A\$29.95) is to my mind the best book so far on the New Zealand novelist, with a useful preliminary account of the typescripts, an examination of language, and an analysis of the limitations of epistemological binaries.

Rollo Arnold's *New Zealand's Burning* (Victoria UP, NZ\$39.95), on the NZ settlers' world of the 1880s, is a social history with lots of data on the timber trade, town planning, road building, native-bush clearing, and the like, though with relatively little information on how these activities impacted on the way the settlers read and wrote; Colin Bourke's *Aboriginal Australia* (UQP, A\$18.95) is an introductory reader, with data on population, land, language, kinship, and art; Jean Harkins' *Bridging Two Worlds* (UQP, A\$29.95) analyzes the structures, usage, and semantic distinctiveness of Australian Aboriginal English; Sean Kane's *Wisdom of the Mythtellers* (Broadview, \$16.95) absorbingly reflects on the belief systems of myth tellers among Haida, Australian Aborigine, Irish Celtic, and Greek cultures (reference is made to John Sky and Robert Bringhurst, to the Song

Cycle of the Moon Bone, and to traditional maps and boundary concepts); and Robert J. King's *The Secret History of the Convict Colony* (Allen & Unwin, A\$29.95) is an introduction to, and translation of, Alexandro Malaspina's report on British settlement in New South Wales, and its relation to the Nootka Sound crisis of 1790 and to the 18th-century British-Spanish rivalry for power in the Pacific.

Rob Nixon's *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood* (Routledge, n.p.) looks at South African culture between 1948 and 1994, and its relation to the rest of the world (e.g., the film portraits of apartheid). Florence Stratton's *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* (Routledge, n.p.) looks at the works of Ogot, Nwapa, Emecheta, and Bâ, and challenges the "orthodoxies" of the "manichean allegory of gender" in order to encourage the emergence within Africa of "more sexually egalitarian societies." Two recent atlases also deal with Africa: Ievan Ll. Griffiths' *The Atlas of African Affairs*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, n.p.) and A.J. Christopher's *The Atlas of Apartheid* (Routledge, n.p.). Griffiths assembles maps, statistics, and commentary on rainfall, religion, energy, foreign aid, apartheid and its demise, and numerous other subjects, though there is surprisingly little on AIDS in the section on disease. Christopher focuses more on "spatial aspects of government policy," arguing that it is possible to trace the relation between resources, voting patterns, and the construction of segregation. Christopher Moseley and R.E. Asher's *An Atlas of the World's Languages* (Routledge, \$599.95), unhappily, is less informative, for its choice of colour separations and arrangement of data, despite all the work that went into assembling the book, leave its distinctions unclear.

David N. Livingstone's *The Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a Contested Enterprise* (Blackwell, n.p.)

explains the fascinating ground on which such books as atlases and accounts of landscape blend into postcolonial theory (though for a more Foucauldian explanation, readers are advised to turn to Derek Gregory's *Geographical Imaginations* also). Livingstone charts ten chapters, on such subjects as myths and maps, geography in the Enlightenment, pre-Darwinian analysis, disciplinarity, race and Empire, place and particularity, and quantification, showing how each definition of geography foregrounds a different set of premises. David R. Coffin's *The English Garden* (Princeton UP, n.p.) provides one example of such foregrounding, for it emphasizes ways in which gardens were designed for meditative use. John Dixon Hunt's *Gardens and the Picturesque* (MIT, \$19.95), in eleven chronologically arranged essays, relatedly examines the history of landscape architecture, seeking to explain "the writing of a site, the inscription of meaning... onto some segment of terrain." Knowing that meaning is "coded in" to landscape design, Hunt asks how that meaning can subsequently be read back out. Looking at examples from Plato to Gary Larson, Castle Howard and Vauxhall to Gilpin, Ruskin, and Haussmann, he probes such subjects as verbal/visual parallels, allegory, landscape painting, and utopian design.

Two other map books pursue further the connection between representation and power. J.B. Harley's brilliant (but alas, black-and-white only) *Maps and the Columbian Encounter* (U Wisconsin-Milwaukee Library, n.p.) is an "interpretive guide" to a travelling exhibition of map drawings that represent primarily Hispanic (but also English and French) America. Illustrations include diagrams of the Aztec universe, Mixtec manuscript place signs, depictions of Gog & Magog, Adam and Eve, Prester John, and assorted "world maps"—Ramusio, Mercator, Lescarbot—and several examples of the monstrous dis-

tortions of the unknown that so characteristically (as in the illustrations on Münster's 1546 map of the New World) turned "other people" into cannibals. R.L. Gentilcore's contribution to the Historical Atlas of Canada project provides a different division of authority; volume 2 of the 3-volume project, this work—*The Land Transformed 1800-1891* (U Toronto P, \$95)—begins effectively, demonstrating how the work of painters and photographers (Hind, O'Brien, Kane, and the travellers who crossed the country by the CPR) constructed the conventional images of "region" that lasted at least till the Group of Seven, and in many respects still pertain. 57 more plates then follow, with commentary, but while the data is fascinating, the plates (50 of them designed by computer) are so dense with diagrams as to be nearly impossible to decode, let alone enjoy. That said, I found several of the sections especially interesting: those on Loyalist habitation, transatlantic emigration patterns, the effect of the British Navigation Acts and Corn Laws on Canadian trade, the impact of the hessian fly and wheat midge on Upper Canada agriculture, ethnicity and seasonal activity in the Red River settlement, boundary disputes, the war of 1812, the B.C. gold rush and the Native population. There is also data on family fertility, the Governor-Generals' travels, women in the workforce, newspapers and libraries, and D'Arcy McGee's funeral procession. Overall, the mapmakers have striven to emphasize economics and the growth of an urban nationalism, not the persistence of region, yet a concept of "natural region" nevertheless underlies this book, and perhaps underlies the economic paradigms of nation that these cartographers collectively elucidate.

Finally, four books of theory bear on these several issues. Jameela Begum's *Canadian Literature: Perspectives* (Macmillan India, Rs.150) announces openly its interest in fragmentation and marginality, and

observes how the materials collected here portray a culture that derives from "geographical spatiality and disparateness"; yet the editor's introduction appears to want fixed answers nonetheless—by accepting as "truth" the construction of "French-Canada" as a site of victimization, she distorts the complexities of the political culture. Abdul R. JanMohamed and David Lloyd's *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse* (Oxford, \$23.95) perhaps provides a frame of reference for such comments. It collects a series of essays primarily focussing on the American experience of race and power, with some acknowledgment of Arab-Israeli issues, Latin America, India, the Caribbean, "Western Feminism," canonicity, the role of laughter, dialogue-as-conquest, and hegemonic ideology (the watchwords of the early 1990s). The editors make their own position perfectly clear in their introduction: "one cannot overemphasize that Western humanism still considers us barbarians beyond the pale of civilization; we are forever consigned to play the role of the ontological, political, economic, and cultural Other according to the schema of a Manichaean allegory that seems the central trope not only of colonialist discourse but also of Western humanism." Tall words, which seem to assume that race (and perhaps gender) are coherent categories of judgment, and also that that current bugbear "Western Humanism" is a uniform authority. Such categories are, of course, convenient for a Manichaean argument, but they distort experience. I read JanMohamed and Lloyd through different categories still: these authors are American, and they read the subject of "minority discourse" without entirely recognizing the parameters within which they themselves identify their subject. There's no mention of Canada here, or Australia, or New Zealand—they're the places that lie outside the American consciousness, apparently, and appear to be of

no consequence because the structure assumes they they don't need to be thought about. That sounds to me like another version of minority discourse, folks, but it's one that can't be summarily labelled by the American desire for a universal majority/minority binary, tidily parcelled up, and cast aside.

Colonial discourse/postcolonial theory, ed. Francis Barker et al. (Manchester UP, ú45), at least mentions Australia and Canada in an early sentence, even if they do disappear after that, in favour of the U.S.A., Asia, Europe, and Peru. Gayatri Spivak tells us how to read a "culturally different" book, and Anne McClintock discusses the perils of the term "postcolonial." The writers collectively talk about the politics of power, and the book is useful as a sign of what some people are writing these days about nationalism, hybridity, and colonial conditions—but like a lot of other commentaries on power it leaves out (and except by

example leaves unanswered) the important self-reflexive question: who has access to theory? Homi K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, n.p.) in some ways attempts to answer. The book collects some of this cultural analyst's most interesting and perhaps most familiar essays—"Signs taken for wonders," "The postcolonial and the postmodern," and ten others—and they comment repeatedly and constructively on issues of nation, margin, and place and displacement, the boundary between. While it is necessary to "retrieve repressed histories," Bhabha argues, it is fetishistic to reject the heterogeneous present in order to put roots into some romantic version of the past. Recognizing the fissures in society and fiction, moreover, does not constitute a formula for despair; it is, rather, an affirmation and an enactment of the process that leads each of us to find an accommodating place to live. w.n.

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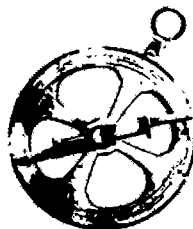
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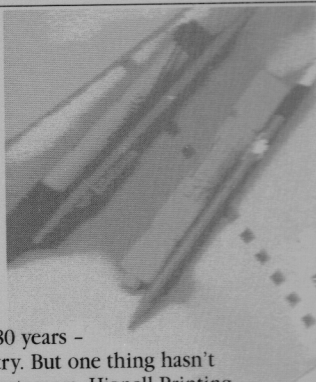
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