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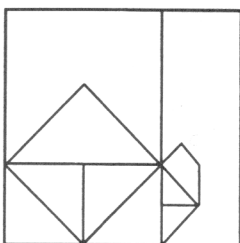
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Imagining Quebec

Quebec and Canada. Quebec in Canada. Quebec out of Canada. Since the late eighteenth century, this issue of Quebec and Canada has been at the heart of Canada's national self-construction. Writers and literary critics, with their need for symbolic representation, have persistently worked at finding a metaphor that can adequately represent the relationship between Quebec and the rest of Canada. In 1945, Hugh MacLennan borrowed "two solitudes" from Rainer Maria Rilke (who was using it to describe two lovers) and this metaphor certainly has currency in English Canada (a photocopy with the full quotation appeared on a bulletin board near my office just before the recent referendum). As early as 1876, Pierre-Joseph-Olivier Chauveau had suggested the famous "double spiral" staircase at the Château de Chambord, which two people can climb while catching only glimpses of each other, and without meeting at all. Phillip Stratford's 1979 image is more uncompromising: parallel lines that never meet. E.D. Blodgett suggests a "gitter," German for a "lattice-work fence, a grid of interwoven strands whose common threads relate and distinguish, but do not unify" (33). Patricia Smart borrows an image from a text by Nicole Brossard, of two women back to back: "Brossard's image is one of touching but not of fusion, of separate identities respected and shared as both partners look not at each other, but—supporting each other—out to the world. Transposed, it becomes an image of two nations and two projects, an adjacent but not common space, a border shared in which both cultures find strength in difference." In 1969, D.G. Jones chose *Ellipse* for the

title of a journal devoted to the translation of poetry from one official language to the other, because the outline of an ellipse is traced by a point whose distances from two other points always add up to the same sum.¹ What these images figure is equality and difference at the same time, sometimes with the addition of a kind of abstract interdependence. English and French in Canada are “equal partners” in these metaphors.

What this “two nations” theory leaves out is that anglo-Canada has most of the territory, most of the population, and most of the votes in the House of Commons. Despite the very prominent role francophone Canadians have played in Canadian history and do play in Canadian public life, if asked to describe a “typical Canadian” most Canadians, whether francophone or anglophone, would describe a British-descended anglophone. And further, although anglo-Canadian conceptions of Canada may ignore Quebec (along with the First Nations and many ethnic minorities), Quebec is implicitly always there, subsumed under the label Canada.

One thing is certain: these metaphors make clear that Quebec is already a nation, whether it becomes an independent state or not. Although English-Canadians tend to see it as part of the whole, Quebec in these writers’ views is always a separate entity. Where English-Canadians might visualize a hole, Québécois see a whole and always have. Thus if Quebec leaves Canada, what remains will not be a nation because it has never seen itself as one (which is why we are reduced to calling it “the rest of Canada”), and even its statehood will have to be reconstructed. Some serious revisions of the ways in which Canadians and Québécois have constructed their “imagined communities”² will have to take place, whatever happens. And English-Canadians have to do more work than the people of Quebec, who have been imagining Quebec as a nation since the Conquest. So this editorial is an attempt to start imagining.

The “gap” that Quebec’s departure would produce in the national highways, seaways and thoughtways seems, at first glance, unimaginable. It would leave a hole in the middle of not only the national imaginary, but also the national territory. But clearly we can’t ask Quebec to stay in Canada just so the map won’t be messed up. To try to express its over-reliance on territory to represent the nation, Abraham Rotstein once called English-Canadian nationalism ‘mappism’ (qtd. in Crean 11). But let’s look at the hole in the map. It is an imaginary hole; if Quebec separates, those sailing along the St. Lawrence or driving down the 401 are not going to drop off the

edge of the world, after all, or even (if the European experience is anything to go by) stop at a border crossing. Nor is Quebec (if one uses the divorce analogy so popular in the media) going to leave town. The territory of Quebec will be there, filled with people speaking French, no matter what happens. In English Canada one often hears the heartfelt wish that it would be nice to have the debate over with. This isn't going to happen either. The debate will go on, just as the debate with the United States goes on, because we share borders. The issue is, then, whether we want these borders to be the borders of different states or not, and if so, how this impinges on other metaphysical territories.

Canada is unusual in the world for its ability to manage, non-violently for the most part, the conflicts inherent in having two major nations in a single state. (Neither of these two nations has done so well in dealing with the First Nations, one must add.) Given the current spate of vicious wars driven by nationalist rhetoric, Canadians might well see our impasse as an opportunity for producing a model that could resolve our crisis *and* perhaps prove useful elsewhere, if only as inspiration. A shift in Quebec's role in the Canadian federation might be viewed as leading the way in a larger world shift from a time when the nation was the only conceivable player in international relations, to an age where global capital, multinational corporations, international tourism and immigration, and United Nations peace-keeping—not to mention Benetton ads or the Internet—have started to produce a different way of thinking the world.

The movement for an independent Quebec can be seen as a regression to a narrow, ethnicity-based nationalism, a view that Jacques Parizeau certainly lent credence to in his post-referendum speech and which the voting patterns supported (rural francophones were more pro-independence than urban francophones, for example). The rest of Canada suffers from this sort of nationalism too, a fact made clear by the backlash against Sikhs entering Legion Halls wearing turbans and Hong Kong Chinese moving into Vancouver—not to mention the moans of various commentators about the costs of bilingual services. (Compare these, somebody, to the cost of Quebec separating!) English-Canada is usually happy to point a finger at Quebec's lapses, while ignoring its own. If English-Canada feels Quebec should not revert to narrow nationalism, however, then English-Canada must be prepared to forsake such attitudes itself and entertain a Canada which makes allowances for national differences (for Quebec and the First Nations)

within Confederation. A revision of Canadian nationalism must also take into account the growing number of Canadians whose background and appearance doesn't match that of the "typical" white British-descended Canadian: these Canadians are tired of having to make clear that they and their families have often been here as long or longer than those "typical" Canadians, and that yes, indeed, they do speak surprisingly good English (or French). Now is a good time for both francophone and anglophone Canadians, especially the "pure laine" Québécois and their dyed in the wool Anglo-Celtic counterparts, to choose to adjust their nationalism to the specific realities of our current history, rather than trying to impose an Old World model (dated even there) on a New World nation.

What does national independence mean in the late twentieth century? In Montreal last summer, I was startled to see big posters in the Metro assuring riders that if they voted "yes" in the referendum, they could continue to carry Canadian passports and use Canadian money. "Who says?" I thought grumpily to myself. But then I began to wonder about an independence movement that was advocating what looked like dependence. If you're independent, you have your own passport and money, right? But then I thought about Canadian money—whose head is on it? And didn't Canadian passports once say, "A Canadian citizen is a British subject"? In fact, paradoxically, if it had not been for anti-British pressure from Quebec (where any difference between Canadian English-speakers and the British is often elided) we would probably still sing "God Save the Queen" and fly the Red Ensign. Then, of course, I thought about the irony that Europe, once that paradigm of model nations, all with their languages and cultures neatly packaged as distinct, is now struggling to embrace, guess what, a common currency and passport. Not surprisingly, it is the nations that adhere to the old model of an ethnically and linguistically "pure" nation that have the most trouble coping with internal difference. What is Germany going to do with the Turkish guest-workers, whose German-speaking and German-educated children are rather implausibly expected to be prepared to go "home" to Turkey at some unspecified point in the future. And a similar quandary is produced for the French imaginary by Algerian and other Islamic residents. Canada's view of the nation has always had to accommodate huge violations of the convention of "pure" nationhood. It can be argued that the rest of Canada has much more to lose than Quebec if we prove unprepared to accommodate more revisions in this model.

It is not enough to concede that Quebec is a distinct society; Quebec must be given powers that will actually support Quebec's desire to remain distinct, even if these powers are not shared by other provinces, in other words, asymmetrical federalism. Charles Taylor, Professor of Philosophy and Political Science at McGill, writing in 1990 after the failure of the Meech Lake Accord, notes that those who reject asymmetrical federalism are ignoring the fact that Canada is already functioning under this model. Quebec has more control than the other provinces over taxes, retirement benefits, immigration, culture, language policy and many other aspects of its political life. The issue is not whether we can allow such a thing to happen (it already has), but whether we can manage to express this situation in constitutional language that the Canadian federation can agree on. In other words, we have a translation problem.

Taylor argues that the failure of various attempts to amend the Constitution (and the results of the recent referendum also support this point) mean that we cannot go on tinkering, we cannot go on acting as if Quebec must be a province "just like all the others." Quebec has never been that. The insistence on this sort of abstract "equality" usually comes as a last ditch attempt to contain a group that is, in fact, just getting close enough to some real power and privilege to become perceptible to the majority. The offer of equality, then, obscures the difference that has hitherto accounted for a long history of inequality and, in essence, denies both the history and the difference at the same time. What is called for, instead of "offers" that would require Quebec to give up powers it already has, is an effort to imagine a new relationship. As Michael Ignatieff points out in *Blood and Belonging*, those of his generation have "spent their entire adult political life wondering whether the country either can or deserves to survive" (111). If Canada is to survive, both sides, instead of falling back on old metaphors and images, must make a new effort of the imagination, an effort that—if we are lucky and very very clever—will lead to a new political association, a new "imagined community" that really works. M.F.

NOTES

- 1 I would like to thank Louise Ladouceur, who collected the set of images of the two cultures I refer to above. They are from a draft of her doctoral dissertation in Interdisciplinary Studies at UBC, which will examine what happens in and to the translation of Canadian plays from one official language to the other. Her kindness in letting me use this material should not be taken to mean that she agrees with my ideas on Confederation. I would also like to thank Laurie Ricou and Sneja Gunew for reading the editorial and making helpful comments on it.
- 2 Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* 2nd ed. rev. and ext. (London: Verso, 1991) is the source of the phrase "imagined communities."

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Metamorphosis

I am turning
into my final self
spiders of time are spinning
silver into my hair weaving
wrinkles into my skin
the tatting is almost complete
the pressure to preserve
appearances passing

through
Soon I will breathe
with the breeze unresisting
perseverating the past sifting
into the present I will fade
and reappear resilient fragile light
You will see

in me
suspended animation
lost loved ones special places
wrapped in gossamer perception
my memories
yourselves

Debunking a Postmodern Conception of History: A Defence of Humanist Values in the Novels of Joy Kogawa

To be without history is to be unlive d crystal, unused flesh; is to
live the life of the unborn. JOY KOGAWA *Itsuka* 280

Joy Kogawa's two novels, *Obasan* (1981) and *Itsuka* (1992), are the first fictional works to explore the Japanese-Canadian people's experience of internment during World War II and their subsequent struggle for redress (Rose 218; Willis 239). Kogawa's works are worthy of close examination not only because they are the sole fictive narrativizations of important events in Canadian history, but also because they explore the process and reception of history writing.

Current theoretical discussions of the relationship between historiography and fiction are informed by antiessentialist notions about the impossibility of reliable representation. Advancing the poststructuralist belief in the essentially unstable nature of signification, postmodern critics who enjoy popularity at present argue that language cannot reflect empirical reality. History is not, therefore, an accurate record of past events but is, like fiction, a subjective construct.¹

Reflecting a relativistic understanding of history, Naomi Nakane, the narrator of both *Obasan* and *Itsuka*, asserts that the "truth" of the Japanese Canadians' evacuation is "murky, shadowy and grey" (*Obasan* 32), and she assumes that belief-affirming modes of expression are ineffectual: "are you thinking that through . . . speech-making and story-telling . . . we can extricate ourselves from our foolish ways? Is there evidence for optimism?" (*Obasan* 199). This historical scepticism, however, is the very cause of Naomi's social and political paralysis. Because she embraces indeterminacy as a means of dealing with the past, Naomi is removed from any personal

responsibility as a historical agent. As Marshall Berman observes, in a post-modern world people lose both the “desire and [the] power to remember” (qtd. in Carr 58).

I propose to scrutinize the assumptions that underlie historical perspectivism through an analysis of Kogawa’s novels. Through Naomi, Kogawa suggests that the postmodern denial of historical veracity is silencing, debilitating, and, ultimately, “betray[s] the truth in ourselves” (*Itsuka* 246). I intend to show how Kogawa’s novels stand against the widespread critical acceptance of contingency through an implicit “commitment to the theoretically problematic yet ethically indispensable desire to get it right” (Patterson 261).

Naomi’s path to maturity involves a confrontation with her historical background and the recognition that “To be without history is to be un-lived crystal, unused flesh; is to live the life of the unborn” (*Itsuka* 280). Through Naomi’s evolving political consciousness, Kogawa seeks to assert the authority and legitimacy of the Japanese community’s historical perspective in a society whose dominant discourses have traditionally denied it. I feel that it is crucial to defend a humanistic faith in historical writing because, as a Jewish woman, I share with Kogawa a sense of the horror of history. Contemporary critics who assert the relativity of all literary expression and, by extension, all lived experience fail to examine the serious and very *real* implications of such an antiassertionist perspective. If experience cannot be formulated with any authority, and no worldview or theory can legitimately speak as truth, then we cut ourselves off from the concrete, rational knowledge that we require in order to resist repeating the mistakes of the past. Thus, while the postmodern conception of history as subjective construct may be engaging in theory, in practice its consequences can be devastating.

Today, only fifty years after the Holocaust, the revisionist effort in North America has taken on alarming proportions. Over the last decade, two of the most tireless and influential Holocaust deniers have been Canadian: namely, Jim Keegstra and Ernst Zundel. The former a high-school history teacher, the latter a publisher, both profess that the Nazi murder of six million Jews never took place. The Holocaust, according to Keegstra and Zundel, is a myth created by the Jewish people in order to gain political and financial advantage in their effort to take over the world (Bercuson xv-xvi; Weimann 24). If we accept the theoretical position that we cannot claim for ourselves a historical narrative that is absolute *truth*, then we unconsciously

validate such voices of lunacy.² In fact, while Keegstra's and Zundel's statements may seem absurd and thus ineffective, today twenty-two percent of American adults accept that the Holocaust may not have occurred ("Survivors"). If we believe, finally, that all of history is a construct, then we embrace a passivity that renders us helpless against the recurrence of global devastation and monstrous crimes against humanity. "History," in other words, "is never simply 'What Have You,' if only because it has the power to destroy" (Foley 260).

Kogawa's novels have not received a lot of critical attention in academic circles, but they have been extensively reviewed. Reviews of *Obasan* are generous in their praise, expressing approval of Kogawa's impressive "technical skill" and "wholly unique voice" (Thomas 105; Kelman 39). Clearly, reviewers of the text are interested in examining Kogawa's prose in the context of her poetic accomplishments.³ As a result, the "richness of Kogawa's language," "the evocative quality of her imagery" (Bilan 318), and the novel's "sophisticated . . . structure" (Hill 31) are seen as the most salient parts of this first prose effort. Similarly, critics of *Itsuka* show interest in its formal elements, though to a lesser degree, being generally disappointed with the lack of "the kind of poetically charged language and intensity of perception that give *Obasan* its extraordinary beauty and power" (Keefer 35).⁴ While Kogawa's writing skills seem to capture the most attention in reviews, her success in assaulting our "collective amnesia" about Japanese-Canadian history is not overlooked (Thomas 103). Specifically, her ideological agenda is unanimously applauded. Reviewers of *Obasan* and *Itsuka* thank Kogawa for offering us the *real* story of Japanese internment and for reminding us that "It matters to get the facts straight" (*Obasan* 183).

This final attention to, and recognition of, the interpretative authority and moral efficacy of Kogawa's writing indicates that reviewers are not prompted to a postmodern understanding of *Obasan* and *Itsuka*. Similarly, in its focus on Kogawa's success in "re-establishing the facts of history" (Harris, "Broken" 44), early scholarship on her work reveals a commitment to humanist critical concerns. Studies of Kogawa's prose begin from the understanding that "The facts of history need some revision in the light of truth," and they imply a "faith in the liberating power of words" and their ability to convey *actual* human experience (St. Andrews 30; Willis 245). Only by evoking the past through language can Naomi "find the power [to] heal . . . her own fragmented psyche" (Howells 125). The discovery of self,

then, is linked to the discovery, and communication, of a historical reality.

Drawing on Catherine Belsey's discussion of contemporary post-Saussurean criticism, Marilyn Russell Rose defines Kogawa's work as "expressive realist" fiction; in other words, as "literature [that] reflects the reality of experience as it is perceived by one . . . individual, who expresses it in a discourse which enables other individuals to recognize it as true" (225). Similarly, in one of the first published critical studies of *Itsuka*, Mason Harris argues that Kogawa's writing "follows the conventions of mimetic realism, adopting the traditional strategy of penetrating through layers of official mystification to reveal a true history concealed beneath them" ("Kogawa" 33). Scholarship on Kogawa's writing thus suggests that both *Obasan* and *Itsuka* "stand up to critical scrutiny despite their tenacious belief in shared or social reality as something that can be known and must be reacted to" (Rose 225).

While these earlier analyses make some valuable contributions to the study of Kogawa's works, more recent (largely postmodern) critical approaches to her writing do her a grave injustice. Among these, Donald C. Goellnicht's "Minority History as Metafiction" stands out as the most extreme and, I would argue, uncompromising postmodern interpretation of Kogawa's prose. Distinguishing himself from critics who remain "staunchly mimetic and humanistic" in their views of Kogawa's writing, Goellnicht examines *Obasan* "through the powerful . . . lens of recent theories of the postmodern and current poststructuralist" concerns (287, 288). Specifically, he defines Kogawa's text as "what Linda Hutcheon has ingeniously labelled 'historiographic metafiction'" and seeks "to demonstrate that history is relative and that danger lies in believing it to be absolute" (288, 291). According to Goellnicht, Kogawa makes no attempt to convey an authoritative historical reality, being "too aware of the impossibility of such a task" (294). He rather presumptuously concludes, furthermore, that "We as readers share this text's awareness that its truth cannot be absolute" (302).

But this is not the prevalent understanding of the text. It is not mine; nor, in fact, does it seem to be Goellnicht's. Although he insists that the telling of history can never be "unproblematic" and cannot be conveyed through "transparently referential" language (287), Goellnicht—as Arnold Davidson so astutely points out—"proceeds to present quite unproblematically much of the history in question" (19): "Before turning to the theoretical matrices

of my argument, . . . I should summarize some of the recent, and long overdue, historical accounts of the internment, evacuation, and dispersal of Japanese Canadians during and after the Second World War” (Goellnicht 288). Furthermore, Goellnicht informs us that, on the day that the Canadian government agreed to compensate Japanese Canadians for their losses and offered them a formal apology, parts of *Obasan* were read in the House of Commons (306). This occurrence, coupled with the fact that *Naomi no Michi* (1988)—Kogawa’s fusion of *Obasan* and her children’s book, *Naomi’s Road* (1986)—is a school textbook in Japan (Redekop 16), confirms that Kogawa’s words are understood as relevant, accurate, and, finally, as signifiers of truth.

The inconsistencies in the postmodern position on historical writing have inspired my study. While each individual lives, perceives, and describes experiences in his or her own unique and, ultimately, subjective way, we do *not* as a society, or as a world community, function as disengaged, isolated entities. We live in communities, we share knowledge, and, most importantly, we share and *act on* a sense of what is *true*. My study will differ from previous humanist analyses of Kogawa’s work in arguing that Naomi *initially* exemplifies the kind of historical scepticism characteristic of the postmodern “ex-centric.”⁵ However, I will ultimately reject the postmodern position by arguing that antiessentialist implications are evident in Kogawa’s writing only to demonstrate their practical futility. While postmodern thought may bring attention to “the ‘different’ and what has been considered marginal over what is deemed central” (Hutcheon, Introduction 10), the logic that the “margin” needs to call all of history into question in order to validate its own perspective is faulty. Deconstructing the notion of truth in order to validate a marginal point of view serves, in practice, to delegitimize *all* voices. In effect, then, Kogawa’s historical perspective would be as questionable as any other.⁶ Thus, in conceiving truth as an arbitrary construction, “some kinds of postmodern thought,” as Robert Holton argues, “have the effect of de-realizing concrete historical experience quite thoroughly, compounding rather than helping to ease the postcolonial situation” (303).

I will look at how Naomi’s initial distrust of historical truth and her suspicion of language result in a retreat into silence, an uneasiness with community, and a loss of faith in, and indifference to, social change. In other

words, Naomi's historical scepticism is alienating, silencing, and politically crippling. Looking specifically at *Itsuka*, I will then examine Naomi's transition from ambiguity to truth; from a questioning to a confirming of history. Naomi's sense of alienation from both historical legitimacy and historical discourse is countered through connection, political activity, and love. Her ultimate return to voice, to action, to community, and to a shared sense of historical reality is the result of her rejection of ambiguity, radical indeterminacy, and perspectivism. Ultimately, Kogawa suggests that faith, belief, and an embracing of univocality—"We've got to speak with one voice" (*Itsuka* 204, 209)—are necessary parts of "the endeavour to obliterate doubt" and to free "the truth that . . . lies badly mangled" beneath it (*Itsuka* 56).

Historiographic metafiction, according to Linda Hutcheon, is work "obsessed with how we come to know the past today" (*Politics* 47). This form, she argues, is appealing to contemporary Canadian writers because it satisfies both "a post-colonial Canadian need to reclaim the past" and a more general postmodern "need to investigate the ontological nature" of narrative (*Canadian Postmodern* 73). So convinced of its extensive use and vast appeal, Hutcheon has written *exhaustively* on this postmodern literary form. In her decade-long examination of the problematic nature of historical knowledge, Hutcheon repeatedly attempts to convince us that there is "never one truth" ("Pastime" 59), that there is no "real" outside ("Pastime" 68), and that it is with "skepticism" and "suspicion" that we are to perceive the world, not through a naïve "positivist" "faith," or "confidence," in empiricist epistemologies ("Pastime" 55).

Maintaining the poststructuralist conviction that "language . . . constitutes reality rather than merely reflecting it," Hutcheon argues that "the mimetic connection between art and life . . . has changed" (*Canadian Postmodern* 65, 61). The reader, she explains, no longer passively absorbs the text but actively participates in the production of meaning through the metafictional self-consciousness of the authorial voice. Citing Timothy Reiss, Hutcheon argues that this "discursive activity" has long been ignored "in the name of scientific objectivity and universality, or in the name of novelistic realism" (61). Rejecting mimesis as an effective narrative strategy, Hutcheon endorses George Bowering's notion that "realist fiction was intended to produce a window on the world. . . . Post-modern novels, on the other hand, are in a way decorative. If they are windows they are

stained-glass windows" (qtd. in *Canadian Postmodern* 63). Thus, in Hutcheon's model, obfuscation is valued over clarity, and ambiguity over meaning. "[T]here is," according to Hutcheon, "no transparency, only opacity" (*Politics* 47). In this theoretical context, history is no longer a reliable reflection of external reality but a problematized rendering of individual consciousness. Therefore, the function of historiographic metafiction, she argues, is to reveal our inability to both "(unproblematically) *know* . . . [historical] reality" and "to be able to represent it in language" ("Pastime" 68).

In "thematiz[ing] the postmodern concern with the radically indeterminate and unstable nature of textuality and subjectivity," historiographic metafiction challenges what Hutcheon perceives as the totalizing voice of dominant history (*Politics* 48). Specifically, in its self-conscious rejection of univocality, this postmodern literary form serves to dismantle what Helen Tiffin defines as "the European 'master narrative' of history" (173).⁷ The dominant Eurocentric interpretation of Canadian history thus becomes open to interrogation by the "colonial other" or postmodern "ex-centric." In other words, the stories of the marginalized are legitimated through the deconstruction of existing hegemonic discourses. Thus, "story-telling has returned," Hutcheon argues, "but as a problem, not as a given" (*Politics* 51). Building on Hayden White's theory that historical records are subjected to narrative form in order to endow the events of the past with meaning ("Value of Narrativity" 5), Hutcheon maintains that the "teller—of a story or history— . . . constructs . . . facts by giving a particular meaning to events" (58). "Facts," in other words, "are events to which we have given meaning. Different historical perspectives therefore derive different facts from the same events" (57).

Plugging *Obasan* into Hutcheon's theoretical model, Goellnicht asserts that Kogawa "knows that history is not fixed, but discursive, a 'form of saying' founded in language, which is always in a state of flux." "In this self-knowledge," he adds, "Kogawa's fiction—like that of many minority writers—transcends the mimetic approach . . . many critics still search for" (294). In accordance with Hutcheon's notion that the narrator of a historiographic metafiction is not "confident of his/her ability to know the past with any certainty" ("Pastime" 66), Goellnicht argues that Naomi's retreat into silence "is linked to her doubts about the efficacy of [Aunt] Emily's words to present reality or effect change" (294-95). While Naomi is the paradigmatic ex-centric—"self-consciously reinterpret[ing] history from . . .

[a] minority position”—Aunt Emily, he argues, “is not yet the postmodern” (290, 293). In her idealistic “attitude to history as the piecing together of truth out of fragments,” Aunt Emily is naively unaware that “surely her truth remains itself a construct that can only be partial” (293). “That Naomi maintains the self-consciousness to recognize the uncertainties in epistemology is,” according to Goellnicht, “her abiding strength” (294). Therefore, against Aunt Emily’s active search for truth and tireless efforts to effect social change, Goellnicht posits the despondent and passive Naomi as the real spirit behind her community’s sociopolitical cause.

There is little evidence to support Goellnicht’s claim that Kogawa sets Aunt Emily up as an “inferior” historian to Naomi.⁸ Rather, through these seemingly opposed characters, Kogawa explores two possible approaches to historical narration. In so doing, she underscores the paradox implicit in the postmodern position that all language is value-ridden and that all value, in turn, is contingent. Specifically, if to articulate a perspective means only to “produce another fiction” (Goellnicht 291), then on what basis is one motivated to speak at all? Goellnicht attempts to resolve this “apparent catch-22” by arguing that

Naomi unravels the paradox by realizing . . . not only that to remain silent means the loss of any opportunity to shape personal and public history, but also that in shaping history through discourse or narrative one must be self-conscious, aware of the manipulative power of the word so as not to claim absolute truth for one’s vision. (299)

In other words, Goellnicht concludes that we are able “to shape personal and public history” not through an emphatic claim to a single shared reality but through an individualized “acknowledgement of limitation” (Hutcheon, *Politics* 58). His argument leaves unanswered the question of what specifically kindles Naomi’s thoughts, inspiring her to speech and action. What impels Naomi to operate morally and responsibly—in short, for the good of the whole—if there is no real or shared truth to pursue? In his subjection of Kogawa’s writing to a fixed theoretical formula, Goellnicht ignores that Naomi derives the strength and inspiration to speak by sharing in Aunt Emily’s social reality. Naomi indicates that Aunt Emily’s “papers are wind and fuel nudging my morning thoughts to flame” (*Obasan* 32), and that her “yearly stories are pebbles skipping over my quiet sea. Each one of her stones helps to build the ground on which I seek to stand” (*Itsuka* 66). Clearly, through sharing in Aunt Emily’s and, by extension, the communi-

ty's sense of what is true, Naomi abandons indeterminacy and passivity and allows "the rage within [to] begin . . . its slow emergence" (*Itsuka* 71).

Naomi's narratives in both *Obasan* and *Itsuka* can be defined as retrospectives. Spanning about a month and a half of current time, and thirty years of the past, *Obasan* documents Naomi's experiences as a child exposed to social discrimination and racist politics. Beginning where *Obasan* ends, *Itsuka* opens with the middle-aged Naomi reflecting on her toiling in the beet fields of Alberta during childhood and early adolescence. Thus, "*Itsuka* . . . covers," as Kathryn Barnwell notes, "some of the same stories we read about in *Obasan*" (39). In *Itsuka*, however, the death of Obasan impels Naomi to make a change, and she leaves Granton to join Aunt Emily in Toronto. With this relocation, Naomi's narrative becomes less focused on inward and past experiences and assumes an outward and forward-looking emphasis. Thus, "While *Obasan* is intimate and personal, *Itsuka* moves into the public and political" (Barnwell 39). Naomi's introverted and introspective narrative in *Obasan* reveals her suspicions of Aunt Emily's discourse and actions. *Itsuka*, on the other hand, traces the development of Naomi's political consciousness, following the story of her growing involvement in the pursuit of historical truth and her investment in the dream that "*itsuka*"—someday—"the time for laughter will come" (*Obasan* 178; *Itsuka* 288).

In *Obasan*, Naomi's rejection of Aunt Emily's values suggests a commitment to the historical relativism characteristic of the postmodern perspective. "All our ordinary stories," Naomi asserts, "are changed in time, altered as much by the present as the present is shaped by the past" (25). It is the fallibility of memory, then, that renders the past, and Aunt Emily's truth, questionable. Even "Aunt Emily's Christmas," Naomi maintains, "is not the Christmas I remember" (79). Thus, it is not possible, according to Naomi, to know history with any certainty, because past experiences are lost or distorted with time. For Naomi, then, history is a chaos of disjointed and discrepant events from which only "[f]ragments of fragments" and "[s]egments of stories" are retrievable (53). The past is not a continuous sequence of events that form a coherent whole but a mystery filled with "many unknowns and forbidden rooms" (*Itsuka* 119).

Because the relationship between lived and reexplored experience seems tenuous, Naomi loses faith in the objectivity of historical representation and

in the notion of historical truth. As a result, Aunt Emily's encouragement to "Write the vision and make it plain" meets only scepticism and defiance from Naomi:

Write the vision and make it plain? For her, the vision is the truth as she lives it. When she is called like Habakkuk to the witness stand, her testimony is to the light that shines in the lives of the Nisei,⁹ in their desperation to prove themselves Canadian, in their tough and gentle spirit. The truth for me is more murky, shadowy and grey. (*Obasan* 32)

For Naomi, authorized truth is an archaic fiction. Reality, she believes, is ideologically and discursively constructed. The government's published "Facts about evacuees in Alberta," for example, is accompanied by "a photograph of one family, all smiles, standing around a pile of beets. The caption reads: 'Grinning and happy'" (193). According to Naomi, however, "That is one telling. It's not how it was" (197).

Rejecting the ability of words to reflect empirical reality accurately, Naomi disputes the efficacy of Aunt Emily's discourse:

All of Aunt Emily's words, all her papers, the telegrams and petitions, are like scratchings in the barnyard, the evidence of much activity, scaly claws hard at work. But what good they do, I do not know—those little black typewritten words—rain words, cloud droppings. . . . The words are not made flesh. (189)

In questioning Aunt Emily's language and resisting her "vision," Naomi removes herself from responsible historical agency and relegates herself to an ahistorical subject position. With no past to believe in, or from which to define herself, she becomes a silent and cynical bystander; a passive observer who is "no crusader," "doubt[s] almost everything," and is "not a true believer of anything much" (*Itsuka* 109, 31, 163).

It is clear, therefore, that Naomi's narrative reflects the exaggerated emphasis on subjectivity and the heightened sense of separateness articulated in postmodern conceptions of history. However, while Kogawa explores historical perspectivism through Naomi's sense of indeterminacy, she also exposes the implications that underlie this outlook. Naomi's conception of history as unknowable in any accurate or verifiable way results in a radical individualism that serves to alienate her further from her community.

Initially, it is the official dispersal policy that severs the bonds that tie both the Nakane family and the Japanese community together.¹⁰ The close relationship that Naomi once enjoyed with her parents, brother, and relatives exemplifies the rich familial bonds characteristic of Japanese culture:

“My parents, like two needles, knit the families carefully into one blanket. Every event was a warm-water wash, drawing us all closer till the fiber of our lives became an impenetrable mesh.” However, Japanese Canadians—“the original ‘togetherness’ people” (20)—are weakened through the systematic dissolution of the family unit. In *Obasan*, Naomi’s father is sent to work on a road gang, her mother disappears in Japan, Aunt Emily flees to Toronto, and she, Stephen, and Obasan and Uncle Isamu are first relocated to the “ghost town” of Slocan and then sent to labour in the beet fields of Granton. Consequently, in *Itsuka*, Naomi, at the beginning of her adult life, is consumed by a feeling of homelessness: “I can’t see myself as part of Granton at all. I’m a transplant. Not a genuine prairie rose. . . . Even if I stood still for a hundred years on Main Street, there’d be no Granton roots under my feet” (48).

It is Naomi’s philosophical disposition, however, that exacerbates her sense of estrangement. In other words, her rejection of a legitimate, shared historical reality further alienates her from her community. Disengaged from her ethnic group’s convictions, Naomi ultimately experiences discomfort with the notion of community: “Something inside me cringes whenever I hear the phrase ‘your people’” (*Itsuka* 114).¹¹ However, she is incapable of connecting not only with her community but also with any other human beings. In both *Obasan* and *Itsuka*, Naomi’s repeated references to her “Old maid,” “Spinster,” or “Bachelor lady” marital status underscore her heightened sense of isolation (*Obasan* 8). Convinced that we are separated by both the subjective nature of our experiences and the inevitable bias of our discourse, Naomi lives in loneliness and solitude: “I know this aloneness. I’m lying here in this \$323-a-month bachelor apartment in Chinatown Toronto, a middle-aged throwback to the reptilian era, and I’m alone alone alone” (*Itsuka* 6). Embracing ambiguity and indeterminacy as a means to deal with the past leaves Naomi with a sense of her own futility and meaninglessness: “Sometimes I wake up in the darkness, wondering what life has been all about, wondering if there was any reason I was born. At times I’m almost violently empty, wandering among the life-bludgeoned in the shopping malls, in the subways, the stressways” (*Itsuka* 104-05). Transcending the purely physical, then, Naomi’s homelessness ultimately becomes an emotional and spiritual dislocation as well.

With neither a historical truth to believe in nor a shared reality to act on, Naomi retreats into silence and forgetfulness, transforming herself into “a small white stone” (*Itsuka* 180).¹² Her silence, however, is not purely self-imposed but a manifestation of learned behaviour. Raised almost exclusively by Obasan, Naomi is a “serious baby” who “almost never talks or smiles” (*Obasan* 57, 101). Obasan, who is always “gentle and quiet” (68), exists in accordance with traditional rules of behaviour, which emphasize delicacy, duty, and service. Therefore, she “does not dance to the multi-cultural piper’s tune or respond to the racist’s slur. She remains in a silent territory, defined by her serving hands” (226). From Obasan, then, Naomi learns “that speech often hides like an animal in a storm” (3). As Kogawa herself explains, as an adult Naomi is a “completely non-political person.” In keeping with Obasan’s manner, she is “subterranean; her stream of consciousness remains underground” (“From the Bottom” 96).

The silent suffering and dignified passivity that Naomi learns from Obasan is characteristic of the *issei*’s behavioural and moral code.¹³ The *issei* are “shadow-dwellers,” gentle and unassuming people “who are proud to be humble” (*Itsuka* 273, 137):

How well I know the *issei*, who will never ever complain. It’s their code of honour requiring them to *gaman*, to endure without flinching, that makes them the silent people of Canadian nursing homes. From their early childhood in Meiji Japan, they witnessed the poverty and the beyond-exhaustion labour of their fellow villagers, who bore suffering without words, for the love of old parents, for the honour of ancestors, for the sake of the whole. (*Itsuka* 131)

In accordance with her belief in endurance without complaint, Obasan’s natural inclination is to dismiss the injustices that she suffered at the hands of the Canadian government: “Everything is forgetfulness. The time for forgetting is now come” (*Obasan* 30). Therefore, for Naomi, the most obvious alternative to political commitment and the pursuit of historical facticity is silence and denial: “If it is not seen, it does not horrify. What is past recall is past pain. . . . [Q]uestions referring to turbulence in the past, are an unnecessary upheaval in the delicate ecology of this numb day” (*Obasan* 45).

In complete opposition to Obasan, Aunt Emily, a “made-in-Canada woman of Japanese ancestry” (*Itsuka* 3), is an aggressive, highly vocal, self-proclaimed political activist. Completely “non-Japanese in her exuberance,” she defies silence and passivity, rejecting the possibility of “ever becom[ing] a bridge-dweller or a fence-sitter, a person who becomes useless through

inaction" (*Itsuka* 3, 165). In his examination of the discursive strategies employed in the fiction of women of colour, Robert Holton argues that the sense of abuse and outrage expressed by the overt, or outspoken, narrative voice reflects the writer's "attempt to impress these facts and this point of view in an undeniable way" on her readers (217). True to Holton's model, Aunt Emily functions as a "jarring witness" whose primary objective is to make "the experience of [Japanese Canadians] . . . available and comprehensible outside the confines of that group" (193). Holton argues further, however, that "given an extreme enough degree of marginality and alienation, this experience must be legitimated even for members of the marginalized group itself whose interpretative categories may be overwhelmed by the *sensus communis* of the dominant social and interpretative community" (193). Thus, it is also Aunt Emily's role to dismantle the politics of negativity that have separated Japanese Canadians from their social memory, or history. It is her task specifically, then, to convince Naomi of the veracity and relevance of her own testimony: "You have to remember. . . . Don't deny the past. Remember everything. If you're bitter, be bitter. Cry it out! Scream! Denial is gangrene" (*Obasan* 49-50).

Clearly, then, Naomi becomes torn between the silent forbearance that *Obasan* demonstrates and the outspoken revolt that Aunt Emily demands. It is when Naomi hears Grandma Kato's letter and learns of her mother's death, however, that the conflict between silence and speech is resolved. The rage and the sense of injury that emerge with Naomi's knowledge of her mother's experience at Nagasaki indicate that she accepts Grandma Kato's words not as arbitrary linguistic symbols but as signifiers of a specific, heinous reality. In other words, Naomi's response to her mother's particular experience suggests that she no longer discredits objective consciousness or perceives the past as unknowable. Rather, her very emotions imply her commitment to a specific historical truth. For how can one feel when one does not know anything with any certainty? Acceptance of an explicit—albeit horrific—historical past, coupled with Aunt Emily's documentation, inspires Naomi's rejection of an open-ended conception of historical interpretation and the silence that is its consequence.¹⁴

Both textual evidence and critical commentary contradict Goellnicht's conviction that Naomi completely dismisses Aunt Emily's position as naïve, ineffective, and thus futile. Naomi, Mason Harris asserts, is finally "able to acknowledge the validity of Emily's concerns" ("Broken" 52). "A faith in the

liberating power of words,” Garry Willis argues further, “is something that Naomi comes to share with Aunt Emily” (245). Similarly, Lynn Magnusson notes that, when Naomi revisits the coulee in the final pages of *Obasan*, she wears Aunt Emily’s coat, “a sign that she will enter Emily’s (and Kogawa’s) wordy world” (66). Indeed, Aunt Emily’s papers become “symbols of communion, white paper bread for the mind’s meal” (*Obasan* 182), that offer salvation from the doubt, distrust, and lack of conviction to which Naomi had submitted.

However, as Willis contends, “To say that Naomi converts from *Obasan*’s view that silence is best to Aunt Emily’s view that one has to speak out is, finally, to oversimplify” (243). Rather, it is from the synthesis of *Obasan*’s and Aunt Emily’s outlooks that Naomi derives her new perspective.¹⁵ Specifically, while it is from Aunt Emily’s unrelenting activity that Naomi is encouraged to break the silence, it is from *Obasan*’s utter humanity that she secures the strength to do so. Naomi acquires a definitive sense of history from Aunt Emily, but it is from *Obasan*, and the issei generation to which she belongs, that she gains her spirit:

Though they lacked political power, their spiritual powers remain—their steadfast rock-hard endurance, their determination, dignity, graciousness, loyalty, modesty, resourcefulness, reliability, industry, generosity, gratitude, their reverence for nature, their respect for education, their amazing tenderness towards the young, their intense passion for us to be worth something. They endured for the sake of the long-term good, for the well-being of the whole. They endured for a future that only the children will know. Their endurance is their act of faith and love. What they offer to the future are their keys to the safekeeping of the soul. (*Itsuka* 250)

Combining *Obasan*’s dignity with Aunt Emily’s determination enables Naomi to accept both her “need to be educated” and her responsibility to defend the humanist conviction that “What’s right is right. What’s wrong is wrong” (*Obasan* 188, 183).

In *Itsuka*, Kogawa explores Naomi’s spiritual rebirth through her re-insertion into community and her reclaiming of a shared historical reality. As a sequel to *Obasan*, *Itsuka* follows Naomi’s journey from a questioning to a confirming of history, from personal scepticism to political commitment to redress.¹⁶ While *Obasan* concludes with Naomi’s knowledge of “the fuller story of her life of loneliness and loss, that knowledge,” as Arnold Davidson points out, “constitutes the grounds for revi-

sioning a past, not for claiming a future" (85). It is in *Itsuka*, then, that "the middle-aged Naomi tak[es] the first tentative steps towards freeing herself from a prison of emotional, physical, and spiritual homelessness" (Keefer 35) by establishing connections that will encourage her to build a meaningful future. The novel is the story of Naomi's transformation from a profound scepticism of interpretation to a full acceptance of her community's objective order of values and integrated worldview: "the picture grows clearer, our wholeness forms, when even a few of us, in our brokenness, start coming together" (168). In demonstrating how commitment to the common good and the valuing of the collective over the individual effects significant and meaningful social change, *Itsuka* rejects the postmodern belief that "the importance of logical clarity, brotherhood, reason as arbiter, political order, [and] community . . . are dead as *useful* frames of reference or pertinent guides to procedure" (Graff 408).

When *Itsuka* opens in September 1983 Japanese Canadians are "pieces of a jigsaw puzzle . . . scattered across the nation"; "there's no Japantown anywhere" (168, 9). The novel's primary emphasis, consequently, is the need for connection, community, and collective political activity. "The dispersed," Aunt Emily stresses, "are the disappeared, unless they're connected" (3). Without belief in a shared system of values and a common historical reality, there can be no community, no knowing, no identity, no self. In short, there can only be indifference. Thus, Aunt Emily asserts, "If our community is to live again, we must go down together into the mud and keep on struggling. . . . This we must do for our psychic survival. This first, this basic thing. What heals people is the transforming power of mutuality. Mutual vulnerability. Mutual strength" (188).¹⁷

In both *Obasan* and *Itsuka*, Aunt Emily's character remains static. Her faith in her vision, in other words, is unwavering: "She walks down a road made narrow and straight by an unswerving heart" (*Itsuka* 276). If anything, Aunt Emily's ideological stance and political purpose reflect an even greater commitment to rational humanist ideals. Convinced that ambiguity breeds indifference, while absolute knowledge fosters change, Aunt Emily contends that "We'll disappear if we don't care. We can't care if we don't know our stories" (*Itsuka* 248). However, in *Itsuka*, she seeks not only to defend the truth of her community's stories but also to demonstrate their connection to other tales of oppression. "[All our] tales of suffering," according to Aunt Emily, "should be [our] bond" (197). She struggles not

only to vindicate the rights of her own community, then, but also “to better the human condition” in general. Thus, Aunt Emily’s discourse and political efforts are not limited to her own specific reality; they address a global sense of injustice: “Oppression is oppression. It’s all connected, whether it’s one abused nisei or the starving in Ethiopia” (189).¹⁸

In her recognition of the mutuality inherent in all suffering and in her call for a collaborative politics, Aunt Emily rejects the postmodern belief in contingency and fragmentation, which denies a common, or shared, sense of reality. As Gerald Graff argues, then, the valuing of commonality, univocality, truth, and meaning is not necessarily tied to a single, “centrist” sense of experience, “but [is] part of a more universal human heritage” (417). Specifically, if we conclude that all experience and every articulation of experience are necessarily constructs created by the “centre” or oppressing social class in order to maintain its position of privilege, then we also reject the possibility of the sharing that links us in a common struggle for a just society. As Rita Felski argues in her examination of feminist literature and social change, the contemporary subversive aesthetic “which undermines truth and self-identity has a potential tendency to limit direct political effect” and to undermine the “more determinate interests of an oppositional politics” (162).¹⁹

Itsuka documents how, in order to effect significant social change, not just the Japanese community “must speak with one voice” (209), but all Canadians “need to be linked arm in arm” with “our roots . . . firmly interlocked” (171, 4). Thus, in order to legitimate their historical truth and alter the government’s perception of their community, Japanese Canadians must confront the politics of multiculturalism that, as Janice Kulyk Keefer argues, has “abetted rather than eradicated the racism that [Kogawa] presents as an institutionalized aspect of Canadian life” (35). Instead of offering ethnic communities access to real power, the Canadian government sponsors “a multicultural event in the foyer of the Arts Centre where we sing pretty songs” (*Itsuka* 243). By exposing the hypocrisy inherent in such token efforts to promote ethnocultural unity, Kogawa suggests that only the illusion of significant and meaningful multiculturalism exists in Canada: “We tell people we’re integrated here and get along in our neighbourhoods. Then we step from the stage and disappear” (243).

The success of the movement for redress, Kogawa reveals, is dependent on building a valid and visible multicultural society. Consequently,

Japanese Canadians must act as “bridges,” “hyphens,” and “diplomats” (85), forming a single, united front with all Canadians by sharing the meaning of suffering and asserting a common experience of a significant external reality. In so doing, the Japanese community can attack the shallow relativism expounded by Canada’s various ministers of multiculturalism—personified in the novel by Dr. Stinson, “consultant to Ottawa’s Multicultural Directorate” (149)—who dismiss minority history as an articulation of “personal bias” and who evade the issue that it is now “time the Japanese Canadian story was better known” by responding with: “Yes indeed. . . . But from what point of view? . . . What point of view?” (152).

While exploring the fight for redress, *Itsuka* also follows the growth of Naomi’s relationship with Aunt Emily and its pervasive influence on her political and philosophical disposition. Contrary to Goellnicht’s interpretation, Aunt Emily remains the primary impetus behind Naomi’s transformation from ambiguity, silence, and passivity to truth, anger, action, and, finally, empowerment. She also becomes Naomi’s principal source of nurture, providing her with a tie to the maternal that, as *Obasan* poignantly reveals, is crucial to Naomi’s sense of belonging: “Aunt Emily’s bimonthly phone call is the kite string, the long-distance umbilical cord, that keeps me connected to a mothering earth” (83). In the very opening of *Itsuka*, we learn that Naomi no longer rejects Aunt Emily’s position; on the contrary, she begins to adopt it: “Over the years I have learned to understand some of Aunt Emily’s sources of anger. And back in Granton and Cecil, in the years following Uncle’s death, I was discovering my own capacity for that unpleasant emotion” (69). As Naomi “watches others try to claim and contain [redress],” as Davidson points out, “she becomes more involved, more her Aunt Emily’s advocate and ally” (86).

Naomi’s transformation from distrust and suspicion to faith and conviction is inspired by an awareness of mutuality learned from Aunt Emily. Her initial scepticism toward traditional pretensions to truth results in the loss of a sense of commonality and meaningfulness and in the consequent inability to commit to anything larger than the self. Naomi is ultimately drawn into the political, however, not through her singular, self-contained understanding of the past but through a sense of responsibility to, and personal connection with, the historical experiences of others: “I . . . got involved because of Cedric. . . . And Cedric was drawn by Aunt Emily, who was drawn by Min” (229). Naomi learns that, in shedding one’s “cocoon”

and “coming forth with dewy fresh wings,” connections are made, collective activity is inspired, and the rational pursuit of political order is carried out. She begins “to fly by stuffing envelopes” (211).

By sharing her community’s worldview, participating in its pursuit of justice, and accepting her responsibility as a historical agent, Naomi overcomes the feelings of isolation and loneliness that consumed much of her early life. Her new sense of historical agency and meaningfulness affects not only her public life but also her personal relationships. In this way, “The erotic and political plots of *Itsuka*,” as Keefer asserts, “are made to intertwine” (35). Specifically, Naomi’s intimate relationship with Father Cedric signifies not only her sexual awakening but also her new faith in our ability to know, understand, and, finally, connect with one another.²⁰ Thus, with her commitment to, and defence of, a shared historical reality, Naomi overcomes her feelings of aloneness and her consequent self-conception as an old maid. It is not through scepticism, suspicion, and distrust that she discovers her political and personal self, then, but through trust, truth, and, finally, intimacy: “The fact of flesh is new in my life. A simple fact, as commonplace as pebbles on a beach. But I’m a pebble that was lost. Now I’ve been found” (215).

It is with hope and faith that the novel ends; with the fulfilment of the dream that “*itsuka*,” “someday the better time will come,” “someday, your sacrifice will be known” (208, 249). On 22 September 1988, Naomi and Aunt Emily gather with other members of their community in the House of Commons to hear the Canadian government’s formal apology and to witness the signing of the redress agreement.²¹ By ending *Itsuka* in this way, Kogawa demonstrates that “more things are wrought by passion than this world dreams of. You don’t need hired staff, or gobs of money. All you need is belief and a handful of people phoning, running around putting up posters, delivering press releases” (210). In other words, it is through community, positivism, and a united defence of truth that “the telling leaps over the barricades and the dream enters day” (288).

While the conclusion of *Itsuka* is concerned with how the *public* struggle for historical legitimacy is finally won, it also returns to the personal: namely, to Naomi’s struggle for selfhood. Having witnessed the positive outcome of her efforts, Naomi is no longer the sceptic “doubt[ful] of almost everything” and “not a true believer of anything much” (31, 109). On the contrary, she is finally able to pray “a believer’s cloudless prayer” (276), and

she feels “whole,” “as complete as when [she] was a very young child” (285). Her final coherence is connected to the reconciliation of her seemingly divided identity. Specifically, with the success of redress, Naomi’s Japanese and Canadian “sides” are no longer at odds. Her final achievement of personal legitimacy, then, is linked to a sense of belonging not only to her community and its historical reality but also to a country that recognizes the truth of that reality:

Aunt Emily and I look at each other and smile. We’ve all said it over the years. “No, no, I’m Canadian. I’m a Canadian. A Canadian.” Sometimes it’s been a defiant statement, a demand, a proclamation of a right. And today, finally, finally, though we can hardly believe it, to be Canadian means what it hasn’t meant before. Reconciliation. Liberation. Belongingness. Home. (286)

“There is no reason to assume,” Holton argues, “that postmodernism, as an ‘ism,’ can provide the appropriate concrete historical, philosophical or political framework” with which to understand the discursive context of the marginalized (303). If it could, as Andreas Huyssen observes in “Mapping the Postmodern,” then it would have to be a new postmodernism that resists the old, “easy postmodernism of the ‘anything goes’ variety” (qtd. in Holton 303). However, “Is it wholly necessary,” as Graff asks, “to conclude that the humanist alternative is forever and finally dead?” (416). Clearly, Kogawa’s novels are evidence that “certain kinds of literature are still built upon the old humanist assumptions” (Rose 225).

Both the values conveyed in, and the response evoked by, *Obasan* and *Itsuka* contradict Goellnicht’s argument that Kogawa’s “special purpose” is “to demonstrate that history is relative” (291). Appropriating Kogawa as a postmodernist, and labelling her writing as historiographic metafiction, Goellnicht argues that she does not seek “to ‘write the vision and make it plain,’ for she remains too aware of the impossibility of such a task” (294). On the contrary, Kogawa’s writing, as Rose asserts, “denies the illusion of non-referentiality . . . and draws attention to the real historical experience which it seeks to portray” (215). Kogawa’s novels ask “us to take the history of the internment as revealed by Naomi and Emily as the painful truth, rather than as one fictional construct among others” (Harris, “Kogawa” 32).

Through Naomi’s evolving philosophical and political consciousness, Kogawa demonstrates that the struggle for legitimacy in historical representation takes place not in the deconstruction of truth but in the collective defence of truth. One does not, in other words, impose one’s presence on

the historical record by obfuscating meaning but by clarifying it. Textual evidence in, and the reception of, both *Obasan* and *Itsuka* reveal that it is unconvincing to argue that history is in any meaningful sense fictional in Kogawa's narratives. In other words, it is difficult to read Kogawa's novels as purely discursive acts that have no base in reality. There is, ultimately, a responsible reading of Kogawa's texts—it is a reading that demands that we recognize, as Naomi finally does, that “It matters to get the facts straight” because “Reconciliation can't begin without mutual recognition of [these] facts” (*Obasan* 183).

There are, undoubtedly, many stories of the experience of internment. And even Aunt Emily recognizes that there is no one story of redress. Rather, “There are as many stories as there are people” (*Itsuka* 247). However, what is clearly conveyed in Kogawa's writing is that the sum of all these stories—including her own—constitutes one reality, a single truth: “During and after World War II, Canadians of Japanese ancestry, the majority of whom were citizens, suffered unprecedented actions by the Government of Canada against their community” (formal “Acknowledgement,” qtd. in Miki and Kobayashi 8; qtd. in *Itsuka* 289).

What, then, becomes of historical narratives in a “post-humanist society” (Graff 409)? What becomes of history in a world wherein “distortion . . . is taken to be the normal and proper condition of human experience” and “meaning . . . comes to be regarded with a mixture of distrust and boredom” (Graff 394, 401)? It is in such a world, I would argue, that the “refusal of the facts of history,” as Dorothy Rabinowitz documents, can be “heard without much objection, and treated as though it were an argument as good as any other” (36).²² How far are we, in other words, from embracing the lie when we accept the impossibility of absolute truth?

While my humanist approach to Kogawa's novels may seem to reflect dated, or “outmoded,” thinking, the postmodern conception of history articulated by Hutcheon and her predecessors amounts to more than just a “historical simplemindedness” (Rose 216)—it amounts to a dangerous “situation in which meaning is being emptied out of the world, so that things appear only in their simple presence” (Graff 397). In such an indeterminate world we risk losing sight of the difference between good scholarship and bad, between what is right and wrong. “In a society increasingly irrational and barbaric,” as Graff observes, “to regard the attack on reason and objectivity as the basis of our radicalism is to perpetuate the nightmare we want

to escape" (417). Clearly, in a world in which Nazism is resurfacing as surely as its victims, and their stories, are dying, it is our responsibility to reembrace an epistemological model that emphasizes belief and meaning. It is only through concrete, rational knowledge, and not through systems of ambiguity and distortion, that the horrors of history can be prevented from reoccurring. It is in this way that "The past," as Kogawa teaches us, "is the future" (*Obasan* 42).

NOTES

- 1 Since the writing of this essay, Kogawa has published a third novel, *The Rain Ascends* (Toronto:Knopf, 1995). An exploration of love, family life, and the nature of good and evil, Kogawa's most recent novel tells the story of a woman who makes the painful discovery that her father abused young boys throughout his career as a minister.
- 2 In his discussion of the possibility of writing factually about observable reality, Robert Scholes argues that "There is no mimesis, only poesis. No recording. Only construction" (7). When applied to historiography, "The deconstructive argument that all writing stands at a distance from that which it seeks to represent entails . . . the dethronement of historicism as an objective discipline" (Patterson 259). For example, in his understanding of history as a poetic construct governed by narrative "tropes," Hayden White maintains "the essentially provisional and contingent nature of historical representations and their susceptibility to infinite revision" ("Historical Text" 62, 42). Influenced by White's theory of history as "verbal fiction" ("Historical Text" 42), Linda Hutcheon argues that both historical and fictive narratives are "ideological constructions" that acknowledge their status "as construct[s], rather than as simulacr[a] of some 'real' outside [world]" ("Pastime" 61, 68).
- 3 As Barbara Foley argues, "by postulating a radical indeterminacy," postmodernism has enhanced an "impotent" "view of history as a realm of alien and undifferentiated facticity" (265).
- 4 Kogawa's books of poetry include *The Splintered Moon* (1967), *A Choice of Dreams* (1974), *Jericho Road* (1977), and *Woman in the Woods* (1985).
- 5 In her very favourable review of the text, Kathryn Barnwell nevertheless notes that "The highly poetic and allusive style of *Obasan* is nowhere to be found in *Itsuka*" (39). Similarly, Maxine Hancock expresses disappointment with *Itsuka*'s "jarring" narrative style after "the nearly perfect poise of the prose of *Obasan*" (50).
- 6 Hutcheon uses "ex-centricity" to define the condition of individuals marginalized as a result of "differences in class, gender, race, ethnic group, and sexual preference" (*Canadian Postmodern* 11). In other words, such individuals do not belong to the white, male, upper-middle-class infrastructure that Hutcheon defines as the central voice in Canadian society.
- 7 Gerald Graff effectively underscores this contradiction in postmodern thinking by linking it to the interrogation of the romantic aesthetic: "If imaginative truth were determined from within rather than without, how could a poet know whether one myth prompted by his imagination were truer than any other?" "The paradox of the sophisticated modern mind," he argues, "is that it is unable to believe in the objective validity of

meanings yet unable to do without meanings." Consequently, the "crisis" of postmodern thought lies in its "self-contradictory attempts . . . to define . . . a discourse that is somehow both nonreferential yet valid as knowledge" (391).

- 8 It is important to note, however, that critical debates rage about whether the postcolonial is the postmodern or whether it is its very antithesis. While Hutcheon asserts "that the links between the post-colonial and the post-modern are strong and clear ones" ("Circling" 168), Tiffin argues that the two are diametrically opposed. According to Tiffin, while postmodern theory seems to endorse difference, pluralism, and multivocality, "in practice [it has] operated in the same way in which the Western historicizing consciousness has operated, that is, to appropriate and control the 'other', while ostensibly performing some sort of major cultural redemption" (170).
- 9 Kogawa herself suggests that Aunt Emily is modelled, in part, on Muriel Kitagawa, a champion of the Japanese-Canadian community's political rights. As Patricia Merivale notes, "Kogawa's admiration for her is palpable" (81).
- 10 The Japanese community in Canada has named each of its generations, the immigrants from Japan being the first generation, or the issei. The issei's Canadian-born children, the second generation, are referred to as the nisei. Naomi and Stephen, born to a nisei father, belong to the sansei generation (Miki and Kobayashi 19).
- 11 Miki and Kobayashi argue that the destruction of the Japanese-Canadian community was also undertaken on economic grounds. On 19 January 1943, the Canadian government passed Order in Council PC 469, which declared that all confiscated Japanese property (homes, businesses, and personal belongings) would be placed for sale without the consent of the rightful owners. Personally and financially valuable items were immediately sold for well below their actual worth. "This new measure," according to Miki and Kobayashi, "compounding the injustice of mass uprooting, led to the dispossession of Japanese Canadians. With the dismantling of their community, their former social and economic presence on the west coast could now be erased" (42).
- 12 As Mason Harris argues, Naomi bears the "double burden" of being a "foreigner" in her homeland and an "exile from the community which might have provided a sense of home in that land" ("Broken" 48).
- 13 In the poem that opens *Obasan*, Kogawa establishes the stone as a symbol of silence. Gottlieb (35), Rose (223), St. Andrews (31), and Willis (240) all examine this metaphor in their various critical approaches to Kogawa's writing.
- 14 When ordered by the government to evacuate, the issei dutifully obeyed, responding in accordance with cultural norms that dictated conformity and obedience over dissension and revolt. "The status of the immigrant Issei," according to Ken Adachi, "was similar to the roles and positions they had left in Meiji Japan, so that the status their superiors held in Japan was now transferred to the white officialdom, and subsequent patterns of deference or humility were matters of course" (225).
- 15 Comparing her retreat into silence to her mother's refusal to speak "*kodomo no tame*"—"for the sake of the children"—Naomi finally defines their "wordlessness" as their "mutual destruction" (*Obasan* 243).
- 16 Similarly, Marilyn Russell Rose asserts that, standing "in dialectical relation to both [aunts]," Naomi is "clearly destined for synthesis" (220). Patricia Merivale argues accord-

ingly that the “seemingly incompatible voices” of Obasan and Aunt Emily “are essential to [Naomi’s] eventual synthesis of her self” (70).

- 17 Following *Obasan*’s account of life during the internment, *Itsuka* is the story of the Japanese community’s subsequent struggle for redress. The movement was first organized by the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC) in January 1984. The Japanese community’s struggle “for a just and honourable resolution to the injustices of the 1940s” (Miki and Kobayashi 11) met with vehement opposition from the Trudeau government and continued without success through five successive ministers of state for multiculturalism. It was not until 22 September 1988 that an agreement was reached between the Conservative government of Brian Mulroney and Japanese Canadians.
- 18 In a March 1984 issue of *Canadian Forum*, Kogawa voices Aunt Emily’s sentiment almost exactly: “Our wholeness comes from joining and from sharing our brokenness. . . . Rather than abandoning the way of brokenness, I believe we need to remember the paradoxical power in mutual vulnerability” (20).
- 19 The redress movement sought not only to secure an apology and compensation for the violations and losses suffered by Japanese Canadians during World War II but also to help *all* visible minorities to overcome the effects of racism and discrimination in Canada. Redress was, therefore, a major human-rights issue. Accordingly, the NAJC’s recommendations to the Canadian government included “That the War Measures Act be amended in such a manner as to ensure that similar injustices will not recur, and further that a serious commitment be made to initiate a review and amendment of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to guarantee that the rights of individuals will never again be abrogated on the basis of ancestry” (NAJC Redress Proposal, qtd. in Miki and Kobayashi 97).
- 20 Even Hutcheon, in her discussion of the various connections between the postmodern and the postcolonial, recognizes the former’s ambivalent political implications. She admits, in short, that the postmodern aesthetic does not constitute a “constructive political enterprise” insofar as it lacks “a theory of agency and social change” (“Circling” 183).
- 21 Cedric also represents the kind of maternal love and security that Naomi clearly needs. He is Naomi’s “fairy godmother” (145, 148), and he “cradles [her] as a mother holds her child, with care and confidence” (261). Like Naomi’s “Gentle Mother,” whose eyes “do not invade and betray” (*Obasan* 243, 59), Cedric is “as gentle as the smallest waves from the sea where the rainbow is moored and he does not, he does not invade” (261).
- 22 The Canadian Redress Agreement states that the government accepts blame for the discriminatory actions taken against Japanese Canadians during and after World War II, recognizes that such actions were unjust and violated basic principles of human rights, and pledges to ensure that such events will never occur again against any ethnic minority group. In addition, \$21,000 was given to each Japanese Canadian who was subjected to internment, relocation, deportation, loss of property, and/or “otherwise deprived of the full enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms based solely on the fact that they were of Japanese ancestry” (Miki and Kobayashi 139).
- 23 Rabinowitz and Elie Wiesel participated in a conference on the need to preserve, transmit, and legitimate Holocaust history. The central concern of each paper presented was the scholar’s responsibility “to set the record straight” and, in so doing, to preserve the Holocaust from “becom[ing] a matter of indifference—a meaningless, senseless, inexplicable horror” (Smith 1, 3).

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The End of Everything

First sign will be
the soles of our feet sizzling,
strips of pale bacon
twitching in a frying pan. Moss
bursting into blaze
like doll's hair. Dead roses
exploding into fumes.
The trunks of maples
will burn so quickly,
leafy upper branches
will be left suspended in the air.
And then, only one sound:
the raspy gasp of flames.

As for you and me, an instant
is everything. See, we've
been skeletons all along,
worn down like old
odds and ends of chalk.
Watch how effortlessly
our fingers shrivel, our
eyelids pop. Who can tell
the difference between clouds and
souls? What little wind is left
will only blow us into Lake Ontario.

Planet earth is just a testing ground,
one huge Hiroshima. Cats, crabgrass,
rock 'n' roll, nothing to sustain
our interest beyond our fears.
I study my Bible like a clock.
Read about the beastly Russians.
Listen to the bullets

tearing into Middle Eastern palms.
Earthquakes in the unlikeliest
places. Half the world
starving to death.

I live as if on the sun, knee-
deep in celestial destruction, fatal
gases scalding holes in my brain.
Sometimes I'm fevered head to toe
with signs, the butterflies in my stomach
blazing, sweaty palms
stinking like sulphur and roses.
It could happen so fast,
I might mistake the tops of trees
for airplanes or angels, God
swooping low enough for a last look.

Language, Power, and Responsibility in *The Handmaid's Tale*:

Toward a Discourse of Literary Gossip

The sheer ubiquity of gossip in literature, from Chaucer's *Wife of Bath* to Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* to Atwood's *Handmaids*, suggests the importance of developing a theory of gossip that would account for the variety of ways in which gossip functions in literary texts. Although gossip as a socio-cultural phenomenon has received serious attention from both sociologists and anthropologists since the mid 1960s and new books on the subject continue to be published (Brison 1992; Bergmann 1993), the attention paid to gossip in literature has been less substantial. Patricia Meyer Spacks' *Gossip* (1985) is probably the best recent effort to bring the implications of theoretical models of gossip drawn from other areas of cultural study to bear on literary gossip and on literary forms themselves. In many ways, however, Spacks' thesis that gossip engenders and sustains a potentially subversive female community might be seen as a feminist re-vision of the well-established position within social anthropology that gossip and scandal "have important positive values" since they "maintain the unity, morals and values of social groups" (Gluckman 308). Anthropologist Max Gluckman's "Gossip and Scandal" (1963), which has dominated discussions of the subject since its publication with its focus on the stabilizing function of gossip based on its reinforcement of moral norms, has made Gluckman himself into gossip's central apologist. Tacitly rejecting the traditional notion that gossip is simply empty chatter, Gluckman argues that gossip is a principal factor in defining and sustaining distinct social groups within larger communities precisely because of its

nature as an exclusivist discourse. Like Mikhail Bahktin's sociolinguistics, Gluckman's notion of discourse is informed by the shared assumptions that "generate a community of value judgments" ("Discourse" 397). Rather than reinforcing universal norms, or more accurately, those of the dominant ideology, gossip always orients itself around the codes of a specific social group, binding it together in the process. Although Gluckman's interests lie elsewhere, the implications of his argument for a feminist treatment of gossip are not hard to see.

Building on Gluckman's conclusions about gossip as a mechanism of group preservation, Spacks extrapolates a theory of gossip that is explicitly motivated toward a consideration of women's discourse. Through her study of gossip in the Anglo-American novelistic tradition, Spacks identifies a continuum of intent on which different kinds of gossip are provisionally defined. At one end, gossip appears motivated by pure malice, generating in the gossipier "an immediately satisfying sense of power" (4); poised at the center, "idle talk" operates "[w]ithout purposeful intent" except to protect the gossipers from serious engagement with one another (5). At the other pole lies what Spacks calls "serious gossip," "which exists only as a function of intimacy" (5). As Spacks explains, this type of gossip is not concerned with informational content, but rather is solely focussed on "the relationship such gossip expresses and sustains" through its very form as intimate, dialogic conversation. In an attempt to resuscitate gossip's originary etymological sense, from the Old English *godsibb*, and the positive associations of bonding, community and shared experience that it implies, Spacks concentrates her study on this "serious" pole of her "crude taxonomy" (6) while she simultaneously insists that "even malicious gossip may possess a positive value" (34). For Spacks, that value originates in the personal since gossip "releas[es] people from the prison of their own thoughts" (43), but inevitably moves outward to embrace the concerns of a larger social community: "Gossip, of course, demands a process of relatedness among its participants; its *I*'s inevitably turn into a *we*" (261). Aligning her argument that gossip often works to empower subordinate groups with Deborah Jones' notion of a "speech community" that is "a key to the female subculture" (Jones 248), Spacks exposes the moral attack on gossip as the dominant (male) discourse's attempt to foreclose upon the circulation of potentially subversive ideologies. For Spacks, as for many other feminist writers, gossip "embodies an alternative discourse to that of public life and

a discourse potentially challenging to public assumptions; it provides language for an alternative culture. . . .A rhetoric of inquiry, gossip questions the established" (46).

By locating herself within the province of communal rhetoric, however, Spacks leaves her argument open to the same kinds of criticism that have plagued Gluckman himself. As Robert Paine argues in his rebuttal to Gluckman's theory, "What Is Gossip About? An Alternative Hypothesis" (1967), "[i]t is the individual and not the community that gossips" (281). By shifting his emphasis away from the community that Gluckman prizes, Paine suggests importance of surveying the motives of gossip production from the ground floor, recognizing that an individual's discourse is always directed towards his or her own self-interests before those of the group. In fact, the chief criticism of Gluckman's position has been his refusal to do just that: "[His] argument commits a category mistake that is typical of functionalist explanations because it implicitly foists its determination of the latent function of gossip on the gossipers as a goal" (Bergmann 145). Consequently, Gluckman must completely ignore gossip's social disrepute, treating it only as "an erroneous opinion...that needs to be disproved" (Bergmann 144), lest the essential contradiction between gossip's simultaneously destructive and preservative powers undermine the premise of his argument. In much the same way, Spacks attempts to salvage the "positive" aspects of gossip by circumscribing her subject: concentrating her discussion on the socially productive mode of "serious gossip" even as she acknowledges that "to take a positive view involves suspending consciousness of gossip's destructive force and considering what besides animus against others it may involve" (34). Like Gluckman, Spacks excuses gossip's often malicious content by insisting that "[r]educd to means rather than ends, aggression serves alliance" (57). Although this may be functionally true, one is still left with an unsatisfying argument that fails to adequately account for the ways in which individuals use gossip to further their own interests.

A different approach might examine how individuals use gossip to empower themselves through the imaginative appropriation of other people's lives as story. As Rachel M. Brownstein notes, "Gossip, like novels, is a way of turning life into story. Good gossip approximates art" (cited in Spacks 13). To regard literary gossip as a metafiction is in large part

to relocate the significance of gossip in the novel from community to individual. Following from Paine's thesis that gossip is a personal discourse motivated by the self-interests of the gossiper, my argument suggests that although gossip often does function as a mechanism for preserving social groups, there are also ways in which literary gossip is intimately linked to a process of metafictional self-construction. By examining the ways in which Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* not only articulates gossip's positive potential, but also tests the limits of its power and suggests the possible dangers of its method, my argument will not simply catalogue gossip's effects, but attempt to discover *how* gossip functions in a literary text. Specifically, by locating *The Handmaid's Tale* in relation to the competing linguistic assumptions of theorists like Jacques Derrida and Mikhail Bakhtin, I will attempt to show ways in which such theories provide suggestive models for structuring the workings of gossip and in turn, how Atwood's treatment of gossip itself might furnish a valuable model for interrogating their assumptions.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, gossip seems to function along precisely the same lines as those laid out by Spacks in her thesis. Representing the Handmaids' gossip as the discourse of a women's subculture, Atwood shows how gossip "provides a resource for the subordinated. . . a crucial means of self expression, a crucial form of solidarity" (Spacks 5) by locating it within the context of the paradigmatically oppressive Gileadean state. The images of confinement that Roberta Rubenstein describes as characterizing the Handmaids' experience, such as "the physically confining rooms, walls and other actual boundaries of the Republic of Gilead [which] corroborate the condition of reproductive 'confinement' to which the Handmaids are subject" (103), might also be expanded to include their confining silence. In which case, gossip itself is transformed into a crucial balm for isolation. As Lucy M. Freibert observes, "[t]he formulaic speech patterns imposed on the Handmaids, 'Blessed be the fruit', 'May the Lord open', 'Praise be' [9] . . . , serve to perpetuate the religious nature of their role and *to prevent practical conversation*" (284; my emphasis). In fact, the suppression of practical conversation in Gilead, like the dominant ideology's suppression of gossip in Spacks' study, seems to reflect "the justifiable anxiety of the dominant about the aggressive impulses of the submissive" (Spacks 30). More importantly, however, for the rigidly monitored Handmaids, whose prescribed and ritualized actions and speech constantly serve to isolate them from

their own social group, gossip represents the almost unimaginable possibility of social contact. Offred's yearning for precisely this kind of community is apparent in her desire to gossip with the Marthas, Rita and Cora:

. . . and we would sit at Rita's kitchen table, which is not Rita's any more than my table is mine, and we would talk, about aches and pains, illnesses, our feet, our backs, all the different kinds of mischief that our bodies, like unruly children, can get up to. We would nod our heads as punctuation to each other's voices, signalling that yes, we know all about it. We would exchange remedies and try to outdo each other in the recital of our physical miseries; gently we would complain, our voices soft and minor-key and mournful as pigeons in eaves troughs. *I know what you mean*, we'd say. Or, a quaint expression you sometimes hear, still, from older people: *I hear where you're coming from*, as if the voice itself were a traveller, arriving from a distant place. Which it would be, which it is.

How I used to despise such talk. Now I long for it. At least it was talk. An exchange of sorts. (10-11)

Offred's emphasis on mutual exchange, on the quality of voice itself, "soft and minor-key and mournful as pigeons in eaves troughs" and on the choral support, "*I know what you mean*," "*I hear where you're coming from*," betray her desire for human contact as a goal of the utterance itself that will validate her personal experience and locate her within a social group that is distinctly her own. As the focus of this passage suggests, the domestic gossip that she longs for, what Deborah Jones calls "chatting," is prized not for its content, but for the intimate relationship it expresses, for the "continuous chorus and commentary on the incidents of women's daily lives" it provides "in an evaluative process that also provides emotional support" (Jones 248). Significantly, Offred positions her current longings for mutual disclosure against her own former derision of "such talk" and the entire tradition of moral censure that it implies. Offred's nostalgia for this kind of gossip about the old quotidian (ours) in which women's bodies might be seen as something other than "walking wombs" emphatically suggests that Atwood, like Jones and Spacks, is taking a revisionist stance by proposing to focus on the 'positive' value of gossip as a social bonding agent.

Gossip's functional value as a mechanism for sustaining social groups attains its ultimate form in the Mayday underground's institutionalization of gossip in the nefarious "grapevine." Transformed by the radicalization of late twentieth-century contexts in Gileadean society, the grapevine, once a transparent euphemism for the movement of gossip itself, takes on a central role in the Mayday underground as a network of information acquisition and dissemination. Although functionally similar to "chatting," Mayday's

grapevine literalizes gossip's latent ability to define a coherent social group in the form of a password that confirms or denies individual membership:

"Who told you?" I say. There's no one near, we can speak more freely, but out of habit we keep our voices low.

"The grapevine," she says. She pauses, looks sideways at me, I sense the blur of white as her wings move. "There's a password," she says.

"A password?" I ask. "What for?"

"So you can tell," she says. "Who is and who isn't." (190)

Significantly, even the password itself, "Mayday," points to a community of mutual assistance and support. For Offred, the password takes on the value of its acoustic equivalent, "M'aidez" (42), the polite French second-person plural which literally means, "*you* (plural), help *me*." By speaking the password, a member creates with language an entire community of support. However, the value of gossip for the Mayday resistance is not simply the solidarity it provides. In fact, Offred's realization—"There is an *us* then, there's a *we*. I knew it" (158)—prompted by her introduction to the Mayday organization, is largely a side-effect—a function—of this gossip's explicitly political agenda. As the language of the (un)official political resistance, the grapevine is emblematic of gossip's subversive potential.

In a similar way, Offred imagines the subversive possibilities for the language of an alternative ideology even in everyday gossip, since it too can be a conduit of forbidden knowledge:

The Marthas know things, they talk amongst themselves, passing the unofficial news from house to house. Like me, they listen at doors, no doubt, and see things even with their eyes averted. I've heard them at it sometimes, caught whiffs of their private conversations. *Stillborn, it was. Or, stabbed with a knitting needle, right in the belly. Jealousy, it must have been, eating her up. Or, tantalizingly, It was toilet cleaner she used. Worked like a charm, though you'd think he'd of tasted it. Must've been that drunk; but they found her out all right.* (11)

Like chatting, gossip about the private lives of social superiors does promote alliance among the gossipers in that it identifies them as belonging to the same social sub-group. This unofficial news, "passed from house to house," serves the same function as the women's lip-read names exchanged "from bed to bed" (4); the sugar packets stolen to comfort Moira, "hand[ed] from bed to bed" (87); or the story of Moira's escape "passed among us that night, in the semi-darkness, under our breath, from bed to bed" (125) at the Rachel and Leah Center. Gossip traveling from house to house or bed to bed is an image of alliance, solidarity, and resistance that defines and sustains a distinct social 'we'.

Like the Mayday grapevine, however, the Marthas' gossip is valuable not simply for the purpose of alliance it serves, but for the way in which it undercuts the representative figures of the dominant ideology. Gossip about a Wife overcome by jealousy and a Commander slain by toilet bowl cleaner works subversively to deflate the power of those in charge, even as it ostensibly reinscribes the dominant morality: "*but they found her out all right.*" As Offred later notices, the story of Moira's escape from the Center, that whittles away at the power of the establishment, works in precisely the same way: "In the light of Moira, the Aunts were less fearsome and more absurd. Their power had a flaw to it. They could be shanghaied in toilets. The audacity was what we liked" (125). In keeping with the subversive nature of gossip, the Marthas' retreat to established values might be seen in the context of Paine's suggestion that "gossipers always pursue the goal of exploiting the values and moral ideas to which they implicitly or explicitly refer in their information in order to promote their own interests" (Bergmann 147). In this way, the Marthas can reap the benefits of empowerment inherent in subversive gossip without placing themselves at risk in a landscape populated by ears and Eyes.

In more complex ways, the gossip between Moira and Offred at the Rachel and Leah Center reveals its value as a parodic tool for the suppressed:

What we're aiming for, says Aunt Lydia, is a spirit of camaraderie among women. We must all pull together.

Camaraderie, shit, says Moira through the hole in the toilet cubicle. Right fucking on, Aunt Lydia, as they used to say. How much do you want to bet she's got Janine down on her knees? What do you think they get up to in that office of hers? I bet she's got her working away on that dried-up, hairy old withered—

Moira! I say.

Moira what? she whispers. You know you've thought it.

It doesn't do any good to talk like that, I say, feeling nevertheless the impulse to giggle. (208)

Returning to Brownstein's remark that gossip is a form of the artistic, Moira's parodic reinterpretation of Aunt Lydia's rhetoric of "camaraderie" ("we must all pull together") as a grotesque forbidden sexual encounter highlights the performative possibilities of gossip when used subversively. As Mikhail Bakhtin suggests, "parodic travestying 'mimicry'. . .rips the word away from its object, disunifies the two, shows that a given straightforward generic word," in this case Aunt Lydia's patriotic and implicitly suppressive rhetoric, "is one-sided, bounded, incapable of exhausting the object; the

process of parodying forces us to experience those sides of the object that are not otherwise included in a given genre or style. Parodic-travestying literature introduces the permanent corrective of laughter, of a critique on the one-sidedness of the lofty direct word, the corrective of reality that is always richer, more fundamental and most importantly *too contradictory and heteroglot* to be fit into a high and straightforward genre" (*Dialogic* 55). In her travestying mimicry of Aunt Lydia's Word, manifested in gossip, Moira rejects the one-sidedness of Gilead's communal rhetoric for the ludicrous propaganda it is, asserting the primacy of her own experience. At the same time, she suggests something of gossip's power to perpetuate "the permanent corrective of laughter," much like Spacks' "rhetoric of inquiry" that "questions the established."

Even Offred herself, the reluctant auditor of Moira's parodic verbal performance who stifles a giggle, eventually embraces the power gossip represents as she admits, "It does so do good. It does"; "There is something powerful in the whispering of obscenities, about those in power. There's something delightful about it, something naughty, secretive, forbidden, thrilling. It's like a spell, of sorts. It deflates them, reduces them to the common denominator where they can be dealt with" (208).

In fact, the magic Offred recognizes is gossip's power to cripple utterly the authority of the elite by objectifying and appropriating their life as story. The spell to which she refers recalls Spacks' suggestion that gossip's appeal is based in "the ancient belief in the magic of language," and the notion that "telling stories takes possession of others' experience" (11). As Roland Barthes suggests in his scathing moral indictment, "Gossip reduces the other to *he/she*, and this reduction is intolerable to me. . . . The third-person pronoun is a wicked pronoun: it is the pronoun of the non-person, it absents, it annuls" (cited in Spacks 34). For Offred, however, gossip that deflates authority by objectifying it in language, reducing it to a manageable fiction, is an essential coping device and a testament to gossip's almost supernatural power.

Nancy M. Freibert would likewise attribute enormous power to the story-teller in *The Handmaid's Tale*. "Although forced into complicity by fear during her three postings," says Freibert, "Offred, once freed, threatens the system by telling her tale." And again, "Atwood demonstrates through Offred that women, able to take risks and tell stories, may

transcend their conditioning, establish their identity, joyfully reclaim their bodies, find their voices and reconstruct the social order” (285). These claims for the power of language sound suspiciously like those made by Spacks herself when she calls gossip “a weapon for outsiders” that “incorporates the possibility that people utterly lacking in social power may affect the views of figures who make things happen in the public sphere” (Spacks 45, 7). Although Freibert is reluctant to be explicit, her own argument bears heavily on the function of story as gossip. Not only is it the epitome of Spacks’ discourse for an alternative culture, but on the most fundamental level, Offred’s story approximates gossip in its oral mode since “Offred literally tells her story, recording it on tape instead of writing it down” (Freibert 286). Moreover, like the Mayday password, Offred’s telling creates its own auditor: “By telling you anything at all I’m at least believing in you, I believe you’re there, I believe you into being. Because I’m telling you this story I will your existence. I tell, therefore you are” (251). Offred’s story-telling thus produces the same kind of social community that has otherwise only been imagined through gossip in the novel, in such a way as to locate gossip and story functionally within the same discursive set.

Spacks identifies a similar dynamic in the novel form itself when she suggests that gossip “supplies a form of analogizing the exchange between narrator and reader: the novel’s basic economy” (21). Citing Bahktin’s account of dialogue, Spacks shows how “the implicit presence of a listener—or by extension a reader—would affect the dynamics of language even in the process of composition” (21). As Bahktin himself argues, “the listener as an immanent participant in the artistic event...has [a] determinative effect on the form of the work from within” (“Discourse” 408). According to this model of discourse, founded on the recognition that “every conscious act is already a social act, an act of communication” (“Discourse” 408), writing and speech can not be totally divorced from that New Critical bogie—authorial intent. Like gossip, story too is intimately linked to notions of purposeful communication. For Bahktin, the regulative role of the listener in artistic creation, who, as “the bearer of the value judgements of the social group to which the ‘conscious’ person belongs” (“Discourse” 408), ensures the inherently dialogic nature of the text since his “constant coparticipa[tion] in all our conscious acts determines not only the content of consciousness but also. . .the very *selection* of the content, the selection of what precisely we become conscious of, and thus determines also those eval-

uations which permeate consciousness" ("Discourse" 409). Thus for Spacks, as for Offred, the story itself could be said to function as a kind of gossip.

If Offred's story represents the ultimate form of productive gossip in the novel, then Freibert's incredible claims would make its teller—and gossip itself—nearly omnipotent. However, while the subversive qualities of gossip as it is presented in the Handmaid's discourse might be seen as a form of power, the conclusions of Atwood's novel are less optimistic. Although the Handmaids' gossip can be emotionally empowering as it is for Offred who finds herself "so excited [she] can hardly breathe" (158), its actual power often proves to be illusory. Consider Offred's emotional defeat just prior to her miraculous rescue: "I resign my body freely to the uses of others. They can do what they like with me. I am abject. I feel for the first time, their true power" (268); or Moira's resignation to a life at Jezebel's (234); or the increasing pressure of the Mayday organization whose demands for information prove to be as oppressive for Offred as those of the state itself (255). All of these examples suggest ways in which Atwood's novel is self-consciously concerned with establishing the limits of gossip's power as well as its strengths.

Despite Freibert's speculation that Offred's tale "precipitate[s] the action that will bring Gilead to an end" (289), the "Historical Notes" that follow the tale emphatically suggest that while the political Republic of Gilead may have fallen, the seeds that produced it are comfortably gestating in the hearts of the scholars in attendance at the Twelfth Symposium on Gileadean Studies. As David Cowart notices, the latent misogyny present in the jokes of Pieixoto and the scholarly community about the Underground Frailroad and "enjoying" the chair, "[c]oming as they do after such a horrendous story...set the teeth on edge" (108). Considering the scholars' academic awareness that "no new system can impose itself on a previous one without incorporating many of the elements found in the latter" (287), their running sexist commentary on Offred's story of a political system rooted in misogyny and its effects on her own life reveals in the historians an appalling lack of self-consciousness. In effect, Atwood's scathing satire of the academics in this section presents the conference as a Gilead in microcosm, even as it projects readers back to their own time, warning that "American society at the end of the twentieth century may be at a terrible historical turning point" (Cowart 108). If the Gileadean ethos persists in this way even after Offred's supposedly cataclysmic telling, an argument like Freibert's would seem to miss the point.

Although *The Handmaid's Tale* seems ultimately sceptical of gossip's power to alter the social order as Spacks implies it might, Pieixoto's "little chat" at the IHAC presents yet another way of viewing gossip in Atwood's novel. Even more than Offred's own telling, Pieixoto's iteration of her tale might be considered in terms of its functional relation to gossip communication. As a meta-text, Pieixoto's "Historical Notes" comprise the academic complement to gossip that is itself "a kind of meta-communication. . . a communication about communication" (Rosnow and Fine 84). Furthermore, the casual atmosphere of the Conference, punctuated by further jokes about missing lunch; the relaxed nature of Pieixoto's talk—"Problems of Authentication in Reference to *The Handmaid's Tale*"—which he describes as "my little chat" (282); the frequent laughter, applause or indulgent groans in response to Pieixoto's presentation that act as affirmations of community values; as well as the speculative nature of his comments—"This is our guesswork" (292)—all contribute to the sense that the Conference may present itself as the locus of a kind of academic gossip—a place for speculation on the lives of those radically, as well as grammatologically, absent. However, Pieixoto's academic gossip appears to be altogether different from that of the Handmaids presented earlier. Aside from its incidental function of sustaining academia, that is to say the critic's social group, Pieixoto's appropriation of Offred's story is ultimately self-reflexive and self-constituting.

The extent to which Pieixoto usurps Offred's tale for his own purposes is evidenced by the fact that Offred herself is barely present in the historian's comments which focus almost entirely on discovering the identity of her Commander. The disturbing misogyny that David Cowart sees in the final section clearly extends beyond the "sexist jokes" (Cowart 108) of Pieixoto's introductory remarks to inform the proceedings of the entire Conference. In similar fashion, Pieixoto's naming of the text itself suggests how fully he has made the text his own:

Strictly speaking, it was not a manuscript at all when first discovered, and bore no title. The superscription "The Handmaid's Tale" was appended to it by Professor Wade, partly in homage to the great Geoffrey Chaucer; but those of you who understand when I say that I am sure all puns were intentional, particularly that having to do with the archaic vulgar signification of the word tail; that being, to some extent, the bone, as it were, of contention, in that phase of Gileadean society of which our saga treats. (Laughter, applause.)
(282-83)

While the inappropriateness of locating a story of female oppression and resistance under the banner of “the great Geoffrey Chaucer,” the *Father* of English Literature, goes unnoticed by the participants of the Conference, its irony is emblematic of the extent to which Offred’s story has been ripped from its original context and relocated to furnish a new meaning. More importantly, in the act of naming her story, “The Handmaid’s *Tale*” (283; my emphasis), literally as a story, Pieixoto himself reduces her life to a manageable fiction, that is to say, to a “text.” Clearly, in Pieixoto’s recontextualization of her story in terms of his own academic project, the integrity of Offred’s “tail” (both of them) is on the line.

To posit a correlation between gossip and Pieixoto’s historical meta-text, as I have done, is ultimately to suggest that both function in similar ways for similar reasons. As a purely textual trace, whether oral or written, of one who is grammatologically absent, Offred’s tale is cut off from its original meaning and “can,” as Jacques Derrida argues, “be cited, put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable.” As Derrida goes on to explain, “This does not imply that the mark is valid outside of a context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any center or absolute anchoring” (*Limited* 12). With no authorial center, Offred’s text ceases to be “hers” the moment it is uttered. In a similar fashion, gossip, by reducing others lives (or one’s own) to story, breaks with life contexts and assures its own iterability. Available for appropriation, such stories can evoke endless significations and even become, paradoxically, the basis for another’s identity:

Did our narrator reach the outside world safely and build a new life for herself? Or was she discovered in her attic hiding place, arrested, sent to the Colonies or to Jezebel’s, or even executed? Our document, though in its own way eloquent, is on these subjects mute. We may call forth Eurydice from the world of the dead, but we cannot make her answer; and when we turn to look at her we glimpse her only for a moment, before she slips from our grasp and flees. As all historians know, the past is a great darkness, and filled with echoes. Voices may reach us from it; but what they say to us is imbued with the obscurity of the matrix out of which they come; and, try as we may, we cannot always decipher them precisely in the clearer light of our own day. (293)

Pieixoto’s final word on Offred’s text thus shows ways in which gossip can be both self-referential and self-constituting. If Offred is his Eurydice, then Pieixoto has scripted for himself the role of Orpheus whose irresistible

power of song can raise the dead and wring tears from trees. For Pieixoto then, whose methods seem to be underwritten by Derridean notions of absence and free-play, gossip affords an expedient means of self-construction through the textualization of other people's life stories. Ironically, however, Ovid's version of the Orpheus story ends with the singer's painful realization of the impotence of song and the dangers of gossip. Ovid's Orpheus, who rejects the female body after his second loss of Eurydice by singing scatological songs, could be seen as Pieixoto's ironic counterpart since he too is a gossip spreading scandalous stories—about Venus and Adonis and even about his own father—to revenge himself on love. Orpheus' empowerment through his rejection of female sexuality (in his extravagant grief he turns to pederasty as well as malicious gossip) is ultimately parodied by Ovid since the singer is ripped to pieces by the frenzied Maenads when he discovers that his tune—based on the appropriation of his father's story—can't hold off his own destruction. As W. S. Anderson suggests, Ovid rejects Orpheus' "violent misogyny," exposing him as "a performer, egotistic, calculating, self-dramatizing" (44, 47). Like Orpheus, Pieixoto too is implicated in the dangers of privileging the linguistic/masculine at the expense of the physical/feminine in true Derridean fashion, only to be ripped apart, more subtly, by Atwood's cutting satiric portrayal. Although Pieixoto is blind to the ironic implications of Orphic gossip as a paradigm for self-construction, Orpheus himself, as he is torn to bits, embodies the ultimate reminder of the consequences for the academic's Derridean free-play with Offred's story.

■ If the principles of Derridean logic are ultimately parodied in this text, though, where does this leave Atwood's view of gossip that would seem to operate on those very principles? Offred's insistence on the value of context—"Context is all" (136)—seems to produce a rupture in Atwood's thematization of gossip. While it might be taken to suggest Derrida's multiplication of contexts and the ways in which meaning is never determinable, and thus to open its own door to Pieixoto's appropriative "reading," the Handmaids' gossip itself tells a very different story. As Bruce Stovel suggests, gossip is indeed an art; adapting Bakhtin, we might call it an art that is "immanently social; the extra-artistic social milieu, affecting art from outside, finds direct, intrinsic response within it" ("Discourse" 393). Thus, as in the case of Moira's parody of Aunt Lydia, in gossip "the

[extraverbal] situation enters into the utterance as an essentially constitutive part of the structure of its import" ("Discourse" 397). In gossip of the kind Moira practices, the extraverbal situation is not restricted to the physical person or event to which it refers, but also includes "the implicit reference to common knowledge, common values" (Jones 246) whose silent citation determines the individual's inclusion in a social group. Gossip, at this level, is a social communication *par excellence* since, as Bahktin recognizes, "[t]he meaning and import of an utterance in life (of whatever particular kind that utterance may be) do not coincide with the purely verbal composition of the utterance. Articulated words are *impregnated* with assumed and unarticulated qualities" ("Discourse" 401). In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Gilead's socio-political structures that largely determine the extraverbal contexts of gossip are so extreme that every covert utterance is steeped in the ideological assumptions of a particular group's relation to the social order. Just as the Handmaids and Marthas gossip about the Wives and Commanders, so too, Offred speculates, the Wives must gossip about their social counterparts: "*Agreed to it right away, really she didn't care, anything with two legs and a good you-know-what was fine with her. They aren't squeamish, they don't have the same feelings we do. And the rest of them leaning forward in their chairs, My dear, all horror and purience. How could she? Where? When?*" (202). Not only is this gossip loaded with an assumed knowledge of Gilead's social structure and social practices, it also incorporates into its very form, as moral censure, the unarticulated values of the dominant discourse.

Significantly, however, gossip as a verbal performance is not simply rooted in the immediacy of the experiential. Nor is it, like Bahktin's notion of a literary text, "a special form of interrelationship between creator and contemplator *fixed* in a work of art" ("Discourse" 294; my emphasis). In no way can gossip be a "fixed" utterance since, "[i]nasmuch as aggressive wishes control the discourse, the narrative that initiates the gossip interchange may alter form or content to serve the reporter's need. Gossip thus often partakes of fiction (some people would say lies), less because of the inevitable distortions of its passage from mouth to mouth than because of the purposes it serves for the retailer, who forms the story to fill unconscious needs" (Spacks 50). Because by its very nature gossip is repeated—from mouth to mouth or from bed to bed—and in that repetition new contexts are introduced and content is altered, its meaning can never be

“anchored.” As Derrida insists, “Iteration alters, something new takes place” (*Limited* 40). With each repetition, gossip retreats further away from the real object of the utterance itself whose intrinsic value is simplified or emptied and filled with a new meaning as determined by the performer. Reducing the world to a linguistic artifact, Derridean free-play does much the same thing.

Although Pieixoto’s performance is not gossip *per se*, its similarities with the post-structuralist’s practice of “iterability” make gossip a suggestive model for interrogating Derridean assumptions. Since the endless circulation of the Handmaids’ gossip is often prized for its form rather than its content, Atwood’s treatment of their gossip neatly skirts the ethical questions raised by Derrida’s decentering of the “matrix.” Furthermore, because their gossip is consistently aimed at “the façade of reputation people construct around themselves” (Spacks 45), the Handmaids are exempt from Atwood’s critique of Pieixoto’s Derridean methods which focuses on his total disrespect for the text’s function as a “social communication” (“Discourse” 395). However, the textual privilege given to their highly socialized gossip suggests the extent to which *The Handmaid’s Tale* is a humanist text. Conversely, Pieixoto’s academic gossip that reduces the viscosity of Offred’s life “to an academic question” (Freibert 280) to accommodate his own megalomania demonstrates the dangers of Derrida’s comparable exile of the body from language: “What writing itself, in the nonphonetic moment, betrays, is life. It menaces at once the breath, the spirit, and history as the spirit’s relationship with itself. In the end, their finitude, their paralysis. Cutting breath short, sterilizing or immobilizing spiritual creation in the repetition of the letter, in the commentary or the *exegesis*, confined in a narrow space, reserved for a minority, it is the principle of death and of difference in the becoming of being” (*Of* 25).

In the wake of the academic’s erasure of Offred’s body, her own utterance, “Context is all,” surfaces as a humanist life-preserver on a sea of Derridean supplementarity. As Offred says of Moira’s story, “I’ve tried to make it sound as much like her as I can. It’s a way of keeping her alive” (228). Although Atwood’s presentation of gossip ultimately accepts the emotional and intellectual empowerment that gossip functionally represents, it remains deeply suspicious of any technique that would turn an ex-Handmaid of the system into a Handmaid of Orpheus. While Atwood’s novel presents a valuable starting point for developing a discourse of gossip

proper by suggesting its multifarious functions for both individual and community as well as the ethical problems it raises, it also speaks to the relevance of a study of gossip as a model for responsible criticism. Exposing the dangers of viewing gossip finally as "a game which, like all absorbing games, expresses impulse and satisfies needs" (Spacks 47), *The Handmaid's Tale* offers its own deconstructive critique of Derridean free-play. Finally, Atwood's stance on gossip is cautionary in its suggestion that Derridean play may itself be based on a highly questionable ethos of gossip that views the world as a playground and the person as a word.

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Marina Santin (1970–1993)

A beautiful young woman was killed here yesterday
Here on this very spot on this road
Her name was Marina Santin and she was twentythree
And she was going to university next year
To start graduate work in Urban Studies
And the big ugly truck hit her dead

I am talking to you in crimson red shirt
Yes you over there in the guilt scarred blue jeans
Are you deaf or what
I said a beautiful young woman was hit

Yes I am telling you woman overthere strutting like a peahen
Show respect for the young beautiful woman
Who'll never graduate from university
Because her life was snuffed out on this very spot you are
Desecrating with your sneakers

No I don't mean to be self righteous about it
Because the dump truck did not stop
A beautiful young woman was hit here yesterday
Then the ambulance came to collect her
Flattened limbs twisted into a metal lump
That was her bicycle

And the police said her helmet shattered like
A dry peanut shell scattering its bloody seeds
To impregnate the ripe urban road fatality statistics
That's the name they give the eyeless beast that
Stalks our ravaged cities to prey on young gazelles
Still cradled in the morning of their sucklings
Leaving behind only a thick porridge of bloodied grey matter on
The spot where a beautiful young woman was killed here
Yesterday

Margaret Atwood's Modest Proposal

*The Handmaid's Tale*¹

Margaret Atwood begins her novel *The Handmaid's Tale* with two dedications and three epigraphs: a passage from *Genesis*, a passage from Jonathan Swift's "Modest Proposal," and a Sufi proverb. This abundance of preliminary matter establishes a frame through which we read the novel, just as a frame around a painting tells us to read the enclosed space in a certain way, as an art object, an object re-presented in a way that calls attention to its special relationship to surrounding objects. We look through—not at—the frame, but its presence has already categorized the object within and structured the way we will view it. Similarly, Atwood's interpolated texts set up a frame that asks us to read the rest of the book in a particular way.

To frame means, among other things, to utter or articulate, to fit or adjust to something, to enclose, to shape or fashion, to invent or imagine, to plan or contrive, to devise falsely (to frame up); all of these meanings resonate in *Tale*. In Gilead, women have been framed. Framed by their red robes and wide wimples, the handmaids are clearly visible, marked and delimited by their social status. For the wearer within the frame, the wimples serve as blinders; to look *through* them is to see only straight ahead, a narrowed view of the world. For us as readers, to look *at* the wimples is to read the authoritarian practice of Gilead which attempts to control women, and to permit only one view of reality. By decoding Atwood's framing texts, we can read the frame itself as well as reading through it. Such a reading may in fact expand our view, for it adds layers of inference and possibility. Many critics

have discussed one of the framing texts, the Historical Notes section at the end. Indeed, this topic is the focal point of articles by Arnold E. Davidson and Patrick D. Murphy. Davidson considers the political implications of the Notes, while Murphy examines this section of the novel as a structural device. For other analyses of the Historical Notes, see, for example, Deer, Lacombe, LeBihan, Rubenstein, Stein, Tomc. Thus, while this section has received substantial attention, few critics have spoken about the prefatory material. Lucy M. Freibert addresses the dedication and all of the epigraphs, although she speaks in detail only about the material from *Genesis*. She remarks that the epigraph from Swift prepares us for political satire. Nancy V. Workman analyzes the Sufi proverb and its meanings for the novel. She mentions the Swift epigraph in passing, notes that it is “readily understood” and relates Swift’s exaggerated satire to Atwood’s exaggerated satire of American Puritanism and the Moral Majority (11). Linda Wagner-Martin discusses the novel’s dedications briefly. Sandra Tomc explores in greater depth some of the ironic implications of the dedications. I will consider all of the prefatory framing matter here, and focus in particular on the Swift epigraph. I shall argue that this epigraph serves larger thematic and stylistic purposes in Atwood’s novel. By examining these initial framing devices, I hope to ask useful questions about the narrative voice and to extend our readings of the novel.

Before considering the preliminary framing matter which will be our central concern here, it will be useful to sketch out the workings of the book’s “Historical Notes,” the concluding frame. This chapter, a report of an academic conference about Gilead held at the University of Denay, Nunavit (“deny none of it”), serves many functions. For one, the academic discourse satirizes academic pretension. More seriously, through its sexism and moral relativism it establishes ideological parallels between the dystopias of Gilead and the post-Gileadean society. Rhetorically, the speaker at the conference, Professor James Darcy Pieixoto, continues the process of ironic layering of texts which the multiple epigraphs have initiated. Pieixoto has in fact assembled Offred’s story, rearranging and transferring her audiotaped oral narrative into the written text that is the eponymous story. Thus, through his editorial acts, and now, in the novel’s narrative present, through his conference presentation, Pieixoto provides another narrative voice, another layer of interpretation to frame the handmaid’s narrative. His narrative includes information about Offred’s escape

from Gilead and her recording of the story which, puzzlingly, she does not provide. Moreover, in bracketing her tale, his text reiterates the tension between Offred's words and patriarchal control of her story which forms the crux of her tale. We shall have more to say later about the ways in which Pieixoto misreads Offred's tale.

Additionally, the "Historical Notes" section furthers the satirical purpose of the novel. In describing the function of this frame, Patrick Murphy explains it as a device to solve a problem facing writers of dystopian speculative fiction: if the dystopian world is too far removed from ours, our reading may lead to "cathartic reduction of anxiety" (26) with no impulse to act in our world. The reader who is too comfortable may read for escape or to "reinforce smug assumptions" (26). To reduce this distance, and induce a "discomforting" reading, the author employs a framing device "intended to reduce the distance between tenor [relations in the empirical universe] and vehicle [relations in the fictional universe] and thereby further the fundamental purpose of this SF subgenre: to prompt readers to change the world" (Murphy 40, bracketed text from Suvin 70). Murphy notes that while it has "historical precedents in the 'discovered manuscript' device used by Swift . . . and others, pseudo-documentary framing" is a more appropriate strategy for contemporary readers because it is closely related to "journalistic and academic writing conventions. . . [influenced by] 'new journalism' and the popularity of the 'non-fiction novel' " (27). To Murphy's categorization of *Tale* as dystopian science fiction, I would append, as others have suggested, the label of satire (and also, the labels of journal, epistolary novel, romance, palimpsest).² Satire, like dystopian science fiction, is a genre which addresses its exaggerated version of present evils to readers who have some power to act and, by this means, hopes to bring about social and political change. Offred's original text, recorded on audiotape, is presumably intended to inform a larger audience about Gilead and thus to serve the same purpose of bringing about action to extirpate the horrors of the dystopia.

This dystopian-science fiction-satirical-journal-epistolary-romance-palimpsest text, then, this *Tale*, is the story of a rather ordinary, educated, middle-class woman who is framed by, but (presumably) escapes from, a dystopian misogynist society. How appropriate to frame (bracket) her story with a dedication to Atwood's ancestor, Mary Webster, who escaped hanging as a witch at the hands of the dystopian misogynistic

Puritan Massachusetts. Because the rope broke and the law of double jeopardy saved her from being tried again, Webster escaped from death and subsequently moved to Nova Scotia, a more liberal society. Counterpoised to Webster, the novel's other dedicatee is Perry Miller, an American scholar of Puritanism (a teacher of Atwood's when she was at Harvard). Sandra Tomc demonstrates that the juxtaposed dedications posit the ironic relations between scholars and the texts they (mis)read, between the events of history and the historians who (mis)interpret them. In explicating and valorizing the texts they interpret, both Pieixoto and Miller ignore the deeply misogynist strain of Gileadean and Puritan cultures. Pieixoto urges the conference audience to suspend moral judgment in studying Gilead; Miller was in the vanguard of American scholarship that celebrated the Puritan vision as quintessentially American (Tomc 80). Observing that the ironic pairing of Webster and Miller at the start parallels the pairing of the handmaid Offred and Professor Pieixoto at the end, Tomc notes "the issue in both cases is the failure of the female object of study to fit the patterns of inquiry set out by her male scrutinizer" (81). Moreover, because they do not fit these "patterns of inquiry," Offred and Mary Webster are able to escape from the traditional plots scripted for (or rather against) women, and thereby to elude not only the scholars who study them, but also the rigidly punitive societies that seek to destroy them.

Like the dedications, the epigraphs chosen as framing texts are drawn from the domains of history, literary history and religion, thus pointing to a wide scope of issues, to a seriousness of purpose and, also, to the persistence over time of the problems the novel will raise. These preliminary interrelated texts signal the reader that several discourses will be juxtaposed; several layers of meaning and language will be superimposed upon each other, and played against each other to produce ironic effects.

Because irony is a chief feature of the novel, and one of the components of satire, a brief discussion of its purposes is in order. A useful place to begin our understanding of irony is Linda Hutcheon's discussion. Describing the complex, multifaceted uses of irony, Hutcheon notes that its tone extends along a range that begins with the mildly emphatic and continues through the playful, ambiguous, provisional, self-protective to the insulting, the subversive or the transgressive (221). She offers a definition of "irony as the interaction not only between ironist and interpreter but between different meanings, where both the said and the unsaid must play

off against each other (and with some critical edge)” (220). Moreover, irony may be a device which creates a community of knowing readers who are complicit in their exclusion of the targeted groups, those other readers who do not comprehend the point of the irony. With this in mind, let us resume our readings of the prefatory matter of *The Handmaid’s Tale* to discover how the ironizing frame of the novel is constructed.

Just as the double dedication suggests ironic possibilities, the biblical, Swift and Sufi epigraphs open up spaces for further ironic readings. Because others have addressed the biblical and Sufi material, we shall consider them only briefly here, and then focus our attention on the Swift text which needs further critical explication. In her analysis of the Sufi proverb, Nancy V. Workman explains that punning, multiple meanings and paradox (discursive strategies central to *The Handmaid’s Tale*) are central components of Sufi writings. She finds that the “inwardness and language play” important to the Sufi mystical tradition structure the novel and provide the narrator with “the power to shape reality” (18). However, we must be aware that the reality Offred shapes is a private one; her world is a narrow cell-like room within which she is free to imagine and meditate as she chooses.

In contrast to Offred’s constrained shaping of reality, the totalitarian government of Gilead appropriates biblical texts to institute and enforce harsh political control, to shape a political reality for its citizens. Lucy M. Freibert discusses the religious hypocrisy of Gilead and explores the comic implications of the biblical allusions and parallels, noting “humorous correspondence between the biblical account and Atwood’s tale” (283) and outright “high burlesque” (284) in the prayer scene preceding the impregnation ritual. The epigraph biblical text *Genesis* 30: 1-3 suggests the importance of children to women and raises the issue of male control over women. Recontextualizing this passage, Gilead turns Rachel’s anguished plea for children into the pretext for instituting a new domesticity based on the sexual triangle of a man and two women. In the guise of a re-population program, Gilead reads the biblical text literally and makes it the basis for the state-sanctioned rape, the impregnation ceremony the handmaids must undergo each month. In this recasting of the biblical passage, Gilead obliterates the emotional meaning of the story and, instead, turns a woman’s desire into an instrument of male control.

Moreover, on a more figurative level, the choice of a biblical text for the epigraph suggests that spiritual as well as political significance is at issue in

the novel. The state-controlled religion of Gilead, like the patriarchal Israelite society and the Puritan theocracy of Massachusetts, offers its adherents little spiritual sustenance. Its belief system is a harsh theology based on a judgmental father god rather than on a nurturing divinity. The state cynically selects the texts which it privileges to authorize its political control, and promulgates religious rituals (such as the Salvagings, Particutions and Prayvaganzas) as “steam valve[s] for the female elements” (390). Its written texts are subject to state control. Bibles are kept locked up, and only the men are legally allowed to read them. Computer-banks of prayer machinery print out prayer scrolls and intone them in metallic monotones, but no one reads or listens to the prayers: “you can’t hear the voices from outside; only a murmur, a hum” (216). Even worse, neither Offred nor her partner (and possibly no one else in Gilead) believes that the intended audience—God —“listens to these machines” (217). Consequently, the computer prayers are voices which fall upon deaf ears, just as Offred’s voice falls upon deaf ears, unheard or misheard. Since Pieixoto finds her audiotapes so many years later, hidden in a trunk in what was once the city of Bangor, Maine, we must assume they did not succeed in their purpose of conveying the story of Gilead to her contemporaries.

Another voice whose urgent, impassioned call to action was not heard by his contemporaries is the voice of Swift’s Modest Proposer. Atwood’s choice of an epigraph from “A Modest Proposal” invites us to explore thematic and stylistic parallels between her text and Swift’s, and leads us to posit ironic readings of the narrative voices. The satire in each case depends upon an ironic narration, the “proposal” or “tale” of a supposedly artless observer who reports an appalling situation in a relatively flat style. The targets of satire are repressive governmental policies which produce worse harm than the problems they set out to solve. Swift, the brilliant Irish political satirist and clergyman, published his “Modest Proposal” in 1729 to expose the damaging consequences of British economic policy toward Ireland. Atwood, the brilliant Canadian novelist, published her *Handmaid’s Tale* in 1985 to expose the damaging consequences of patriarchal misogyny in an imagined state, which Atwood alleges is not entirely fictional.

The passage which Atwood appends in her epigraph reads: “but as to myself, having been wearied out for many years with offering vain, idle, visionary thoughts, and at length utterly despairing of success, I fortunately

fell upon this proposal.” Whose is this voice? Is it the voice of Swift, the outraged public man who seeks to ameliorate the problems of a debt-ridden, colonialized Ireland? The Proposer, who frames— in a data-filled, matter-of-fact report— a most heinous solution to the problems of Ireland’s poverty and overpopulation? Critics are still asking: How are we to read the connections between the voices of Swift and his Proposer? Swift chose the “Modest Proposal,” a genre popular in his time,³ as his frame “to reduce the distance between tenor [relations in the empirical universe] and vehicle [relations in the fictional universe] and thereby further the fundamental purpose of this . . . subgenre: to prompt readers to change the world” (Murphy 40, bracketed text from Suvin 70). His satire is powerful in part because it is directed at its readers, both the educated business class of England and the oppressed Irish. English and Irish Protestant mercantile interests might speak in exasperated, voices about the Irish poor, as does the Proposer. Or they might suggest policies as detrimental to Ireland as those of the Proposer, without realizing the tragic consequences of such legislation. On the other hand, many of the remedies the Proposer discounts as being ineffective or impossible to realize, such as the refusal to purchase foreign manufactured goods, are options available to the Irish themselves.

Whose voice(s) does the author of *Tale* mean to imply by the epigraph? Who are we to suppose is the equivalent of the Proposer? There are layers of authors: the imputed author, the handmaid Offred who narrates the tale, the archaeologist Pieixoto who pieces together the fragments of audiotaped oral narration to assemble the manuscript. Whose voices emerge from this layering, and with what degree(s) of innocence? And what are the targets of the novel’s satire? What are we to make of the novel’s use of romance story conventions? Should we conclude that because it uses the romance plot—the rescue of the helpless female victim by the mysteriously dark, silent lover—the tale is therefore retreating from politics and public life into romantic fantasy? Or is the tale satirizing the woman who would choose this plot for herself? Or is the tale satirizing those readers who do not see that the romance conventions are also a level of irony (Tomc 82)? Or is the tale satirizing all of the academics who attempt to pin down its voice and propound our own interpretations?

Swift’s “Modest Proposal” and Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* share many stylistic and thematic features. Stylistically, both play with the range of possible irony. Both create characters (the Proposer, the Commander and

the Professor) whose smug certainties are punctured by ironic narration. Thematically, both texts establish metaphorical links between women/animals/ procreation/ food. Both paint graphic pictures of the horrific consequences of misguided political policy. Swift's text demonstrates the tragic effects of English colonial policy which reduced Ireland to poverty & famine. Atwood's novel depicts the ravages of a fictional totalitarian regime (although Atwood insists, in an interview in *Quill & Quire*, that "there's nothing in the book that hasn't already happened"). In both cases, one social dilemma addressed is that of population. The "Modest Proposal" seeks to solve the problem of Irish overpopulation; the rulers of Gilead are obsessed with resolving their crisis of underpopulation, for industrial pollution and experiments in biological warfare have produced the sterility that led to underpopulation. In each case, the measures taken to rectify the population are draconian. Gilead resorts to the desperate remedy of enforced sexual servitude; the Proposer suggests another desperate remedy, cannibalism. The voice of the Proposer, like that of Gilead, is definitely hostile to women (note that the possibility that Swift was also a misogynist is a matter of some critical debate).⁴ Both the Proposer and the government of Gilead seek to control and appropriate women's sexuality and to commodify their children.

In both texts, there are deprecating references to women as animals, especially breeding animals. Ofglen is a "trained pig" (26), the handmaids are like "caged rats" (90). Offred sees herself as a "prize pig" (90), and "an attentive pet" (238). She refers to the handmaids as two-legged wombs. She thinks of a Commander as a "rutting salmon" (p. 282). In "Modest Proposal," a similarly reductive perspective prevails. Women are compared to brood mares, calving cows or sows in farrow. Charles Beaumont finds that in its thirty-three paragraphs of text "Proposal" uses the terms "breed" or "breeders" six times, and "dam" (in the sense of female progenitor) twice (105-107).

Body parts of men as well as women (often exaggerated or grotesquely depicted) figure prominently in each text. In *Tale*, Offred sees worms as "flexible and pink, like lips" (p. 23); she describes the Commander's penis as a "tentacle," "blind," like a slug (113). The sexual politics of Gilead foregrounds sexuality as reproduction, and leads the narrator to view the world in terms of reproductive functions. Offred perceives flowers as "the genital organs of plants." As a result of this distorted vision, as Roberta Rubenstein notes, "distinctions between human and non-human are grotesquely inverted or reduced" (107). The hanged bodies of Gilead's victims are suspended from

the walls of the former Harvard Yard like slabs of meat on meathooks. With bags over their heads, they are anonymous, featureless. Offred contemplates this process of dehumanization: "This is what you have to do before you kill. . . You have to create an it, where none was before. You do that first, in your head, and then you make it real" (249). The "Modest Proposal" employs a similar strategy of dehumanization; the Proposer describes infants as "useless mouths" (17); Beaumont counts five uses of the word "carcass," and four appearances of "flesh" (105-107).

Just as women in Gilead have become property of the state as child-bearing machines, the children they produce are commodified. In *Tale*, bearing a child insures the handmaid's survival, while handmaids who fail to produce progeny after three postings are exiled to the toxic waste colonies. Because of their enhanced value, pregnant handmaids flaunt their status. But they lose all rights to the infants after parturition: the babies become the property of the Commanders' wives. However, as a result of environmental pollution, many babies are born deformed and thus fail to actualize their commodity value: they are "Shredders" rather than "Keepers."

In "Modest Proposal," of course, the sole value of children is as marketable commodity. But market value here depends on weight and flavour. Children are described as "plump," "fat," or "fattest." Infants are reckoned up in terms of how many portions they will make: "a well-grown fat yearling child . . . roasted whole, will make a considerable figure at a Lord Mayor's feast, or any other public entertainment" (16); "a child will make two dishes at an entertainment for friends; and when the family dines alone, the fore or hind quarter will make a reasonable dish" (13). Additionally, children are compared to venison or suckling pig, and recipes are offered.

The "Modest Proposal" continues to shock with its vitriolic satirical suggestion of cannibalism. But there are dark echoes of cannibalism in *Tale* as well, which it will be worth considering. Indeed, Atwood's first novel was *Edible Woman*, in which the narrator Marian MacAlpin perceives herself as a commodity that her fiance Peter plans to consume. She thinks of herself as analogous to the rabbit he hunts and eviscerates; she runs away from the camera he seeks to "shoot" her with. In the conclusion, she bakes a cake in the shape of a woman and asks him to consume it instead of her. (For an exploration of the food imagery in *Edible Woman*, see MacLulich, who reads the novel as a version of the "Gingerbread Man" folktale.)

Atwood has clearly been fascinated with the idea of cannibalism. She has treated this subject playfully in at least one other context. In 1987 *The CanLit Foodbook: From Pen to Palate—a Collection of Tasty Literary Fare*, edited and illustrated by Margaret Atwood, was published.⁵ Written as a fund-raiser for Canada's Anglophone P.E.N., the book is a compilation of authors' favorite recipes, and selections from Canadian authors containing descriptions of food or meals. Atwood cautions her readers that this is not exactly a cookbook. Indeed, chapter nine is titled: "Eating People is Wrong: Cannibalism Canadian Style." In her foreword, Atwood tells us:

Chapter nine is devoted to cannibalism, metaphorical and actual, of which there's a surprising amount in Canadian literature. It appears to be one of those thrill-of-the-forbidden literary motifs, like the murders in murder mysteries, that we delight to contemplate, though we would probably not do it for fun, except in children's literature, where devouring and being devoured appears to be a matter of course (4).

In her selections for this chapter, Atwood includes the passage in which Marian MacAlpin bakes and decorates her woman-shaped cake. Atwood comments in the foreword that collecting recipes and "pestering writers" took a long time: possibly she had begun thinking about the *Foodbook* at the time she was writing *Tale*. Of course, the tone of the foodbook is much lighter than that of *Tale*. Alluding to cannibalism in connection with Hitler's policy of extermination establishes a much more serious context in *Tale* than in the tongue-in-cheek cookbook. Yet, this conflation of serious and comic is a recurring feature in Atwood's work. In fact, her playful *Foodbook* is a fund-raiser for the serious purpose of raising money on behalf of writers who are political prisoners.

Cannibalism, to the extent that it may ever have been actually practiced (apart from the desperate cases of stranded disaster survivors in extreme conditions), is an act of aggression against an other, a powerless, but somehow potentially dangerous and fearsome victim. We would apply the cannibal label only to alien others, whom we perceive to be savages beyond the pale of civilized humanity, for cannibalism is a powerful taboo, which has, as Atwood notes, the power to horrify and titillate readers. The cannibal theme is carried out in several ways in *Tale*. On some level, the foods the handmaids eat, symbolic representations of wombs and fertility (pears, eggs, chickens, bread described as baking in the oven), are analogues for their bodies. Additionally, one of Offred's flashback memories recounts her childhood fear of cannibalism. When her mother described the deaths of

victims in Nazi concentration camps, she talked about people being killed in ovens. As a young child, not comprehending, Offred believed that these people had been baked and eaten. "There is something especially terrifying to a child in that idea. Ovens mean cooking, and cooking comes before eating. I thought these people had been eaten. Which in a way I suppose they had been" (187-88). By means of this digression, Offred makes explicit the analogies between Gilead and Nazi Germany, and between her tale and "A Modest Proposal." In all cases, we have dystopian societies that are devouring their children.

Having explored some of the thematic parallels, let us now turn to the stylistic parallels between Atwood's and Swift's texts. These stylistic strategies hold the key to our readings of the texts, for through their styles the narrators establish their relationships to their texts and present themselves as subjects of the reader's interpretations.

Discussing the style of "A Modest Proposal," Charles Pullen writes that the Proposer "is quite capable of irony and anger: what he is incapable of seeing is how monstrous his marvelous solution is" (77). Further, "The Proposer is . . . highly skilled, knowledgeable, imaginative . . . He is also a captive of his style which simply has no need or room for emotion, for morals, for human implication. Solving the problem is all: he possesses the rhetorical structure, the proper language and the necessary knowledge" (79). This characterization of the Proposer's style applies equally to the first of the two male voices in *Tale*, the voice of the Commander (the state). The Commander, "highly skilled, knowledgeable, imaginative," is smugly certain that he has solved "the woman problem." But he is more sophisticated than the Proposer. Aware of the human implications, he is nevertheless pleased with his solution. In conversation with Offred, he lapses into cliché, thus signaling that his response is superficial, trivializing both the issue and the person he is answering. His response again relies on dehumanizing and cannibalizing the victims: "You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs" (273). He also acknowledges that "better never means better for everyone. It always means worse, for some" (274). Thus women become for him the eggs which are broken and consumed to create a better life for the patriarchal ruling class.

The Commander is evasive and trivializing about the human implications of his political revolution. On the other hand, we note that Professor James

Darcy Pieixoto (the voice of the academy) who speaks in the Historical Notes section, is willing to remain oblivious to the “human implication” of Offred’s tale, the story he has pieced together from fragments. His distanced, objective reading is at cross purposes with Offred’s subversive political intent in recording her tale. Accordingly, his neutral stance highlights his links to the Commander, and serves to accentuate the satirical purpose of the novel. As Pullen notes in continuing his discussion of the Proposer’s style: “Only a style of antiseptic distance could ignore the potential for horror in this” (80). The last of the narrators of *Tale*, Professor Pieixoto prides himself on his “antiseptic distance,” his fitting, proper, moral relativity. Ignoring the horror of Gilead, he warns his audience “we must be cautious about passing moral judgments upon the Gileadeans. Surely we have learned by now that such judgments are of necessity culture-specific. . . . Our job is not to censure but to understand” (383). Thus, Pieixoto adheres to a reading practice that remains distanced from dystopian or satirical narratives, reading for escape or for comfort rather than as an impetus for action toward social change. It is this kind of distanced reading which perpetuates the dystopia of Gilead in its current avatar in Nunavit.

We now turn to the central narrative voice in *The Handmaid’s Tale*. What are we to make of the voice of Offred, the handmaid whose oral narration has been transcribed by Pieixoto? Glenn Deer has analyzed the voice of the narrator, and finds her to be not as innocent as we might first suppose. Deer notes that Offred is a gifted storyteller; she does not remain an artless narrator. To some extent she is complicit in the story she tells, a story which foregrounds violence. “In *The Handmaid’s Tale* we are guided by a cunning implied author, a voice that feigns weakness in the guise of Offred, her narrative mask; but this voice cannot help but advertise the control and strength of its origins: Margaret Atwood. . . [T]hough the reader has participated in the construction of this story, responsibility for its pain and power lies in the rhetorical will of the author” (230). Deer argues that Atwood must create a skilled storyteller in order to achieve her rhetorical goals. I would like to push Deer’s point somewhat further, to argue that the power of the novel comes precisely from the tension produced by just this layering of narrative voices. By reading the slippage between the voices of Offred and Pieixoto and the “rhetorical will of the author” we become aware of the layers of irony, “the interaction. . . between different meanings. . . with some critical edge” (Hutcheon 220). Similarly, it is in the slippage between the

skillful speech of the Proposer and the “rhetorical will” of Swift that the irony of “A Modest Proposal” resides.

A key stylistic feature of *Tale* is its use of layers of textual material to establish frames that set up ironic oscillations of meaning. The epigraphs, historical notes and dedications are part of this process, but even within Offred’s narrative the novel employs this ironic layering device. First, we note that Offred’s text, the main portion of the novel, is Pieixoto’s piecing together of recorded fragments. Second, within the tale puns, digressions, flashbacks, asides, rewordings, abound. Offred sometimes retells the same event in different ways, reminding us that this is a “reconstruction” or an “approximation.” Thus, Offred’s words continue the pattern of layered texts, overlapping voices within the novel. Jill LeBihan notes that this textual layering functions to problematize the Gileadean notion that there exists one truth, one officially sanctioned version of reality: “the novel constantly reiterates its uncertain, problematic relationship with the concept of a single reality, one identity, a truthful history” (96-97). Further,

the dystopian genre and temporal shifts are ways of drawing attention to the frame, the arrangers, and the white space and flat surfaces which make perception . . . possible (104). . . *The Handmaid’s Tale* is dystopian fiction, but also historiographic metafiction with a confessional journal-style first person narrator. The single identifiable generic frame is stretched to include as many different writing strategies as possible within its construction. But the story once in print . . . is not under the subject’s control (106).

Thus, several narrative conventions exist in tension with each other, challenging the notion of a seamless reality and a unified narrative voice. Similar stylistic strategies are at work in “A Modest Proposal.”

Returning to interrogate Swift’s style, we find that its power stems from this very tension of layered voices. I quote at some length from Clive T. Probyn’s discussion:

[Swift] characteristically works from the margin inwards, leaving us with a false frame, or even several overlapping frames of discourse. . . . The background noise[s] (allusions, . . . genres, styles, . . . asides, . . . disconnections) are endless. There is no one voice for us to interrogate, and . . . [the] text . . . refuses to give us a definitive truth. . . [Swift situates] the crisis of interpretation within the narrative personality, *before* the text reaches the reader of print, when he or she recognizes that . . . to agree with Gulliver we must become horses, or that humanitarianism in Ireland depends on cannibalism. . . . There is no solace or privilege for the critic in all of this. Swift’s narrators are always their own first critics, analytically adept,

logical to a fault, keen students of the literary text. . . Swift's solution to warfare between overlapping texts is to rewrite, recycle, and permanently distort one text by [another]. . . version of it. . . . The subversion of a given text by an incursion from the margin which rewrites either in part or whole . . . [adds] a further and implosive level (25-30).

The overlapping frames of discourse, the background noises (puns, allusions, digressions, memories, retellings, multiplicity of genres, disconnections); these are among the devices which construct *The Handmaid's Tale*. There are many voices, starting with the dedication, moving through the epigraphs and the journal-entry novel to the Historical Notes. The "crisis of interpretation" is situated within Offred and Pieixoto. To agree with Offred, we must become complicit in the voyeurism of Gilead and its sexual and political violence; we must reify the romance plot which engineers Offred's escape from Gilead. To agree with Pieixoto, we must acquiesce to moral relativism and patriarchal sexism. "There is no solace or privilege for the critic in all of this": we must interrogate our own readings; in the person of Pieixoto ("analytically adept, logical to a fault, [a] keen student of the literary text") we have already been subsumed into the text. Layers of overlapping texts "rewrite, recycle, and permanently distort one text by [another]. . . version of it." The incursions from the margins, the dedications and epigraphs which press in upon the text, the Historical Notes which rewrite the tale from a future time add "further and implosive level[s]." Atwood's scintillating satire appropriates and puts to powerful use the very strategies which built Swift's satire.

Let us now turn to the epigraph: "having been wearied out for many years with offering vain, idle, visionary thoughts; and at length utterly despairing of success, I fortunately fell upon this proposal." If we read this as the voice of the Modest Proposer, we see the man who considers himself a practical, decent person, exasperated by the folly and suffering of humanity, delighted to be able to offer a solution to the ills of Ireland.

Who is the equivalent of the Modest Proposer in *Tale*? Let us consider the options. Is it the Commanders of Gilead, who at last have fortunately come upon the solution to the political ills they addressed, and to the problem of women. In this context, we remember that the Commander tells Offred that men from the time before Gilead had lost the ability to feel, and believed "there was nothing for them to do with women" (272). Or, is Atwood's Modest Proposer the voice of the somewhat obtuse, chauvinist historian

Pieixoto who at this point in his professorial career (after what previous encounters with ideas, what manner of “thoughts”?) “fortunately fell upon” Offred’s narrative, which may lead to conference papers and publications, and thus insure his professional “success”? Perhaps it is Offred, who was “wearied out for many years” thinking her “vain, idle, visionary thoughts” in her cell-like room in Gilead, and has now “fortunately [fallen] upon this proposal” to dictate her memoirs as a way to communicate the horrors of Gilead to a larger audience which possibly has the power to intervene in Gilead, or at least to commemorate its history. Or perhaps we have here the gently self-mocking, ironic voice of the imputed author (or of Atwood?). This author has “been wearied out for many years” speaking publicly, writing novels and essays “offering vain, idle, visionary thoughts” and has despaired because the political changes her texts propose have not yet come to pass. However, she has now “fortunately [fallen] upon this proposal” as the cautionary tale which will at last bring others to see the light and to mend their ways. Or perhaps, dear readers, it is we, the scholars who, like Professor Pieixoto, “fall upon” our texts and read into them our own obsessions. Perhaps, it is we who commodify the texts we read and evaluate according to our standards; we who offer up recipes for consuming the texts.

- 1 This article was prepared during a sabbatical leave from the University of Rhode Island. The research was conducted at the University of British Columbia through the generous hospitality of the Centre for Research on Women’s Studies and Gender Relations, Department of English, Library, and the Arts Computing Centre.
- 2 For satire see Hammer; for romance see Miner; for palimpsest see Lacombe; for epistolary narrative see Kauffman.
- 3 The complete title of the work is “A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People from Being a Burthen to their Parents, or the Country, and for Making them Beneficial to the Publick.” Claude Rawson notes that “The form of title is that of many ‘modest proposals’ and ‘humble petitions’ which appeared in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. . . . It captures accurately the conventional postures: concern for the public good, profitability, the air of planned or scientific management of human material. . . . The title would be taken quite straight and give no hint of shocks to follow” (187-88).
- 4 See, for example: Katherine M. Rogers, *The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966), 166-74; Rogers, *Feminism in Eighteenth-Century England* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 58-62; Margaret

Anne Doody, "Swift among the Women," *Yearbook of English Studies* 18 (1988), 91; Laura Brown, "Reading Race and Gender: Jonathan Swift," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 23 (1990), 442.

5 Richard Cavell directed me to this book.

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Mosaic

Who is this love song for
I wonder. I'm kneeling on the floor
suddenly crying to the cat. "Oh, Sammy,
we've lost a lot of people." He comes near
and bumps against my head.

This mother's music for her three babies,
her voice bare and true to all our sorrows,
recalls me from an arid zone
into my own dark water.
Who is lost?

The soul, wandering beyond the body,
weeps for reunion.
It homes on a remembered sound:
an infant playing on a reedy shore
still unconscious of its solitude.

Northrop Frye and Liberal Humanism

Northrop Frye was a lifelong liberal humanist. In 1988 he reiterated what he termed “my own confession of faith as a humanist, and my confidence in the value of what is called liberal education, a confidence that the social and political events contemporary with my seventy-five years of life have left totally unshaken.”¹ In the same paper he celebrated his political values: “I have remained a bourgeois liberal all my life because the serious ideals of democracy—personal liberty, free speech, equality of citizenship and tolerance of variety of opinion—are anti-doctrinaire ideals” (OE 3). This commitment to liberal humanism, which is consistent from the 1930s to the 1990s, has not attracted much attention in the secondary literature about Frye, though there are plenty of discussions of other aspects of his work. Yet liberal humanism is at the centre of his work, and, in fact, gives it its purpose.

What accounts for the silence? Now that liberal humanism is no longer “current” in literary academia, Frye’s advocacy of it is an embarrassment. Especially in Canada, but also elsewhere, there is still great respect for Frye’s work, and perhaps this produces a desire to soften the obvious incompatibility between it and post-structuralist theory by looking at its margins rather than its centre. To emphasize the liberal humanism would be to “date” Frye unkindly by tying him to the long-past heyday of such ideas. Frank Kermode recognized this “datedness” in a recent review: “Times have changed since, thirty years ago, the prophetic Frye was the height of fashion. Nowadays the vogue is different, and grand visions of the human purposes

of literature, and the plights and needs of the human community, cannot expect wide acceptance.”² (Kermode does not ask why this is the case.) Other critics, however, have tried to rewrite Frye to make him look up-to-date. A flagrant example of this process can be found in the editors’ introduction to the Festschrift for Frye’s seventieth birthday, *Centre and Labyrinth*. The title is taken from a passage in the *Anatomy of Criticism* in which Frye offers a clear choice between the centred criticism he advocates and the labyrinthine criticism he rejects, but which the editors prefer. They write:

Frye suggested that, unless there were discoverable in literature a total form, a centre to the order of words, the critic would be condemned to a series of free associations, to exploring “an endless labyrinth without an outlet.” Now, a quarter of a century later, and with the pejorative implication removed, the labyrinths of language—of forms, structures, terms, and subjects—make up both the central preoccupation of contemporary critical writing, and its dispersal.³

The impression is given that contemporary criticism is following on from Frye’s ideas, when in fact it is going in the opposite direction. The editors presume to remove Frye’s “pejorative implication” (which is actually an explicit rejection), and to convert his choice (centre *or* labyrinth) into a combination (centre *and* labyrinth). The whole muddled passage is an attempt to evade the stark conflict between Frye’s principles and contemporary “theory.” Frye was politically centrist, his system was structurally centred, and his thinking was central to the literary humanism of the post-war period. But now we are in a centrophobic period. To add “centric” to a word makes it into a derogatory term, as in “Eurocentric,” “heterocentric,” or “ethnocentric.” The rhetoric of marginality is hostile to Frye’s centrism. Thus the editors “decentre” Frye’s system, by reinterpreting it as a labyrinth. In this paper I want to look at the centrality of liberal humanism in Frye’s work, to clarify the relation of his humanism to religion, and finally to ask how much this kind of humanism deserves its current opprobrium.

“**H**umanism” is actually a nineteenth-century coinage, but it refers to an earlier threefold division of learning set out by Francis Bacon as “Divine Philosophy, Natural Philosophy, and Humane Philosophy, or Humanitie” (cited OED). These three, theology, natural science, and the humanities in modern parlance, have as their respective objects God, Nature, and Man. Interestingly, this threefold division is reflected by three different groups for whom “humanism” is a negative term at present.

Christian fundamentalists see humanism as a secular ideology opposed to religion. Deep ecologists see it as giving exclusive weight to human interests as opposed to nature's. Post-structuralist theorists, though employed in "humanities" departments, see humanism as an outdated relic of bourgeois liberalism.

We can sense Frye's own ideals informing his picture of Renaissance Humanism in *The Critical Path*. The humanist is principally an educator, one of whose most important expressions is the educational treatise. This genre, practiced by writers like Castiglione, Elyot, and Ascham, concerned the upbringing of the ideal courtier, prince or gentleman. Frye wrote educational treatises himself, for example in *The Educated Imagination* and the addresses collected in *On Education*, though his theme is the role of education in a democratic society, not the production of a restricted élite. The Renaissance humanist himself is not a courtier or prince, nor usually a poet, according to Frye: "The humanist was typically a scholar and critic, rather than poet."⁴ Characterizing the breadth of the humanist's learning, Frye could also be describing his own: "Encyclopedic learning is not specialized learning: versatility is a humanist ideal because only through versatility can one keep a sense of social perspective, seeing the whole range and scope of a community's culture" (CP 62). Liberal education is above all a broad education: all specialization must be related to "a comprehensive social vision" (CP 62).

The temper of humanist writing reflects these ideals: "The typical humanist strives to be sane, balanced, judicious; he is not a prophet nor an angry man, nor does he seek a transvaluation of values" (CP 90). In other words, the humanist is an Arnoldian, rather than a Nietzschean. The style of the humanist's writing is in keeping with this moderation: "He avoids both technical and colloquial language, and has a deep respect for conventions, both social and literary" (CP 90). Where recent criticism often includes an uneasy mixture of the technical and the colloquial, the humanist style is accessible without being either esoteric or vulgarized, aiming to reach a wide audience without condescension or cheapening the subject matter. This middle style is essentially Frye's own.

Although Frye places the humanist writer "as socially an insider, near the centre of his society" (CP 90), he defines humanism as primarily individualistic, as tending to the liberation of the individual from the collective mind. In *The Critical Path* he associates humanism with what he calls "the

myth of freedom” as opposed to “the myth of concern.” Roughly speaking, “the myth of concern” is what holds a group, community, or society together; this myth is generally “religious” in the original sense of “binding.” Freedom is a centrifugal or individualist movement, concern a centripetal or collective one. Freedom sees truth as correspondence to reality as verified by the individual. Concern sees truth as socially established and guaranteed by divine revelation. Freedom produces inquiry, concern produces ideology. Frye takes a typically “balanced” view of the two sides, seeing both as necessary, complementary though in tension. But the higher value is ultimately individual freedom: “At the basis of human existence is the instinct for social coherence. . . . Above it is individual life, and only the individual is capable of happiness.” (CP 170) The individual ascends towards this point just as society evolves towards allowing greater and greater individual freedom and happiness.

What does this enviable state, the ultimate goal of humanist education, consist of? It seems to be a purely *inner* freedom, a freedom from outside constraints or determinants, an essentially imaginative (or, to a skeptic, imaginary) freedom.

The basis of happiness is a sense of freedom or unimpeded movement in society, a detachment that does not withdraw; and the basis of that sense of independence is consciousness. It is the articulated worlds of consciousness, the intelligible and imaginative worlds, that are at once the reward of freedom and the guarantee of it. (CP 170)

This vision of the individual freed into a classless and unconstraining society is reminiscent of Marx’s ideal of life at the end of history, but for Marx the means to it is class struggle, while for Frye it is individual education.

Frye’s Utopianism is literary and educational, rather than directly political. The apotheosis of individual freedom takes place only in the imagination; in reality the humanist continues his down-to-earth existence as an educator and respector of conventions. “The real Utopia becomes the social vision of the wise counsellor’s mind, founded on humanistic education” (CP 164). *The Critical Path* was written against the background of the student radicalism of the late 1960s. Frye did not respond favourably to its more theatrical forms of Utopianism, and its rebellion against many of the norms and conventions of the university. “The universities are the social centres of the myth of freedom” (CP 138), Frye wrote. His kind of inner, imaginative freedom needs the *social* protection of an institution whose

structures must be respected because of the cultural liberation they enable. The radical students had a different idea of freedom, and Frye attempts to turn the tables on them by associating their activism with the conservative myth of concern: "there is a strong desire to transform the university . . . into a society of concern, like a church or political party" (CP 138-9). In contrast to this insistence on political involvement, Frye asserts that universities "are by necessity, devoted to the virtues of the truth of correspondence, including objectivity and detachment" (CP 138).

Frye defines freedom as detachment rather than involvement. He saw a danger in the late 1960s that concern over social issues might be used as a mask for denouncing all forms of authority and structure. In his paper on "The University and Personal Life" (collected in *Spiritus Mundi*), Frye dismisses the refusal of *all* authority as infantile. The mature individual "respects authority that fulfills and does not diminish the individual."⁵ Humanist education is based on respect for certain *kinds* of authority, not personal or official, but rather "the authority of logic and reason, of demonstrable and repeatable experiment, of established fact, of compelling imagination" (SM 41).

The full development of individuality, in Frye's view, depends at some points on self-submission rather than self-assertion. Among other things, this humility means not overemphasizing "relevant" reading in courses, because "it is what is irrelevant, in the narrow sense, about what we study that is the liberalizing element in it" (SM 43). Broadening one's horizons means precisely reading about times and places which differ from one's own, and which therefore *lack* direct personal relevance. The liberal creed is that nothing human is alien, or irrelevant. Studying the Greek and Latin classics has never, in the Renaissance or since, provided directly relevant knowledge of one's own society. This distance is what "enabled the classical training of humanism, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, to be a far more genuinely liberal education than it is often given credit for being" (SM 43). Humanist education liberates the individual through respect for the authority of the classics, not through reading those works that seem closest to one's own experience. Authority is needed to ensure that intellectual emancipation can take place. Frye combines both aspects of the educational process by calling the universities centres of "free authority."

Frye's liberal humanism looks to the future as well as to the past. There is

an ethical as well as a historical dimension to his idea of education. He writes in *Anatomy of Criticism*: “The ethical purpose of a liberal education is to liberate, which can only mean to make one capable of conceiving society as free, classless and urbane.”⁶

Studying the culture of the past provides one with a standpoint to criticize the orthodoxies of the present, and the quality of a society’s future depends on its ability to absorb its past through education. Frye defines intellectual freedom as “the ability to look at contemporary social values with the detachment of one who is able to compare them in some degree with the infinite vision of possibilities presented by the culture” (AC 348).

Not only is the student thus freed from social conditioning, but the works studied are as well: “liberal education liberates the works of culture themselves as well as the mind they educate” (AC 347-8). These works are lifted clear of what Frye regards as the bondage of history, and come to participate in “the vision of the goal of social effort, the idea of a complete and classless civilization” (AC 348). The implication is that education makes culture progressive by recontextualizing it in the humanist curriculum. Intellectual freedom is obtained not *from* the past, but *through* it, by means of “the humanistic principle that the freedom of man is inseparably bound up with his acceptance of his cultural heritage” (AC 349). Like much of Renaissance Humanism, this vision offers an ordering or reordering of the past as the agency of renewal and progress, as a project for the future.

How are Frye’s liberal humanist principles to be reconciled with his reputation for holding a religious or mythical view of literature? The general understanding of liberal humanism sees it as moving away from myth and religion towards a belief in the secular progress of humanity through human effort. How can these two seemingly antithetical outlooks be combined? How does Frye combine religion and humanism?

What Frye offers is actually not a religious appropriation of secular literature, as is sometimes implied. Rather, it is a humanist appropriation of religion. Frye’s Christianity at times appears scarcely more orthodox than Blake’s, despite his ordination as a minister in the United Church of Canada. Humanist values always took precedence over religious ones if there was a conflict. Frye was raised in the Methodist Church (one of the three which merged in 1925 to form the United Church). When the inevitable conflict took place between the church’s narrower perspective

and his growing appreciation of the wider world of literature and ideas, he subjected his religious beliefs to humanist criteria. Later he wrote to Roy Daniells about this adolescent crisis: "I think I decided very early . . . that I was going to accept out of religion only what made sense to me as a human being. I was not going to worship a god whose actions, judged by human standards, were contemptible. That was where Blake helped me so much. . . ."⁷ After this crisis, Frye gave his allegiance only to a faith that had been purged of its anti-humanist elements.

Frye sought not merely to make his religion compatible with humanism, but to combine the two. They are not parallel commitments, but form a single one, inspired by Blake. Frye's description of Blake's religious humanism could apply to his own:

Blake never believed, strictly speaking, either in God or in man. The beginning and end of all his work was what he calls the "Divine Humanity." He accepted the Christian position because Christianity holds to the union of the divine and human in the figure of Christ, and, in its conception of the resurrection, to the infinite self-surpassing of human limitations.⁸

This vision of humanity liberating itself from nature and becoming divine is the essence of Frye's humanism, which includes Christianity rather than the other way round. Christianity is simply the exemplary instance of creative human self-divinization. The divine is the human raised to the highest imaginable power, as Frye confirms in the *Anatomy*: "by divine we mean the unlimited or projected human" (AC 125).

This Blakean "divine humanism" enables Frye to perform a dazzling series of syntheses of apparently opposite ideas. He finds both cyclical and progressive views of history in Blake:

There are theories of history as a sequence of cultural organisms passing through certain stages of growth to a declining metropolitan phase which we are in now. . . . There are at the same time theories of history as a sequence of revolutionary struggles proceeding towards a society completely free of both exploiters and their victims.⁹

Like Blake, Frye was able to combine both, though his "progressive" perspective is non-revolutionary. Just as religion is appropriated by humanism, literature is appropriated by criticism. Literature is seen as moving in quasi-seasonal cycles, like the fictional modes which move from myth and romance through high and low mimetic to ironic and back again to mythic. There is no linear progress here: both classical and modern literature have

gone through this cycle. But criticism, as the vehicle of humanist education, should move only in one direction: "Criticism as knowledge should constantly progress" (AC 28). Or, put in another way, "criticism has no business to react against things, but should show a steady advance towards indiscriminating catholicity" (AC 25). Ideally "the systematic progress of scholarship flows into a systematic progress of taste and understanding" (AC 25).

The linear, cumulative movement of critical and educational progress appropriates and reorders the cyclical movements of artistic creation. Literature may go on rolling through its seasonal cycles, but when criticism unites all the works of literature and art into a single unified vision, we move beyond aesthetics into one-way social progress: "the moment we go from the individual work of art to the sense of the total form of the art, the art becomes no longer an object of aesthetic contemplation but an ethical instrument, participating in the work of civilization" (AC 349). Frye often contrasts the organic connotations of "culture" with the liberal, progressive associations of "civilization," not to denigrate either one, but to show how civilization can subsume the works of culture and add power to them by involving them in a new and different project of creating a truly civilized society. Thus he is able to combine the appeal of modernist, cyclical theories of culture held by writers such as Joyce, Eliot, or Yeats, with the appeal of theories of advancing civilization through education, espoused by liberals like Arnold or Mill. The universalizing vision of humanist education turns past culture into present and future civilization, and turns the aesthetic into the ethical.

Only through this critical act of systematizing works of art into a single Form does art become progressive and help forward the movement of civilization. Frye does not talk much about how literature is created; rather, he focuses on how it is taught and received. Nor is the artist as such an exemplary figure for him.

It is not the author, but the reader who is improved by literature. Historically, the arts do not improve, only change. But understanding and appreciation of them *does* improve:

It is the consumer, not the producer, who benefits by culture, the consumer who becomes humanized and liberally educated. There is no reason why a great poet should be a wise and good man, or even a tolerable human being, but there is every reason why his reader should be improved in his humanity as a result of reading him. (AC 344)

Frye rates the creative act somewhat below the critical understanding of it. Creation may be only half conscious, “a half-involuntary imitation of organic rhythms or processes,” whereas the response to it is “a revolutionary act of consciousness” (AC 344). In an extraordinary reversal, the appreciative consumer or critic takes on the transformative vision once reserved for the Romantic poet or prophet. Reading becomes more humanizing than writing.

For Frye, a society is humanistic and progressive in so far as it disseminates appreciation of its past culture. The twentieth-century improvements in the means of reproducing paintings and recording music struck him as not merely technological advances, but as having “spiritual productive power” (AC 344). The increased availability of art to consumers he saw as repeating the original effect of the printing press in spreading humanism. Humanist education, aided by technology, spreads the benefit of cultural appreciation more widely and thus helps to create a classless society. The culture of the past, however much it may have been implicated in unjust class societies, and however fallible, misguided or vicious were the artists who created it, is redeemed by education in the present to enable the civilization of the future.

The culture of the past includes religion. Religious texts should be included in the field of study, but approached from a humanist, not a theological, viewpoint. Frye positions the Bible as the *basis of literae humaniores* or humane letters, whereas in the Renaissance “Humanity” and “Divinity” were seen as separate, even competing, disciplines. In the context of humanist education, the critic should not accord the Bible or other sacred texts any special privilege:

The literary critic, like the historian, is compelled to treat every religion . . . as though it were a human hypothesis, whatever else he may in other contexts believe it to be. . . . [T]he study of literature belongs to the “humanities,” and the humanities, as their name indicates, can take only the human view of the super-human. (AC 126)

Once again, Frye makes it clear that he is taking a liberal humanist approach to religion. Although in practice he focuses on the Bible and western literature, the ultimate dimension of his humanism is global. In the *Anatomy*, when he mentions Indian or Chinese texts, we catch a glimpse of an even wider synthesis and an assumption that all religions and literatures should be studied as a single field. Christianity has no special privilege; the prominence

of the Bible in Frye's system derives only from its importance in the literature of the West. The humanist synthesis of world art reaches beyond the scope of any particular religion: "Religions, in spite of their enlarged perspective, cannot as social institutions *contain* an art of unlimited hypothesis" (AC 127). Humanism contains religion, not the other way round.

Frye's humanism is implicitly trans-religious and trans-cultural in range. At the end of *Fearful Symmetry*, he quotes Blake's doctrine that "all had originally one language and one religion," interpreting it as "the doctrine that all symbolism in all art and all religion is mutually intelligible among all men" (FS 420). This idea of universal cultural intelligibility leads Frye to suggest a new science of anagogy. Jung's idea of the collective unconscious common to all humans is only an adumbration of this new science: "A comparative study of dreams and rituals can lead us only to a vague and intuitive sense of the unity of the human mind; a comparative study of works of art should demonstrate it beyond conjecture" (FS 424).

At its visionary high points, Frye's humanism seems to take on a religious quality, most emphatically when he speaks of moving beyond specific religions. At times one is reminded of the religion of Man that surfaced briefly in the French Revolution, and in general Frye's radicalism has the flavour of the 1790s rather than the 1930s or 1960s. But instead of religions being rejected as outmoded relics of the unenlightened past, they are redeemed and purged of their repressive elements by humanism. In Frye, humanism not only appropriates religion as a field of study, it is structured like a religion, to adapt Lacan's phrase. More precisely, Frye's humanism is redemptive. Not only religions, but also societies and individuals can be redeemed, not through a social or economic programme, but through an educational one. An individual who undertakes a liberal (liberating) education is freed from the limiting particularities of class and situation, into a state resembling the state of grace. A society, too, can attain cultural redemption by fully sharing its own artistic and creative past among all its members, regardless of class.

At the very apex of Frye's vision, all religions, all cultures, and all individuals, can be gathered into the "unity of the human mind." This act of totalization is humanity's act of self-redemption, not granted by God, but attained through the progressive work of civilization. Ultimately, humanity becomes divine. Beyond the myths of freedom and concern lies "a third order of experience. . . a world that may not exist but completes existence"

(CP 170). If we could reach this state, “life itself would be the continuous incarnation of the creative word” (CP 171). Frye’s highest notion of literature is of humanity’s taking over the divine prerogative of creating reality by pronouncing a verbal fiat, like the sacred syllable AUM or OM, which opens and closes the universe in the Indian tradition, or like the Christian “In the beginning was the Word.” Literature is humanity’s collective creative word, ultimately capable of recreating its human agents in the divine image.

Frye chose liberal humanism as his central affiliation in the 1930s, at a moment when it was not a popular choice among intellectuals. It was widely felt that liberal democracy was doomed, and writers gravitated to the right or left of the political spectrum. On the right, some were attracted to Fascism to various degrees (Yeats, Pound, Lewis) while others, seeing the crisis as fundamentally a spiritual one, leaned to religious conservatism, converting to Roman Catholicism (Waugh, Greene) or Anglo-Catholicism (Eliot). On the left, many believed that bourgeois capitalism was simply a preliminary to Fascism, and joined or supported the Communist Party as the only viable route to a just society. Frye’s view had elements in common with both sides. With the conservatives, Frye agreed that culture as a whole cannot be considered without reference to its religious roots. With the Marxists he shared a vision of human progress towards a classless society, though he saw education rather than class struggle as the means. While respecting both Marxist and religious views, Frye adhered firmly to the liberal perspective, and was vindicated in the post-war period, when, as often happens after a phase of ideological illiberalism, liberal values acquired widespread support once again. The 1950s and 1960s were Frye’s heyday, when he articulated a vision of social transformation through education which was widely shared, even by governments. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, liberal humanism went out of fashion again, and while critical theorists, including many of his former followers, moved in other directions, Frye continued to elaborate and extend the visionary system he had first conceived in the 1930s. Thus the two decades of his centrality were preceded and followed by periods of relative marginality.

In the context of post-war liberal humanism, Frye’s version was highly distinctive. Its uniqueness lay in its twofold relation to religion: first, in including religious texts as thematically continuous with literary ones; and second, in giving the humanist project itself the powers of a meta-religion

with the capacity to redeem the individual, the society, and ultimately the world. Most modern liberal humanism offers freedom *from* religion; Frye offers freedom *to* it. He offers to liberate religions from their own sometimes illiberal or repressive institutions into the wholeness of the human endeavour. Religious texts are opened to humanist study and acknowledged as the basis of literatures and cultures.

We can see Frye's distinctiveness by contrasting his position to those of two other major critics of the post-war period, T.S. Eliot and Lionel Trilling. Besides sharing Eliot's view of tradition as "simultaneous order," Frye also agreed that culture cannot be fully understood without reference to its roots in religion. But where Eliot, in *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (1948), held that culture could best be preserved within a class society where each class made its distinctive contribution to the whole, Frye held that the class culture of the past should be liberated into the classless civilization of the future. For Eliot, humanism is a phase in the decline of religion, where for Frye, religion is a phase in the ascent of humanism. Eliot states in his essay on "The Humanism of Irving Babbitt" that "You cannot make humanism itself into a religion,"¹⁰ thus dismissing in advance what I have been arguing Frye was attempting. With Trilling, Frye shared a commitment to liberalism, but Trilling was disturbed by a lack of imaginative power in liberalism: "in the interests, that is, of its vision of a general enlargement and freedom and rational direction of human life, it drifts toward a denial of the emotions and the imagination."¹¹ Frye, however, was able to appropriate the mythic-religious sources emphasized by conservatism and combine them with a humanist, progressive vision. Frye provides the visionary liberal imagination Trilling was looking for.

During the period of Frye's ascendancy, the literary Modernism of the early twentieth century was being identified and accepted into the literary canon (then called "tradition"), and this process provides an excellent example of Frye's idea of past culture being redeemed and transformed into present civilization. Many Modernist authors, including T.S. Eliot, actively disapproved of mass education, yet the study of their works became a key element in forward-looking liberal institutions of higher education. Where many progressives found their aesthetic preferences at odds with their political beliefs, Frye's system was able to incorporate the aesthetic appeal of the sometimes reactionary perspective of Modernism into the liberal project of democratizing society through education. He showed that, placed in the

right framework, myth could be progressive, that the conservative imagination could be absorbed into the liberal imagination.

Frye's reputation rose with the tremendous expansion of the universities in the 1950s and 1960s, which in many Western countries tripled the number of professional "humanists" in the universities. Governments committed themselves to making liberal education much more widely available, assuming that this step would in turn democratize society by ensuring that intelligence, not class or income, would determine success in society. Liberal education was not only a social good, freeing talent previously held in check by class barriers, but also an individual good, providing opportunities to develop one's capacities for rational argument and aesthetic appreciation. The rhetoric of "breadth" and "enlargement" dominated the period; students would be freed from the limiting particularities of their upbringing, class, religion, region, or ethnicity, into a more universal outlook. Instead of being partisans of sectional or sectarian interests, they would become disinterested, impartial and unprejudiced, able to measure the present against "the best that has been thought and said." Frye gave a magnificent structure to the literary dimension of these ambitions.

Frye offered what we might term a "universalist individualism." This means that individuals improve and develop in so far as they learn more and more about the total human achievement, and make this knowledge part of themselves. They become more fully human by absorbing more of the total human experience, especially those parts of it remotest from their own place and time. This process is a centripetal movement whereby different cultures, periods, and works converge in the mind of educated individuals. Society progresses in so far as it creates greater and greater numbers of these universal or liberated individuals. For Frye, they do not constitute a closed *élite*, but a nucleus which could eventually expand to include the whole society. Class divisions would be eroded by liberation of all individuals *from* class, not through struggle *between* classes.

The situation in universities today is very different from what Frye envisaged. Governments have largely abandoned the rhetoric of liberal education, and, seeing the postwar expansion as an expensive liability, have reduced their support. Universities themselves have largely abandoned liberal principles. A new *élite* of administrators has sought to supplement dwindling government funding with patronage from business corporations,

foreign governments and other “interested” agents with specific agendas for the research they are supporting. The liberal ideas of disinterested research and independent inquiry are largely forgotten, replaced by purely pragmatic economic thinking. Universities are increasingly run on the lines of business corporations. Administrators who think in this way are much more likely to yield to various pressure groups, since they have no principles other than economic ones, and see little reason to displease those who are increasingly seen as customers or consumers. Higher education itself is less and less seen as a social good, and more and more as a private benefit or career investment for which the beneficiary should pay to a greater extent.

The content of education in the “humanities” is less and less seen in liberal humanist terms. The dominant rationale for cultural study is no longer the *overcoming of class division*: rather, it is now the *assertion of categorical difference*, that is, the exploration and definition of separate identity-categories constituted by gender, ethnicity and sexual preference. This focus on categories has taken emphasis away from universalism on one hand and individualism on the other. Categoryism, to coin a term for the belief that identity is mainly or exclusively a matter of categories such as gender, ethnicity, and sexuality, has largely displaced the belief in a common human nature *and* the belief in a unique individual self. The predominant direction is now centrifugal, away from the universal individualism found in Frye. The centripetal, universalizing movement is seen as appropriating category differences into hegemonic structures or meta-narratives, of which Frye’s holistic liberalism is a classic example. Meanwhile the idea of a “universal self” is often seen as a cover for a particular category, the white heterosexual male, which has imposed itself as the human norm.

Furthermore, “liberal humanism” itself has become more or less a term of abuse from some theorists. The reasons for this disrepute may be seen, for example, in Chris Baldick’s *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*:

Liberal humanism centres its view of the world upon the notion of the freely self-determining individual. In modern literary theory, liberal humanism (and sometimes all humanism) has come under challenge from post-structuralism, which replaces the unitary concept of “Man” with that of the “subject,” which is gendered, “de-centered,” and no longer self-determining.¹²

The new vision is one of “subjection” to the powers and discourses which “construct” the self. The new rhetoric is of limitation rather than liberation, of particular category rather than of universality.

The charge is that liberal humanism failed to do justice to the variety of human experience, failed to include the different perspectives of those outside the dominant category, and failed to acknowledge the extent of unfreedom in society.

In response, the liberal humanist project can either be abandoned or expanded. Certainly it is true that Frye, like other liberals of his generation, talks about "Man," that he rarely, if ever, addresses the situation of women or minorities, and that, despite some wider gestures, he remained broadly Eurocentric in outlook. But these limitations do not mean that we should abandon his vision. Belonging to a category of identity does not necessarily exclude one's universal humanity any more than it excludes one's particularity as an individual. The three levels of identity are complementary, not incompatible. That liberalism underemphasized group identity, and moved too directly from individuality to universality, is not an insuperable objection, but rather a challenge to include it. The problem of Eurocentricity is another challenge to widen the scope of cultural study and fully realize the vision of liberal humanism rather than give up on it. Frye's justification of reading works that are remote from one's own concerns, besides balancing the current emphasis on works that are closest to those concerns, also points in the direction of world culture rather than simply Western culture as the ultimate framework of study. The universalism of Frye's vision is not the problem, but rather that in practice it fell short of full universality.

Assertions of cultural difference contain an implicit appeal to liberal principles, such as justice, truth and fairness, and assume a liberal audience which can be persuaded, cowed or shamed into redressing grievances. If the dominant group was purely self-interested, it would have continued to exclude, suppress or silence other groups. This was the course recommended by Nietzsche to groups who wish to stay in power. Assertions of disadvantage and difference tacitly assume the continuation of the liberal humanist project, by rightly criticizing it for not yet having been fully realized. Without this assumption, the prospect would be simply be a competition for dominance among various categories of identity, until the final breakdown of the liberal framework.

But liberal humanism is not everywhere suffering the disrepute it has acquired in the Western academy. Its values are very much prized in areas of the world emerging from illiberal regimes of every kind, just as they were in the immediate post-war decades in the West. The same values are deeply

rooted in parts of Western society outside the university humanities departments, now the home of so many professedly anti-humanist humanists. Such documents as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are taken more and more seriously as charters of universal humanism. Organizations such as Amnesty International testify to the strength of global humanism based on a disinterested concern for fellow human beings regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, culture or politics. Amnesty opposes any attempt to dilute the universality of human rights by governments which use appeals to cultural distinctiveness to condone abuses. Even though anti-humanists discount or discredit the idea of disinterested concern, there is ample evidence in aid organizations of every kind that this feeling exists and is strengthening.

The growth of a global liberal humanism outside the academy will eventually find expression within humanities departments, and make their present vogue of anti-humanism appear as the strange episode that it is. At that point Frye's vision, reworked and extended to make it more fully inclusive, may prove to be a valuable guide.

The project is nothing less than a poetics of world culture, a study of all cultural traditions which privileges none and neglects none, and is based on the principle of mutual respect and the belief in mutual intelligibility. Also, as Frye saw, religion should be included in the field of study and viewed from a humanist perspective: the separation of religion from culture is actually a feature that divides the West from other societies.

The degree of contact between the cultures of the world is greater than ever and still increasing; precisely this process creates countermovements of withdrawal, separation, and asserted difference. These centrifugal movements, which have been dominant in literary study recently, need to be balanced by a new centripetal movement towards unity and universality, which should not mean weakening of identity but enriching it through sharing. The study of culture lags behind the global view attained by other disciplines such as economics and ecology, and an overemphasis on the separateness of categories of human beings adds an obstacle to the existing institutional and disciplinary barriers. But world culture already exists just as much as the world economy or world ecology. All that is needed is the will to study it as such. The work of creating and enhancing mutual intelligibility within and between cultures is immense, and requires perhaps the ultimate enlargement of one's perspective, as well as the vehicle of an accessible,

humanist, middle style of writing, and an institutional framework in which basic liberal principles are reaffirmed and respected. We need a renewal of universalism *and* individualism to balance the current tendency to divide human experience by categories. Frye's visionary liberal humanism, despite the limitations I have noted, is not merely a historical curiosity, but a guide for the future work of creating a truly inclusive civilization.

NOTES

- 1 Northrop Frye, *On Education* (Markham, Ont.: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1988), 1. Cited hereafter as OE.
- 2 Frank Kermode, "The Children of Concern," *English Studies in Canada*, 19.2 (June 1993), 199.
- 3 Eleanor Cook, Chaviva Hosek, Jay Macpherson, Patricia Parker, and Julian Patrick, eds., *Centre and Labyrinth: Essays in Honour of Northrop Frye* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1983), ix.
- 4 Northrop Frye, *The Critical Path : An Essay on the Social Context of Literary Criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1971), 61. Cited hereafter as CP.
- 5 Northrop Frye, *Spiritus Mundi* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 41. Cited hereafter as SM.
- 6 Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957; repr. New York: Atheneum, 1967), 347. Cited hereafter as AC.
- 7 Quoted in John Ayre, *Northrop Frye* (Toronto: Random House, 1989), 45.
- 8 Northrop Frye, *Myth and Metaphor: Selected Essays* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1990), 170.
- 9 Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (1947; repr. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969) 425. Cited hereafter as FS.
- 10 T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (London: Faber, 1952) , 475.
- 11 Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (1950; repr. New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1953), ix.
- 12 Chris Baldick, ed., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990), 102-3.

Marsh Lament

From the Journals of Radisson

Being come to the lake height
we drague our boats over trembling ground
of beaver drowning in great soyles.
Herein grows mosse 2 feet thick
just when you think to goe safe and dry.
Dead water out of one hole
and into another.

Just when you think only madmen can help you
just when you lose half your bodie
and women pass you dry as wood
and you eat the cord
having no use of the bow, where then
is Time Past and Plentynesse
when the poore cry daily?
You, called Gods of the Earth, how
will you make your hole in the snowe?

I, here, shall hold to the mosse
and cast forth sudainly
and goe like the frogg
dragging my green boats after me.

Six Love Poems

I

In the marsh there are ruins.
Houses. French drydock.
Bones of foxes, men and cattle.
Mushrooms pursue them.

Now you come out of a farm road
Dust aches in your quiet-place eyes.
I gather a round of blue flags
from a far field. Tributes.

We find in our hands a celebration.
At least my translation staggers
that way in your gone shadow.

II

Rubberneck loves. Stretching
across far frontiers into close woods.
The summer marsh grass is cut.
It will grow again by August.

You are mother earth. Love flies
from your apron. Birds streak banners
across wet lands.

Now let's try again.
There are warm pools to touch,
to brush with our hands. Now.

III

A quilt waves in the wind.
'Reason over Passion' it says
telling the mind (imagine) to take over,
truss up the steaming hands.

It isn't so bad, come to think of it,
as here we are arm-locked
and heaving. A bedroom
of wild rose, fireweed, a set place
of beauty it is, you know.

Come, whisper to me, I need your lips
and a quiet spill of words.
What did you say?

IV

When we arrived at the red beach
there were few sea-signs, a lip of wave,
thin noises of off-shore birds:

You'd warned me: your departure
into silence, turned face,
a private tuning.

So I took off to collect stones,
sing a little song of yearning,
while waiting for the return.

V

Tree frogs in the dripping dark:
from the row of casuraina
a run of answering bells.
Yes, they sound that way
along the hidden rows
of bougainvillaea, poinsettia,
allamanda.

You are somewhere, as always:
the bite of love takes hold
tasting a sharp sweetness,
but how does distance grow?
From night to morning
the taste and fragrance of you
gives strange alarums.

No, not strange, a present love
it is. The yes and no of it.

VI

A certain ecstasy, backyard trumpets
bringing a march
of old and faltering parades . . .

You remember that time,
how in the white sand
certain faces appeared, magic place,
in a special past given over
to your lips wet with new honey,
warm in the afternoon.

Where are the rainbirds now?
Where is the far sun
to bring whatever our love was
to a yellow threshold?

Unpacking the Baggage “Camp” Humour in Timothy Findley’s *Not Wanted on the Voyage*

Some lives
are only seen
through windows
beyond which
the appearance
of laughter
and of screaming
is the same.

...there are no beginnings, not even to stories. There are only places where you make an entrance into someone else’s life and either stay or turn and go away.

FINDLEY: 1975, 217

In 1981, John F. Hulcoop commented that Timothy Findley “has rarely (if ever) received the kind of attention he merits, [and] has, rather, been largely ignored by reviewers and critics alike” (Hulcoop 43). Hulcoop called this marginalization of Findley as a writer to be reckoned with a “sad irony,” especially in light of the fact that, by the year in which Hulcoop was writing, Findley had already been publishing his work since the mid-1960s (43). More recently, Findley has achieved the kind of prominence that make him and his works the subjects of entire books of scholarship, by such critics as Lorraine M. York and Donna Pennee, as well as a plethora of published articles by others, not to mention an annotated bibliography. However, the reasons for what appears to be a reluctance on the part of critics in earlier years to deal with Findley’s work at all probably also inform their later focus on the more “serious” aspects of his novels. The critics seem as uncomfortable dealing with the humour in some of Findley’s work, as they are with the sensibility behind it, primarily because much of the humour is “camp” and the sensibility, “gay.”¹ Their rigorous, often exclusive, attention to his “apocalyptic vision” elides the humorous underbelly of the horror many of his works contain (Hutcheon 216). Ironically,

Findley himself has repeatedly drawn attention to the humour in his writing, and just as tenaciously, critics have largely chosen to “turn and go away” from the notion that “the appearance / of laughter / and of screaming / is the same,” perhaps because it would force a re-examination of the cultural and ideological premises from which their own assumptions and practices arise.

Findley addresses the ways in which contemporary society tries desperately to “normalize” people, social practices, gender, religion, dogma, and exegesis through his placement of humorous elements in stark juxtaposition to horror and history in his novel, *Not Wanted on the Voyage*. Through a radical infusion of “Camp” elements, Findley not only ironizes social practices, but also criticizes the kinds of binary ideologies that function as filters for exclusivity and inclusion on various, coded levels of a social text — and readers unwilling or unable to move beyond the parameters of the “norms” that construct their readings are forcibly excluded from having access to the encoded criticisms inherent in Findley’s text.

By engaging “seriously” with Findley’s text, while ignoring its inversions and subversions of heterocentrism and heterosexuality, critics seem to skirt potential blasphemies precisely because they position their readings in terms of “fable” and “fantasy” as “fiction” (“Fable,” “fantasy,” and “fiction,” are fair game because, in Judæo-Christian terms, these are Othered as much as “folklore” and “fairy tales” are.). Thus, to talk of *Not Wanted on the Voyage* as a “cautionary fable,” as Cude does, or to examine its moral dimensions, from the perspective of metafiction which functions as commentary on contemporary social “realities,” which Pennee does, fails to address the social, ideological, and political framework within which many critics seem to function but are hesitant to interrogate.

Not Wanted on the Voyage has been described as “fantastic,” “moral,” “apocalyptic” (it would be fairly safe to assert that this adjective is one of the most frequently used by virtually all critics who have engaged with the text), “fabular,” “subversive,” “historical,” and “mythical.” Because of Findley’s overt use — some would say abuse, as seen in the reaction to the novel during his promotion tour — and rewriting of the biblical story of Noah’s ark, most of the critics agree that the novel functions in one way or another as “fabular” or “moral” (meta) fiction.² Seldom has any criticism written about *Not Wanted on the Voyage* made *no* reference to parable, morality, or allegory, at the same time as the novel is described as “fantasy”

or “fantastic.” “Fantasy could clearly be used as a vehicle for many kinds of messages,” writes Linda Hutcheon in *The Canadian Postmodern*:

It could allow a novel to escape linear history and plunge into visionary, mythic dimensions. . . . It could also be used to confront moral issues in allegorical form. Perhaps the most daring such use of fantasy in the 1980s was Timothy Findley's *Not Wanted on the Voyage* (1984). The apocalyptic vision of Findley's earlier novels here took on *comic* yet moving and *serious* form in the retelling of the story of Noah's flood. This was a political and moral retelling, though, a story about evil and destruction, both biblical and future. (216, emphases added)

Hutcheon, in passing, acknowledges the novel's “comic” elements, but moves on to the apparently more important “serious” elements. Similarly, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin characterize the novel as “Findley's radical interrogation of the story of the flood,” in which “the great myth of salvation becomes a saga of destruction in the name of minority righteousness and the extension of petty power” (98). They appear equally reluctant to engage in any discussion of the humour and sensibility expressed in specific aspects of the text. While the critical impulse is still to analyze, the resistance appears to be to the naming of the humorous elements of the novel.

In her essay, “Notes on ‘Camp,’” Susan Sontag discusses the difficulties of attempting to describe something that has either “not been named” or resists identification on various levels because it is somehow privately coded (275). She sets the “sensibility” of “Camp” apart from “an idea,” claiming that “the essence of Camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration” (275). And, because, at the time of the writing of her essay, in 1964, Sontag asserts that camp had “hardly broken into print,” “to talk about [it] [was] therefore to betray it” (275).³ In trying to arrive at “self-edification” in her attempts to analyze camp in its varied, fluid constituent parts, Sontag also characterizes it as “esoteric” and an “aesthetic,” always concerned with taste, style, and artifice. She claims that “the bearer of this taste [is] an improvised self-elected class, mainly homosexuals, who constitute themselves as aristocrats of taste” (290). She goes on to explain that,

while it's not true that Camp taste is homosexual taste, there is no doubt a peculiar affinity and overlap. Not all liberals are Jews, but Jews have shown a remarkable affinity for liberal and reformist causes. So not all homosexuals have Camp taste. But homosexuals, by and large, constitute the vanguard—and the most articulate audience—of Camp. (The analogy is not frivolously chosen. Jews and homosexuals are the outstanding creative minorities in contemporary urban cul-

ture. Creative, that is, in the truest sense: they are the creators of sensibilities. The two pioneering forces of modern sensibility are Jewish moral seriousness and homosexual aestheticism and irony.) . . . Camp taste . . . definitely has something propagandist about it. Needless to say, the propaganda operates in exactly the opposite direction. . . . Camp is a solvent of morality. It neutralizes moral indignation, sponsors playfulness. (290)

Beyond the reservations I harbour about the kinds of essentialist assumptions Sontag makes on the basis of race and sexual orientation, as though the affinities she speaks of are somehow in-born rather than perhaps culturally motivated, her points about the effects of particular movements are well taken. While it is not my intention to make sweeping generalizations about a phenomenon of writing that I approach from outside, as it were, I think it fairly safe to say that, as a gay writer, Timothy Findley would be very familiar with the kinds of coded writings that employ camp, and quite deliberately and consciously deploys similar methods to similar effect. "Camp developed out of the need to hide homosexual implications from hostile heterosexual readers while entertaining one's fellow homosexuals," remarks David Bergman (18). But he argues too that "camp is a style. . . that. . . provided a way to talk to heterosexual and homosexual readers simultaneously" (18). I think it entirely plausible that this is one of the reasons many critics have not confronted the camp elements of *Not Wanted on the Voyage*. Bergman avers that the reluctance of readers and critics to engage with camp is the result of a larger gender issue: "Rarely," he declares, "have straight critics—especially straight male critics—acknowledged that their difficulties with a work are related to gender" (106). And, clearly, the position taken on gender issues is politically and ideologically informed.

Despite his concerns about Sontag's "Notes," Andrew Ross acknowledges that Sontag herself has undergone a shift from her original position about the "apolitical" nature of camp. He argues that the politicization of what Sontag earlier referred to as merely "an 'aesthetic'. . . of 'failed seriousness'" challenges directly the "relation between 'artifice' and 'nature' in the construction of sexuality and gender identity" (19). His point that "camp transforms, destabilizes and subverts the existing balance of acceptance of sexual identity and sexual roles" is one that Findley engages throughout *Not Wanted on the Voyage* (18).

"EVERYONE KNOWS it wasn't like that," we are bluntly told in the first line of the Prologue (3). Although the statement functions as a rebuttal to the

epigraph taken from Genesis in the Bible, it also signals our complicity with everything that is to follow, just as we are complicit with what “anyone knows” about Yaweh (71). What follows immediately is a description of the chaos and panic that prevail as the Ark is being boarded:

To begin with, they make it sound as if there wasn't any argument; as if there wasn't any panic — no one being pushed aside — no one being trampled — none of the animals howling — none of the people screaming blue murder. They make it sound as if the only people who wanted to get on board were Doctor Noyes and his family. Presumably, everyone else (the rest of the human race, so to speak) stood off waving gaily, behind a distant barricade: SPECTATORS WILL NOT CROSS THE YELLOW LINE and: THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION. With all the baggage neatly labelled: *WANTED* or *NOT WANTED ON THE VOYAGE*. (3)

At the same time as we are drawn into the chaos in a very tactile way, through the pushing, the trampling, the howling, and the screaming, all of which assault our senses, we are also quite clearly being cordoned off with “everyone else (the rest of the human race, so to speak).” We are “spectators” and we are barred from “cross[ing] the yellow line” — but spectators to what? Through his use of language, Findley signals that this is indeed a spectacle, and that we are to be spectators to excess. “Blue murder” is cliché, but also proleptic, since Japeth, one of Noah’s sons who has been marinated to turn blue, later literally enacts “blue murder”; the “yellow line” functions as a cautionary signal to the reader about moving into uncharted territory without careful thought or guidance; whether or not we can unpack the contents of the “baggage” will determine whether we are “*WANTED* or *NOT WANTED ON THE VOYAGE*” — but again, this will depend upon whether we choose the charted or the coded “voyage” through the text. And we, as readers, must determine who “the *gaily* waving spectators” are, and whether we are among that faction.

The description of what *is* (chaos), is in sharp contrast to the spectacle that is *not* (camp), and we, the implicated readers, are reminded again in the paragraph immediately following that “they make it sound as if there wasn't any dread” (3). Dread is now juxtaposed against what seems like a scene from a cruise:

Noah and his sons relaxed on the poop deck, sipping port and smoking cigars beneath a blue and white striped awning — probably wearing yachting caps, white ducks and blazers. Mrs. Noyes and her daughters-in-law fluttering up the gangplank — neat and tidy — dry beneath their umbrellas — turning and calling;

"goodbye, everybody!" And all their friends shouting; *"bon voyage!"* while the daughters-in-law hand over their tickets, smiling and laughing — everyone being piped aboard and a band playing *Rule Britannia!* and *Over the Sea to Skye*. Flags and banners and a booming cannon. . . like an excursion. (3)

Through the gaudiness of this spectacle Findley engages that part of the human sensibility that laughs inappropriately at funerals — an example of a demonstration of questionable "taste" — and "taste," according to Susan Sontag, has a certain "logic" that is a fundamental, if "ineffable," underpinning of camp (276). "Camp taste," she declares,

has an affinity for certain arts [more] than others. Clothes, furniture, all the elements of visual décor, for instance, make up a large part of Camp. For Camp art is often decorative art, emphasizing texture, sensuous surface, and style at the expense of content. . . . All Camp objects, and persons, contain a large element of artifice. Nothing in Nature can be campy. . . . Rural Camp is still man-made, and most campy objects are urban. (Yet, they often have a serenity—or a naïveté—which is the equivalent of pastoral). . . . Camp is a vision of the world in terms of style—but a particular kind of style. It is the love of the exaggerated, the "off," of things-being-what-they-are-not. (278)

Findley is clearly conscious of the constructedness of his narrative in very particular ways, and his "affinity" appears to be for the "decorative" and the "textured," not to mention the kind of pastoral effect that Sontag describes. The scene is wildly exaggerated, both in terms of the visual picture it presents as well as in the guffaw reaction it provokes in the reader. We *know* this is ludicrous, but the prospect of perhaps being drawn into the alternative story is most enticing! Seeing Noah "relaxed on the poop deck" (*poop deck?*), wearing "white ducks," "sipping port and smoking [a] cigar," while Mrs. Noyes "flutter[s] up the gangplank"; visualizing the "striped awning" and the "flags and banners," and being party to the pomp and pageantry of a departing cruiseship, all comprise the depiction of excess and contribute to the exaggerated style — "things-being-what-they-are-not" — and Findley's manipulation of a scene in markedly camp fashion. The only hint we have that things are truly "off" is in the umbrellas that keep the women dry. And, of course, the Holocaust dream sequence into which we are plunged with Mrs. Noyes, directly after, serves to remind us that umbrellas are poor protection against Flood, whether it be one of fire or water.

The flood of contradictions and juxtapositions of the Prologue also function to set the reader on either single or multiple tracks of interpretation that are likewise full of seemingly inexplicable contradictions. But by

remaining cognizant of the artifice and “things-being-what-they-are-not,” one can begin to make some sense of the camp and coded aspects of the narrative. “Camp taste turns its back on the good-bad axis of ordinary aesthetic judgment,” Sontag reminds us. “Camp doesn’t reverse things. It doesn’t argue that the good is bad, or the bad is good. What it does is to offer for art (and life) a different—and supplementary—set of standards” (286). This refusal to engage in straight binaries also licences Findley to create a god who is very like the God of the Old Testament — intractable, vengeful — and somewhat less like certain Christian doctrine has attempted to re-create him, to a large degree unsuccessfully, in “man’s image,” and as loving and merciful. Unlike the biblical depictions, however, Findley’s god is neither omnipotent nor omniscient, and, according to Mottyl, is merely human. He certainly seems to be lacking some of his faculties, and this lack is demonstrated in the manipulation of one of the Old Testament names for God. The name *Yahweh* is derived from an Old Testament acronym, YHWH, that meant, roughly, “I am that I am,” and was used in place of a name. Judaic Law prevented adherents to the faith from actually pronouncing any one of His names, an edict of which Findley demonstrates an obvious awareness in his reference to “the ten thousand names of God” symbolized by the “pink and ruby dove” that lies as “plain as an autograph written in the dust,” announcing Yaweh’s imminent arrival (9). Findley’s disobedience lies, not just in the deviation from the spelling of the “name,” Yahweh, that evolved from the acronym, but also in the suggestion that, perhaps this god is either not the one of the Judæo-Christian tradition, or that he is the “real” one, and that the tradition has survived because doctrine has kept him alive, misrepresented him, and never acknowledged his “death.” The irony is that, regardless of how we as readers interpret *this* god, he truly is an artificial construction, Findley’s own mythical creation, and likely in “questionable taste” to a Judæo-Christian sensibility, which has similarly constructed its own version of God.

“Everyone knows it wasn’t like that” comes also to apply to the characters of the text, to the gender roles they occupy as well as the ones that they are *presumed* to occupy by a reading audience unwilling to unpack the baggage of those “*NOT WANTED ON THE VOYAGE*.” For even if the opening statement *is* a response to Genesis, as quasi-dialogue it is disrupted by the infinity sign that we — like Mrs. Noyes, who is later attacked by Yaweh’s cat, Sarah, for making the sign with her fingers — are not supposed to recognize,

because it is esoteric (100). As an interruption, the infinity symbol functions as a resolute linguistic break in co-reference: "Everyone knows it wasn't like that" suddenly contains two pronominal constituents without any co-referring antecedents in the discourse. Without its *normative* deictic power, the statement can point in almost any direction *not* sanctioned by the reader. And lacking the stability of an antecedent that links it to a specific place and direction in the discourse, the statement becomes potentially transformative in the syntax, as well as self-referring: "Everyone knows *that* wasn't like *it*." And, indeed, throughout the text, Findley's characters repeat the statement by continually being self-referring themselves, a closed set, as it were, and they disrupt all expectations the reader might bring to the novel. "The Camp sensibility is...alive to a double sense in which some things can be taken," says Sontag. "But...not the...split-level construction of a literal meaning...and a symbolic meaning....It is the difference, rather, between the thing as meaning something, anything, and the thing as pure artifice" (281). Findley uses this difference in meaning to construct differences in gender roles that interrogate the assumed "normative" value of "accepted" roles. He also subverts the Judæo-Christian ideology that prescribes "acceptable" gender roles and sexual expressions and practices in laws that are an affront to the gay sensibility.

Numerous other examples of camp can be traced throughout the novel, and, to do so, it remains fruitful to refer to Sontag's "Notes," which can function as a guide on the voyage, as it were. One of the most intriguing (and, by now, obvious) manifestations of Camp in *Not Wanted on the Voyage* is the character of Lucy. Sontag claims that "the androgyne is certainly one of the great [Camp] images" and that "the hallmark of camp is the spirit of extravagance. Camp is a woman walking around in a dress made of three million feathers" (279, 283). Of course, both these features of Camp are expressed in the character of Lucy-Lucifer, whom Findley, in *Inside Memory*, calls a "seven-foot gent in drag" (227). When Lucy is first introduced in the novel, s/he appears as "a seven-foot woman with a great, moon-white face and jet-black hair," "beautiful," "odd," "disconcerting," "wearing a long, rose-coloured gown with butterfly sleeves," "whose face [is] covered with a strange white powder" (59-60). S/he has "finely drawn eyebrows" and "kohl. . .colour[s] her lids" (283). S/he even wears a "gown of long bronze feathers," which feathers s/he has

littered liberally through the pages of the text, in a gesture akin to what Bergman calls “dropping his beads” (283).⁴ At various points throughout the novel, Findley slyly refers to her “minc[ing] across the deck,” and “gay and disrespectful” (200, 210). Lucy informs Mrs. Noyes that she is “every inch a queen,” and the latter concurs, but clearly not with the sentiment Lucy has expressed, only with the (mis)perceived one (249). Whenever Lucy’s physical appearance is described, the emphasis is on artifice, on excess, on flamboyance, as well as on her makeup, her silks, the trappings of decadence and excess. “Rouge and facial powder,” Bergman reminds us, should we forget, “draw our attention to the beard stubble below” (11).

Mrs. Noyes, thinking about Lucy, reflects:

The trouble was — the Lucy in her mind was a better match than the Lucy she saw. . . in the flesh. Given the romance of daydreams, Lucy’s figure — as it toyed with Mrs. Noyes imagination — was glamorous, soft and feminine. Pliable. . . But once she appeared in all her seven-foot glory, crossing the lawn or sitting with her knees apart on the fence, . . . the image changed so radically — how could a mother not go worrying? (73)

She has good cause for concern: Ham has fallen in love with a “stranger,” while, “in the past, it had always been Japeth and strangers” — and the implication is now clear that these references to “strangers” are specific to men whose sexual and social preferences are *not* heterocentric. And what Mrs. Noyes has merely a dim suspicion of, Michael Archangelis articulates in conversation with Lucy: “The rumour goes you’re getting married. . . . But — he’s — he’s a [man]. . . . But you’re a. . . *you’re a*. . . But you *are* male” (107). Although he is unable to complete his thoughts, Lucy fills in the gender gaps and claims nonchalantly, “I like dressing up. . . . I always have. You know that. . . . Why not? It’s harmless enough” (107). Earlier, she has teased Michael outrageously: “*Wonderful scene*. . . . Very nice try, ducky” (106). Indeed, the whole tone of her conversation with him is rife with artifice, posturing, and italics — the kind of extravagance of expression that signals what Sontag calls “a mode of enjoyment” (291). “[Camp] wants to enjoy,” she claims. “It only seems like malice, cynicism. (Or, if it is cynicism, it’s not a ruthless but a sweet cynicism)” (291). Lucy understands perfectly well that becoming “human” is impossible for her, that regardless of the heavy makeup and the silk kimonos and the whole of her (successful) impersonation, she will always be an “angel.” Once again, “human company” is emphatically “not the same as angel company. *Only an angel knew that*”

(109, emphasis added). Metaphorically, being human means being “straight,” which, by now, in the text, has become a quite undesirable condition, while being an angel means being “gay,” untainted by the corruption that humanity suffers from.

In *Inside Memory*, Findley talks of other ways in which *Not Wanted on the Voyage* embodies Camp, although he does not use that term explicitly:

Yaweh’s Circus and Travelling Road Show — Noah’s magic that always fails. . . . Noah’s wife drinks a fair amount of gin, likes to thump out Methodist hymns on her piano and teaches her sheep to sing. She is the heroine. A blind cat also plays an important role. (222-23, 227)

Summarized this way, it is much clearer than in the novel why these elements are comic: the humour there forms the hidden underbelly of a more readily recognized horror. Because of the fact, for example, that many mythical creatures are represented in the text, and several of them also speak, the singing sheep in this context barely raise an eyebrow. However, upon scrutinizing the Judæo-Christian notion of a congregation as “a flock,” the humorous effects of literalizing the image immediately surface. Teaching sheep to sing is, outside of this context, no mean feat, but in the context of “organized” religion, this is precisely what they do. With a logical extension of the metaphor, what we suddenly have, to our horror, is not a “ginny” farm wife leading her flock, but a wine-swilling priest or minister of some religious institution doing so in the name of sacramental ritual. And, of course, since what Findley attacks — more openly than was first apparent — is patriarchy, what better way to do that than through a “righting” of harmful and damaging myths and binary constructions that seek to assimilate or eliminate?

To talk about *Not Wanted on the Voyage* at all, then, seems virtually to *require* a critical retreat from humour, primarily because of its “subject” matter. To discuss it as a revisioning of the biblical story of the Great Flood, of Noah’s Ark, appears to force the critic, in a weirdly contortionist fashion, to avoid the “blasphemy” of humour, either in addressing the inherent “blasphemy” of the text itself, or in (perhaps inadvertently) assuming a critical position that might, by other critics, be perceived (or misconstrued) as blasphemous itself. *Not Wanted on the Voyage* could very well be seen as every bit as “blasphemous” as *The Satanic Verses*, for example, particularly in its depiction of God as a doddering, ineffectual, petty old

fool who *dies*. Recall that God is symbolically killed by Lucifer, in a proleptic gesture towards his later *chosen* death, when the dog is killed in the Orchard by Lucy. The crown of flies that settles on the dog is recognized by Mottyl to be the same one that settles on the god upon his departure (57). And we realize later that the dog has died in the effort to kill the cormorant, just as God has died trying to eliminate Lucifer (102). One might say that the inversions of the dog and the god are hardly gratuitous, especially considering that one of Lucifer's many names within tradition is Lord of the Flies.

Another of such potential blasphemies becomes apparent in the fact that the god of Findley's text has "not a single female angel — not a single female presence" in his entourage:

Yaweh, of course — as anyone knew — had never taken wives in the formal sense — and, indeed, it had never been rumoured there was even a single mistress. He seemed content and supremely comfortable with all his male acolytes and angels about him. And why not? They had been so impeccably trained to minister to His every need. . . Mrs. Noyes was in a quandary as to whether they were the gentlest creatures she had ever seen — or the most severe. And still, no women and no female angels. It was troubling to Mrs. Noyes — and she had to admit it. (71-2)

Just as it is troubling to Mrs. Noyes, despite the implied logic of the situation, it is as troubling for the reader, whose eye in the text is Mrs. Noyes. The reader becomes complicit with what "anyone [knows]" about Yaweh — but we are left to conjecture on the notion that there are only "male angels and acolytes" who are so "impeccably trained to minister to his every need," and why the inference of the absence of women as immaterial *should* be so troubling. "Camp often. . . depicts reproduction as one of the aspects of heterosexual society that must be inverted," according to Bergman (112). The suggestion that this god and his angels are a completely self-sufficient, and "unproductive" group, at the very least a homosocial grouping, with no need or desire for women at all — "And why not?" — flies in the face of a heterocentric doctrine which is manifest in an Edict from Yaweh to Noah that the latter must take his sons *and their wives* onto the Ark. It is this inversion that contributes to our general discomfort, as critics, with a sensibility that excludes us, and exacerbates our unwillingness to acknowledge that Findley's indictment is of a particularly restrictive ideology that literally outlaws homosexuality. It seems no accident that the mythology he takes on is specifically the Old Testament, the foundation of Judaism and of Christianity. Recall that it is the Old Testament that proclaims sex between

men as an “abomination” and that Findley subverts the heterocentricity of that text by “normalizing” homosexuality and making heterosexual couplings in his novel fraught with dysfunction. As critics, we seem to have a profound aversion to confronting an ideological position such as Findley’s which challenges “normal” gender identity or expressions of sexuality. His radical interrogation of homosexuality as exclusively “normal” pervades virtually every heterosexual (or presumably heterosexual) relationship in the novel.

Investigating the nature of these so-called “normal” heterosexual unions reveals that they are not simply troubled, but almost completely unproductive also; where they are reproductive, the reproduction fails or produces “monsters.” Mrs. Noyes, for example, recounting the story of her marriage and children, tells Emma:

“Years ago, the Doctor and I had a whole other family. Lots and lots of children — ten of them, in fact. But *all of them died*. There was a plague. . . and that killed six of them. . . [T]he other four children died for other reasons: accidents, fevers, animals. It took a very long while for [us] to recover from all those deaths. . . [I]n time, we began again. . . A whole new family. Shem was the first of these children — and, for a while, the only one to live. *We had...two or three more who died*. Then Ham. And then. . . When Japeth was born,. . . Japeth had a twin. . . His name was Adam. . . *We killed him.*” (162-165 emphases added)

Not only do none of her first ten children survive, Mrs. Noyes loses several later to death as well. The child named Adam was a “Lotte-child” (also characterized as an “ape-child” and an “animal”), and, because not “human,” was not permitted to live. But we as readers already know that even the living children are beset by problems which make their lives as “unproductive” and dysfunctional as their parents’ before them — and these are the unions that have been chosen by Yaweh to be saved to propagate the “human race”! Although Noah himself has taken pains to ensure that, if future such “ape-children” be born, the blame will be placed upon Japeth’s wife and Lotte’s sister, Emma, the text has already suggested that the fatal flaw is Noah’s own — and that it will surface again in the child that Hannah is carrying, since that child has been fathered by Noah, not by her husband, Shem. Shem, the oldest, does nothing, we are told, “but eat and work and sleep” (11). He literally waits “for his wife to service him,” and we are left with the distinct impression that she seldom does, having more interest in her father-in-law (11).

It appears that Japeth’s failure to consummate his marriage with Emma is not merely the result of *her* fear. Japeth is “driven to distraction by Emma’s

refusal to sleep with him and *by his own inability to force the issue*" (23, emphasis added). Indeed, "Japeth's quest [is] to find his manhood once and for all — and returning, to slay the dragon of Emma's virginity and kill the giant of his shame" (23). His quest leads him to the Festivals of Baal and Mammon, which Noah condemns as "monstrous," mostly because of "the men who practice. . . phallus worship, falling on their knees before the priests of Baal" (23, 49). The more "monstrous" phallus worship is later Noah's own (and, by extension, culturally heterosexist and Judæo-Christian homophobic insistence on the "perversion" of homosexuality), made clear in the "ritual sacrifice" of the Unicorn, whose "cloven hoofs forb[id] that it should be placed on the altar" but "its horn, of course — the sacred Phallus — [is] acceptable" (271). It seems that the real source of Japeth's grief is gender confusion, enforced by his own father's insistence on the consummation of his marriage. Learning later that dragons are associated with the devil supports the suggestion that Japeth's "problem" is also his "solution," as it were. His obsession with his manhood and with being a warrior culminates in the representation of these conditions in the person of Michael Archangelis:

Japeth had his mind on Michael Archangelis — a figure of glory unlike any he had ever dreamed could exist. The great angel's height — his strength — his golden hair — and his armour presented the most dazzling images of manhood that Japeth had ever encountered.

Only once had anyone come close to matching them — and on that occasion, the manliness had been dark, not golden; terrifying, not glorious.

That once had been on the road to the Cities. (75)

This worship of Michael Archangelis is couched in erotic terms: "a figure of glory" and a "dazzling image of manhood" — but this yearning is disguised because it is juxtaposed against Japeth's frightening initiation experience with the "Ruffian King," which physically marks him as "different" for life. We know that the angel presides over a collection of other angels who are all male, all warriors, and a completely self-contained group, whose "pallid faces [are] fiercely beautiful beneath their golden hair, . . . and whose hands [are] eternally busy. . . burnishing, dusting and oiling their armour and weapons" (71). Much of the language used to describe the angels is "customarily" used to characterize women, but in this case, engenders men, and nowhere in the text are women described in similar terms. These warrior angels represent the "strangers" whom Japeth feels forced to consult about what he does not comprehend. After all, "human company [is] not the

same as angel company,” suggesting that it is a heterocentric social structure that is fraught with difficulty. (109). “Strangers [are] Japeth’s trade,” Findley explains, and, because Japeth is a “sexual ignoramus and a virgin to boot,” and does “not even know what ‘perverted’ mean[s],” he will “have to go to strangers” for help in sorting out his confusion (76-77).

Ironically, Japeth instinctively recognizes when a relationship is healthy, not beset by sexual problems. When Ham and Lucy marry, “Japeth [is] furiously jealous. He surmise[s], quite correctly, that in his brother’s union, there [will] be no pause between the joy of marriage and the joys of the marriage bed” (119). Of course, of whom he is jealous is not made explicit, and the *reason* for his jealousy is only alluded to. And clearly, the fact that there is no uproar about gender or sexual orientation after their wedding, indicates that Ham must indeed be content in his marriage, and quite happily homosexual, since Lucy is “a gent in drag.” Just as clearly, since this is the only “happy” union of all the marriages in the text, Findley successfully addresses reproduction as “one of the aspects of heterosexual society” that must be inverted, by disrupting the binaries that heterocentrism implicitly and explicitly posits as “normal” (Bergman 112).

In a bizarre sort of twisting of fiction into fact — instead of the other way about — many of the critics reinscribe the “factual” nature of the original myth, and excuse Findley’s “blasphemy” on the grounds that he has effectively “contemporized” an ancient (or perhaps exploded an outdated) myth. Ironically, Findley himself would not have registered surprise at an accusation of blasphemy. “Given the subject of the novel,” he reflects in *Inside Memory*, “if someone had called it blasphemous I might have paled, but I wouldn’t have been surprised” (227). In reading to audiences from the text, he comments that “sometimes, when laughter might have been expected, there wasn’t any at all” (227). Apparently, the elements to which Findley *expected* reaction were either not absorbed, or as emphatically ignored by his audiences as they have been by the critics and reviewers analyzing his work.

Camp is a way of moving in and out of “appropriate” modes of expression at will; of adopting and creating discursive practices that operate on multiple levels, not in binaries; of speaking in two or more languages simultaneously; of being detected and hidden at the same time *by choice*. It is a particular form of cultural disobedience that is conscious of its own comic, yet often uncomfortable, relationship with the world — a form of textual

cross-dressing, if you will, or a “mode of seduction—one which employs flamboyant mannerisms susceptible of a double interpretation; gestures full of duplicity, with a witty meaning for cognoscenti and another, more impersonal, for outsiders. Behind the ‘straight’ public sense in which something can be taken, one has found a private zany experience of the thing” (Sontag 281). By engaging only in “the ‘straight’ public sense” of Findley’s work, critics have missed much of the wit within the text, and failed to acknowledge that the “serious” is simply one facet of his work, not the one to which *exclusive* attention should be directed. The humour requires more than mere mentions in passing. Such gestures both point to and detract from the success of Findley’s textual “passing” undetected in the world of the outsider/critic.

NOTES

- 1 I am grateful to Eva-Marie Kröller, of the University of British Columbia, for her discussion of the fin de siècle influences upon *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, and of the ways in which Findley’s text pays tribute to the influences of such writers as Oscar Wilde and F. Scott Fitzgerald. She also drew parallels between this novel and such diverse cultural “phenomena” as *Brideshead Revisited* and the Reagan era in the United States, all of which somehow bore or perpetuated the earmarks of a “camp” sensibility. The idea of examining these camp elements of Findley’s novel, as well as the impulse to explore how Susan Sontag “informed” the text, came from Kröller as well, and I am indebted to her for sharing her broad readings of the novel. For the encouragement to persist in reading the humour in a text that critics see as overwhelmingly serious, I must thank Tom Hastings, of York University. He noted that Findley might as well have had Sontag’s “Notes on ‘Camp’” beside him when he wrote the novel. I hope I have maintained the integrity of the ideas and discussions that Tom and I shared that led, in part, to the writing of this paper, in this form, at this time. And for their careful readings and insights, my thanks go to Aruna Srivastava, Sharron Turner, and Helen Buss, all of the University of Calgary.
- 2 In *Inside Memory: Pages from a Writer’s Notebook*, Findley remarks: “One of our first stops included a visit to an Ontario high school, and one of the first words we heard after my reading from the book was: *scandalous!* And I must admit that, as a reaction, it threw me completely. . . Maybe I’m just old fashioned. Scandalous, to me, still means Scarlett O’Hara dancing in her widow’s weeds with Rhett Butler” (227).
- 3 It is probably worth noting that, thirty years later, camp has become a larger print phenomenon; however, because of its codedness, it may not always be a readily apparent element of any text. Sontag’s essay remains quite relevant nonetheless, and whatever problems that can be identified in the way she engages her subject have, arguably, more to do with the passage of three decades than with her theoretical positioning within her

cultural and historical context. Sontag claims that “apart from a lazy two page sketch in Christopher Isherwood’s novel *The World in the Evening* (1954), [Camp] has hardly broken into print” (275). Although she does not make it explicit here, Isherwood is one of many gay writers who consciously adopt the camp aesthetic as a “code” to different levels of reading and interpretation.

- 4 Bergman actually says that “dropping his beads” is “a dated gay expression” and credits Bruce Rodgers with its definition as “‘leav[ing] broad hints about one’s homosexuality,’ a singularly important disclosure between gay men” (110). I suggest that the feathers Lucy sheds are a similar gesture from Findley to the reader, who will either understand its importance or overlook it because he (and I use the pronoun here deliberately) lacks the semiotic information to decode the gesture.

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Synge on Inishmaan

Each year I come back, others pass away.
The old fade slowly into vague figments,
and with them whole geographies of words.
The young with enough English emigrate;

cramming duffles with coarse dark bread, they go
by curragh to Kilronan (now port-of-call
for commercial travellers), then by steamer
on to Galway, or worse America.

Attrition worries native speech backwards
to the sheer, cropped tailbone of these islands.
Population reaches its point of no
return. Here they think me fond, a dreamer.

Parcelled stone-meadows prove too difficult,
homemade soil reducing to salty crud.
Only the middle-aged choose to stay put,
their flesh toughed up by kelp and sand and sea.

Pussy Dusts a Picasso

Art appreciation:
the softest rag, no polish, no water, no lint
no pressure.

On your toes, a ladder, a chair, a breath
you balance, Pussy, as if
you too are part of
the composition.

Dark head against green face
dark face against the yellow eye
slim bend of Alice and of paint
not one, one, not.

Sometimes I think Pablo left a space
where you, your apron, your rag and
your care
slip in to make it whole.

Once you said
nobody knows these paintings like I do
and it's true.

Close-up you know them
like a bird knows the chimney pots
like a bird knows that little piece of Paris
and from that piece
knows also
all the rest.

The Continuous Present as a Cake

Natalie Barney once said
that Alice and I in search of cakes
were like two miners
in search of a perfect jewel
and this is true.

One lives in Paris for a number of reasons
and cakes is one of the reasons.

I remember especially
a small patisserie
on the edge of the Place des Voges.
Here, one warm autumn day,
Alice and I discovered a gateau aux prunes
so delectable
that we sat right down and ate it on the spot
among sweepers, pigeons and fallen leaves.

Alice, of course, ate like a bird
even when eating cake.
How it pleased me to watch her—
no crumbs ever losing their place
to skitter and slide into her lace.

I would, now that all is over,
give heaven for a bite of cake
and the sight of Alice eating it.

But cakes are for time
and mine is gone.

I Want Edge

An Interview with Timothy Findley

KRUK: I'd like to start by talking a bit about the short stories—a relatively neglected part of your canon. What draws you to the short story form? Do you know when you begin that you're working on a short story as opposed to a novel?

FINDLEY: I'm drawn to the short story by the fact that I guess that was the first thing I ever read. Children's stories, very often, come in that short form, where you encounter the whole story in one sitting. And then of course when you begin to read yourself, it's the most accessible form. There's something about the self-contained entity, that is taken at one dose....

K: Which is satisfying....

F: Yes. And the first things I wrote were short stories, basically: the first things I wrote with any sense that I was sitting down deliberately, to do something other than merely entertain myself, were short stories.... And they were the first things that got published.

In terms of form, the thing is what it is. And I know what it is I'm writing fairly quickly. Once or twice I've been appallingly wrong, of course—thinking I was writing a short story and then discovering I was writing a novel, and *then* not being able to finish the novel. Or vice versa: thinking I was writing a novel and discovering it was a short story. And mostly giving up where that mistake had been made, whether it was made in one direction or the other.

Basically, the stories in *Stones* and the stories in *Dinner Along the Amazon*

were stories from the start—with one exception that I can think of immediately. One, two, maybe three—are novellas, or *extremely* long short fiction, and one is lifted *holus bolus* from a novel.... “Lemonade” is almost a novella. Another is “Hello Cheeverland, Goodbye,” which is an extremely long piece of short fiction. And the other is “Dinner along the Amazon” itself, which is a portion from a novel—the novel that ended up being *Headhunter*. The first version of *Headhunter* got written in the early 1970s and two of its leading characters appear in “Dinner Along the Amazon”: Olivia, who carries the talking fetus, and Fabiana, the gallery owner.

κ: What really strikes me, when you talk about the different ways the stories develop, are the stories “Daybreak at Pisa” and “Out of the Silence,” which you call plays in progress, or ideas for plays.

F: And in fact they are.

κ: Did they ever become plays?

F: Yes, they did. The really sad thing about “Out of the Silence,” the T.S. Eliot piece, was that I got quite far along with it—it was originally called “Rat’s Alley”—and it was about Eliot and his first wife, Vivien. I think it was a very good piece of theatre. But just at that moment, along came a play called “Tom and Viv” and I was stopped in my tracks.

The “Pisa” piece, about Ezra Pound, became a radio play. So that worked out quite well.

κ: I suggest that “Daybreak at Pisa,” where you’ve included the stage directions, can be read as a meta-theatrical, meta-fictional piece, in that you’re dramatizing Ezra Pound’s *self*-dramatization....

F: Yes. I’m still fascinated by that idea: that writing is a performance art. And vice versa also: you mustn’t ignore the fact that the play is still the written word, and the eye can lift it into the mind, as well as the ear....

κ: In *Stones*, the Minna and Bragg stories [“Minna and Bragg,” “A Gift of Mercy”] are, I think, quite a departure for you, because you are dealing more explicitly with homosexuality.... And also relating aspects of your relationship with Marian Engel...and it’s interesting that you write *two* stories about them.

F: Yes, I want more of Bragg and Minna. And I think there will be more.... I think they’ll come out in story form first, but I also think that, at some point, if I have the energy to do this, their story would make a wonderful play. With elements of all of the unwritten Bragg and Minna stories, and the two written ones. There is a play out of those two people....

K: You also have two stories about Bud and Neil in *Stones*, “The Name’s the Same” and “Real Life Writes Real Bad.” We get two stories, back to back, about the brothers.

F: Aspects of Bud and Neil turn up in Gilbert and Hooker—the brothers in *Last of the Crazy People*. I’d never thought of that before, but it’s quite true. Those two brothers make their way—under a lot of different names—through a lot of my writing.

K: So this recurring pair, the two brothers, can be classed as one of your writerly obsessions....

F: Yes, and it is more apt to pop up in different forms, because you could say they are in “*Stones*,” too; there are two brothers there, who are very much in line with the other pair.

K: I was going to say, there’s a clear contrast established between your two brothers: one seems more obsessed with the traditional male role, and the other is a critic, looking on, the watcher....

F: The sad thing is, the one who’s engrossed with the male role, is also the one who is more accomplished—

K: I question that—

F: Up to a point. I mean, in “*Stones*,” he definitely is the one who is in charge. But he’s also in charge when the father is in trouble and is causing trouble—it is Cy who takes control. He has to do the daring thing, the difficult thing. He has to confront the father. That was interesting to me....

K: What about influences on your short story writing?

F: You pass through stages; it’s hard to hold on to influences as you get further along—and I don’t just mean in the aging sense. As you pass through the various stages of writing, as you learn more about what you’re doing.... I have passed through an *enchantment* with Du Maupassant, O. Henry, the classics—Kipling—the people who told you a story that had an ending that left you closing the book and saying “Boy ... I never thought that!” or “What a marvellous revelation that was, or a twist.” And of course, short stories have changed since the days of those guys.... I went through a period where J. D. Salinger’s book, *Nine Short Stories* was very important to me. I think I read every one of those stories *eighty times* over a period of five years. (The book fell to pieces in my hands!) It was because *he* was my Raymond Carver; what Carver now is to young writers (and I hope it passes, by the way).... I suspect too much has been made of Carver for his own good. This over-adulation also happened to Salinger—and it stopped

him from writing. Carver's death was tragic. It brought a *growing* writer too soon to the end.

K: You don't approve of Carver?

F: Oh, it's not that I don't approve; he was a wonderful writer. It's just that you get awfully sick of reading imitations.... Could we leave the poor man alone to be himself, for one thing: stop the imitation, because imitation isn't getting anyone anywhere....

K: But it's where you start, perhaps.

F: Sure it is. I don't mean that as meanly as it sounds; it's just that—I think it's very dangerous that people settle in to Carver's style. Or Salinger's. Or anyone's. So far as I was concerned,

I had read these nine stories over and over until they were done unto death. I don't think I ever wrote like Salinger, but I think I set out to make the attempt.

K: Would you say you were trying to take the best from him—what he did in the short story form?

F: Yes, but ... I think I was ashamed of *stealing*.... Lest this sound noble, I mean I was afraid of being *found out*; I only mean it in that sense, I don't mean it in any other sense. Just—"Oh God, what if it sounded so much like Salinger they'll say 'Well, who the Hell is this Findley—why pay attention to him, he's only imitating Salinger.'" I wanted my own voice—but I hadn't found it.

K: Were there any Canadian writers you were imitating?

F: Not then; not in my late teens and early twenties—and not in my late twenties, either....

K: Although we have so many great short story writers....

F: Well, there were but I didn't know it, if you know what I mean. It's funny, I've just written a review for *Harrowsmith* of a book called *Wild Animals I have Known*; they're short stories by Ernest Thompson Seton, and I read those when I was a kid. I loved them.

And, of course, there was Morley Callaghan. He was the first writer I read—aside from Seton—who set his stories in my own world—and his—which was Toronto. You suddenly thought "My God, he's talking about Elm Street, and I know where Elm Street is." And he also wrote—*wonderfully* well. Interesting, classically structured—all kinds of good things can be said about Callaghan's novels, but the man was a short story writer, and I think he was a great one.

k: Okay I'm going to shift the focus, to the theme of gender.

Here is a quote from critic Harry Brod: "While women have been obscured from our vision by being too much in the background, men have been obscured from our vision by being too much in the foreground." Do you agree?

F: I'd have to take it as a jumping-off point ... but it's very interesting. I think there is a lot of truth to it, but you can spread that truth further than "men." The truth is, there are things in the foreground that are so subtle, that they are totally missed—and I think, unfortunately, a lot of men who don't like women (and there's a huge difference between men who don't "like" women and men who are violent towards women)—I think they miss *themselves*. So it isn't just the observer, from the outside, who can't see them, it's the guy who's out there with the biceps, the hands, the gun. He could be staring in the mirror and he wouldn't see himself—he's too big! Too overwhelming....

Oddly enough, I got turned on to this aspect of men in writing—and men in life, though it came out of writing first—when I read a piece about men by Gertrude Stein. It's an absolutely incredible piece. In it, she writes about men in a bar in France, and the men she's writing about are in a bar where men gather exclusively—but only because they are all men who've just left the same factory, they've just left the same workplace and they've come in the same condition into this place. And she writes so *wonderfully* about their beauty, their tiredness—their grace, their gentleness. All those things you wouldn't expect to discover in a bunch of *guys* standing in a *bar*, doing the "guy thing!" And I thought, how does a woman write so wonderfully about this very male milieu? Stupid people will say: "Well—she was a lesbian," which has nothing to do with the price of eggs at all. She was looking totally objectively at these men, in this place, in this situation. Reading it, I was thrown back on the reality, and the memory, of when I went to work in a factory, as a very young man.... This was the 1940s and it *was* a hyper-masculine place. I thought I might be beaten to death! But having been told "Be ready for the 'guy stuff' to happen," what you get instead is a *wonderful* gentleness, and a sense of mutual protection. No come-ons, nobody putting the make on you, nothing! Whether it is that the pressure of the presence of women is taken away, they're not strutting, they're not doing all the things you think they would be doing, and they're not ... fearsome. Laughable caricatures of manhood very quickly evaporate.... Out of Stein's

writing, I got a sense of men I already knew, and it threw me back into that reality—behind the stereotypes. And I got that from a woman's writing.

At the same time, having said *all* of that, I obviously have to address the fact that I have also met extremely violent men. Killers. I had a man try to kill me, and in the same way that he would try to kill a woman, because it was during a sexual encounter, and had to do with a particular use of force.

K: So you are saying that you were placed in a position parallel to a woman's, in that you were being treated as the "feminine" object of his rage?

F: Yes, yes, but in a particularly insidious way.... I am willing to stand corrected on this, but this is what I suspect: that far more women are put in jeopardy by men whose "persuasive" powers are latent in the power of their masculine bodies. I was frightened into submission. I think there's far more of that going on than actual pounding. Psychological intimidation, but it's based on the physical possibility: "I can kill you." Yes—he can. Because I was frightened just long enough to get in this corner ... and then, of course, once you're in the corner, how do you get out.

K: Obviously, we're talking about gender here, but we're also talking about how that intersects with your "otherness" as a homosexual writer. That places you in a position, some of your writing suggests, analogous to a woman's position—without creating homosexual stereotypes, or using effeminate language. So many of your characters in *Dinner* are women, for instance, and they seem to be associated with a certain type of perception, or perspective, that you identify with. Would you draw that parallel yourself?

F: Yes, but I'm very glad to hear you say that it is not—necessarily—a parody of femininity, and that I am not speaking in an effeminate voice as a consequence of that identification.

K: True. But as a writer, as a creator of characters, you do seem to ally yourself with women as "other"—

F: Oh, absolutely—no question. But I've never, equally, felt that I wanted to be identified as a feminist-sympathetic, or as a gay, writer ... simply because I think labels are confining. But I'm not turning my back on homosexuality. I'm perfectly happy to have it said, "He is a homosexual." I just don't think I want to be collected exclusively in gay anthologies.... I want my world to be wider than my sexuality.

K: I attended your Duthie lecture, in Vancouver this fall [October 1993], and in it you made a very impassioned plea for resisting the "word wardens." I thought, "How interesting," because you have this ability to be double in

your presentation. You were speaking as someone who has been stigmatized as a gay person, but you were also appealing to the larger, literary tradition. So you were speaking both from the margins *and* from the center.... Do you ever feel as though you might be part of a “gay” tradition of writers?

f: No, although there are voices in that tradition that I look at with particular respect. I will never recover from Tennessee Williams.... But I think it has to have something to do with the fact that he was there in my moment: as I was emerging into the world of sexuality, he was emerging into the world of writing, as a man of promise. When I turned sixteen was when I started having my whole life. A “sexually explicit” life—an actor’s life—et cetera—and that was the moment of *The Glass Menagerie* and consequently of *A Streetcar Named Desire*. And, of course, immediately I recognized the kinship between Blanche Dubois’ situation and what it was to be a homosexual, *in that moment*. It would be, I hope, different now. In that moment, Williams’ was the voice that defined my dilemma....

κ: So there was an autobiographical element for Williams with Blanche DuBois....?

f: Oh, there can’t be any question, there can’t be! Though I think he denied it.... People say that George and Martha in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* are just a couple of guys—“fags”—two lovers who get off on beating up on each other But it isn’t true. What I’m saying is, when people say, about Blanche, that she’s really just a guy in drag: it’s not so. That is, as a character, she remains absolutely, totally female. Just as George and Martha remain totally male and female in their context. And it’s *not* a good idea to go off into....

κ: —translating the sexes of the characters to fit their author’s—

f: —because that ain’t what’s happening. But at the same time, there is this kinship in situations where women and homosexual men encounter violent attitudes in men.

κ: Maybe it’s more accurate to say that there is a submerged tradition of gay male writers, writers who are mainstream, but also gay, whether openly or not. Such as Tennessee Williams ... Somerset Maugham ... Proust ... and Oscar Wilde.

f: Or William Burroughs—another interesting figure. And, of course, John Cheever.

κ: So, does that description fit your sense of your work more accurately?

F: Yes, it does.... Wilde and Cheever have been great heroes of mine.

K: Michael Kaufman says, "Masculinity is power. It is also exclusive heterosexuality, for the maintenance of masculinity requires the repression of homosexuality." How do you feel about that formulation?

F: I think he's wrong. It depends on how you define masculinity.... I would never define masculinity as power.... All the masculine qualities are not negative. I think there are wonderfully masculine men—and that's what I was saying before, about working in the factory, when I was in the position to be extremely vulnerable, and felt so: I was so wrong!

I think another important aspect of the question we just finished before starting this one is: there's something that has to be said, too, about the fact that both a Blanche Dubois and a Timothy Findley and a George and Martha and their homosexual counterparts, when they come in contact with men—either as women, or as homosexuals—they stand the chance of meeting every kind of men. But in the sensational sense, there is an acceptance of the stereotype and this is how the general subject of homosexuality is subsumed into the mass media. The stereotype becomes a part of the storyline, for the mass of people. Brute/fairy, brute/female [mimes simpering expression]; you know, Blanche Dubois languishing, falling backwards ... fainting in the presence of the "brute." What Michael Kaufman [who founded the White Ribbon Campaign, which Findley has joined] described feeds a certain prejudice. I'm a great admirer of his, but I think in this he is wrong. "Don't say that, Michael—that *masculinity* is power—because in saying that, you are saying that all men are bad—because *all* men are masculine."

K: Or: "Maybe we have to get rid of the word 'manhood.' It's done a lot of damage to both men and women." That's what you told Alan Twigg. You still agree?

F: Yes. I still think that because we load the words *manhood* and *manly* and *masculinity* with meanings that are ... killers. In themselves.

K: In your interview with Alan Twigg, you also mentioned "Men's terrible loneliness. Women also have loneliness, but it's not the same kind."

F: I don't think men have ever learned how to benefit from one's another's company in the way that women have learned to benefit from one another's company ... with no sexual connotations whatsoever. I'm always fascinated to see that, in so many photographs of men, if they are photographed together in any context, you always see the hand placed over the

shoulder, with the fingers curled against it. [demonstrates] The fingers aren't allowed to grip the other person. You aren't allowed to *hold* the other person.

K: This is a result of the restriction, or taboo, on demonstrations of affection between men, isn't it?

F: But there has to be built into that attitude the fact that men have a different physical reaction to holding, and being held, which is *purely* biological.... I think this whole subject of gender and sexuality, both as it touches social issues and moral issues, and the issues of writing and of art, has been muddled by a misinterpretation—sometimes deliberate—of the role biology plays in our behaviour as men and women.

Let me tell you a quick anecdote, because it has to do with the way I think about men, and it has to do partly with what Gertrude Stein said about the gentleness of men. This gentleness is sometimes generated by the bewilderment men feel in the "traitorous" aspect of their bodies. It also answers something about Michael Kaufman's statement—and the question of why men can't have casual contact....

This is some years ago, because I'm now sixty-five, so we're talking about around 1970. A friend and I were on a beach together, and we were talking about having reached this age (we both had achieved forty and were passing into a new area of our lives). We had been at one time lovers, and we were still extremely close, very good friends. And we talked about the burst of sexual energy that had happened in our lives—and he said, "You know, you mustn't be afraid of it"—because I had laughed about an increased daily masturbation count and the increased daily "lust" count—"A lot of it is pure biology," he said. "Don't forget, you and I have now come to an age where our bodies are saying 'It's nearly over,' and from a purely biological standpoint—go straight to the science and nothing else—the thing is to broadcast as many seeds as far afield as possible."

Well, it's time we accepted that there is a biological factor in some of this behaviour. And because men get erections, they find that they can't press in close against another warm body with *quite* the same freedom that women can. And that's part of why the fingers are closed, which I think is sad. Because I have immense sympathy for men. Immense. And I cringe when I see what men go through sometimes and think how sad it is that women only think of men as fumbling bastards who have nothing on their minds but sex when often what they are trying to achieve is grace in the face of biology.

There's an amusing side to this in the theatre that I noticed when I was a young actor and watching other young actors. When you embrace in the theatre, your bum always sticks out! And directors are always having to say to the actors, "Come on, bring the bum in." But of course there's a reason your bum is sticking out: you're *terrified* of making pelvic contact. Well, when we come to the moment when we can say, "Hey guys—women—everybody—this poses a problem for males that we can solve so simply by saying—'It's a fact.'" Maybe if men stopped being afraid of the embarrassment factor of "inappropriate" erections, "inappropriate" erections would stop being a problem.

κ: So, you're saying: we shouldn't make more of our sexual and physical differences than they are, but we should acknowledge their existence also.

ϕ: You have to acknowledge it, and it is true of women as it is of men.

κ: In her interview with you, Barbara Gabriel suggested that the homosexual is in a privileged position for understanding the myths of gender a society promotes.

ϕ: Yes, I do think there are places where—probably because one is a homosexual—I do have the opportunity of seeing what it is women *are* enduring, that other men have failed to see; failed to see because there isn't the combination of close friend, lover, *plus* the homosexual.

And I think now that situation is being acknowledged, although in a very strange way, because people talk about this [1993] as being the year of lesbians and gay men. And about how there's been a lot of gender-bending, as they say, in the movies and plays recently.... A lot of to-do has been made of k. d. lang, and Boy George's comeback, and so on. I just think that a lot of that is superficial.... What I mean is, the perception is that we've solved a problem, or that it's over, or that we don't need to worry about the problems of homophobia and discrimination anymore. I think the problem basically still exists. Because we all seem to be willing to accept what k. d. lang is about doesn't mean there is any less masking of reaction to lesbians. It's a commercialized acceptance, not a true one.

κ: I would like to tie this issue of commercialization in, if I can, with your discussion—in interviews with Barbara Gabriel and Terry Goldie—of cultural icons, especially with regard to *Famous Last Words*. What do you mean by cultural icon? Is a cultural icon simply a celebrity?

ϕ: No, because I think increasingly, and this is sad, everyone, and everything, will become iconic, in the Andy Warhol "fifteen minutes of fame"

sense. But not necessarily in a bid—not right off the top—to be iconic, but simply in a bid to rule, in a bid to be the King or the Queen of the moment.

What I'm saying is that people like Lana Turner, Ava Gardner, Elizabeth Taylor—people of that era—were thought of as public whores. Well, today, someone like Madonna touts herself as a public whore.

κ: But she's her own whore....

F: She's her own whore ... but she's more than that. No matter what one discovers about her, the damage I perceive her as doing—and this is the danger of the icons of this time—is that it is pure iconography with no substance. Nobody deserves six million dollars a year: *no one*.

κ: Would you describe yourself as being a postmodernist writer?

F: I honestly don't know what that means.... With all due respect to Linda Hutcheon and people like that, who have delved greatly in that whole world, I have to find it in other books and discover what it means....

κ: Does "realist writer" seem a more apt label to you?

F: No, and I hope not.... Taken with its literary face, I would hope I'm not a realist, because a realist is probably the dumbest thing you can be.

κ: Could you elaborate on that?

F: Yes, but only to a degree. As we came out of the 1950s into the 1960s, there was this extraordinary revolution which took place. We entered this revolution through the medium of writers who started being known as Angry Young Men, and then the "kitchen-sink" school and so forth. And you got this "realist" aspect of writing which invaded the world of fiction and of theatre and films and everything became very grungy and very dark and very gritty and we explored a lot of so-called real lives. It was just like saying, "Of course, up until now we have *not* been exploring real life" [sarcastic chuckle]. Just because it was theatrical or satirical, it wasn't real.

So I'm saying all of this to get to that point: if by realist you actually mean an anchor in the *real* heart, the *real* spirit and the *real* turmoil of *real* life: then yes. Alice Munro is a realist in that sense, but ... a great artist in the writerly sense (and artist is a word she would absolutely loathe, I suspect, but it has to be used because that's what she is). There is art and there isn't, the touch is there or it isn't, and that's what catches you.... I guess it's those who write in the world of Alice Munro and Margaret Laurence but who fail to do it with their artistry, who are left—stranded—in mere reality. And that's what I mean by realism, and that would worry me—

κ: You wouldn't want to be considered in that category—

F: Not only that, but it doesn't interest me as reading material, it doesn't interest me as an exploration of life. I want edge. And I'm delighted by the theatricality of what's happening in theatre now—and in the largeness of, for instance, Atwood's last book *The Robber Bride*, which I have not yet completed. The bigness of those people, and the bigness of the gestures. It gives both comic edge and tragic dimensions.

K: So you see a certain theatricality coming out in recent literature—

F: Yes—theatricality being a very positive thing. The story has to hit you, and it can only do that with its theatricality—and so does a book when you open it—"All happy families are alike..."—or whatever it is that grabs you. Or what about John Irving's *The World According to Garp*, that marvellous opening line, walking with Garp's mother into the movie theatre and taking out a razor and doing terrible things to a man who molested her in the theatre—God!! [screams] Wonderful—it's time it happened! But ... you don't stop reading. Because it's theatrical.

K: Maybe "theatrical realism" is a good way to describe what you're doing, then—

F: It's an *interpretation* of reality. That's what fiction *is*—that's what novels and stories and plays *are* ... and that's what *art* is. It is the articulation of the ordinary in a way that makes the ordinary seem cohesive, when in fact it's not. It *clarifies* the messed-up lack of cohesiveness in real life.

Have you ever read *Camille*, *La Dame aux Camellias*, the novel? It begins with Armand coming back, from Egypt, where his father has sent him to get rid of him. Marguerite—or Camille—has died and the boy comes back, that's where it begins. And do you know what he does? He digs up her body ... to prove that she is dead. And that's how it opens.

K: Quite hair-raising.

F: It is hair-raising. *Now* when they do *Camille*... [he mimes a delicate cough]. I mean, when people think that someone dying of tuberculosis, has a slight cough—"We wouldn't want to over-do it, dear, catch their attention." Well, Marguerite Gauthier caught a lot of people's attention, and she's stayed in the imagination ever since she was created. For a reason: she has *edge*. I've just stolen one of Dumas' images. There's a little girl in my novel that I'm writing now, who, when she's eleven, has her first period. And when she goes to school the next day, she wears a red ribbon in her hair, which is a signal to her friends...that it's started. She's menstruating. Well, Marguerite Gauthier—and this is back in the 1840s—was a courtesan. And

Dumas wrote this wonderful thing: when she appeared at the opera, she always carried camellias, and the camellias were usually white. But when she was having her period, they were red, and that meant men were to stay away now. And I thought, God, that's very daring, for that period in time, to write that.... And I stole the signal. But it isn't just that detail.... It's the fact that Dumas got so close to her.

K: You drew on some aspects of your own growing up in your writing, and you have said that some family members saw it as a kind of invasion of privacy. How does the writer navigate that dilemma?

F: Well, the stories [in *Dinner and Stones*] about Bud and Neil are fairly close to the stories about me and my brother. And "Real Life Writes Real Bad" is my attempt to articulate my reaction to what happened to my brother. That is to say, to lay it to rest to some degree ... to lay the *unrest* in a place where I could look at it objectively and say, "That's what happened." And if you write about it, there are different ways of writing about it. You write about it in your journal, and that can be cathartic. But I don't think that there are aspects of making fiction that are cathartic. Fiction mustn't be written for that reason; there are rules. Somebody said—I think it may have been Thornton Wilder—"The worst reason to write of all is vengeance." Don't ever use your writing simply to get back at someone who did you wrong or at life for being difficult. Don't cheapen what you're making by founding it on motives such as "I'm going to seek revenge." When Thomas Wolfe wrote *You Can't Go Home Again* and *Look Homeward, Angel*, he was trying to exorcise the past. Trying to exorcise the process of growing up in this very difficult family situation, with very sad circumstances. But what happens in those books, even when he tried to get back at his mother, and wanted to expose his mother as being destructive: he writes this incredible character! She becomes one of the great figures of modern American literature. So the creative impulse overrides the spirit of revenge. If you really are an artist, as Thomas Wolfe was, vengeance loses its face.

For instance, I have taken a physical aspect from someone I know.... This woman, a favourite aunt, has passed through all of my fiction. She'd had a stroke when she was in her thirties, so one side of her face was frozen and she spoke out of the other side [imitating], in this kind of 1930s "tough guy" way, so everything she said had this kind of....

K: Edge.

F: Edge to it.... She was a theatrical being, whether she wanted to be or

not, because it was part of her physical makeup. Well, my aunt turns into all kinds of people: she's Rosetta in *Crazy People*, other characters. And she responded with great wisdom to the canon of Findley writing. She said to me, "You know, dear"—holding one of my books—"I've never read any of your books." She said "I don't think I know any of those people and I'm not sure I really care to. And I don't know what a homosexual is ... and I don't really care." Then her eyes sort of wandered over toward the window, and she said, "I really am proud of you." I think she was saying, "I know what you're doing.... This is what you *make* of us, but it isn't us." She had read it, and she was saying "You don't have to worry about what I know, about what aspects of this of are true. This is fiction." Whereas my mother and my brother and my father were always saying "What are you revealing about us now?" Well ... NOTHING! [laughs] How can you think that all these people are you? But on the other hand, the base is there, and why shouldn't it be? That's where the reality is....

k: One last quote: you said to Graeme Gibson some time ago, "I've often sat down and tried to write a love scene between a completely normal man and a completely normal woman. And there's no way I'm going to do that without it turning out to be the biggest laugh of all time." Can you explain what you mean by this provocative statement?

f: I think so. Basically all it means is: that as soon as sex becomes "literature," it starts taking on this other aspect. The sexiest thing is sex itself, but how do you describe it without falling back on synonyms and all this imagery of other stuff (because it's so screamingly funny) like waves crashing on the shore ... and the iconery of sexual pleasure. It all starts turning into "Her skin was like...", "His mouth was like..."

k: There's such a stock of clichés—

f: Yes, but as you fight your way through this jungle of clichés, trying to get to two people actually *doing* something together in bed—and be honest about it—then you very quickly come up against all kinds of barriers. Particularly back then, in 1971, when that comment was made. Which was when we were all trying to be more honest about the sexual revolution that had begun. Which meant people had to actually acknowledge who they were ... you couldn't hide behind all that imagery—it wasn't going to help you anymore. Either in real life, or in books.... So I just used to collapse—literally—across the table screaming with laughter and frustration: "There's no way I can describe this!" It was like those wonderful monologues that

Bob Newhart used to do. You know the marvellous one about tobacco? “You roll it up in a piece of paper and then you put it in your mouth, and then—what?! You set it on fire? Oh, sure, Bob!”

So, if you think, now I’m going to write about sex—male-female, male-male, female-female, dog-dog or whatever, whatever!—it’s only going to be Bob Newhart funny. Then, unfortunately, it took on a hideous look, because all the sex you got, in novels, short stories and in movies, was violent sex, because it was the only excuse to have sex ... grab the reader by the short hairs and say “I’ve gotcha, and you’re in here until this is over.” So then sex took on an ugly face. First it had this romantic face, then it had this chaste face of poetry, then it got this ugly face.

Now, I think sex is beginning to emerge as what it is, which is to say it is something real you can write about. I think I’ve come closest to succeeding in *Headhunter*, where it has both the horrifying edge of the clinically pornographic—and also the much sparser, sparer description of passionate sex. The best book for depictions of *real* sex between men and women, since about 1986, is Michael Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion*. It’s erotic and it’s never denigrating and yet it never *lingers* over the thing. It does what writing should do about all aspects of life: it puts it in front of you to the degree *only* that the story requires it ... and that’s where the artistry comes in.

I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, who provided funding for this research in the form of a Post-Doctoral Fellowship. LK

Sparring for the Love of it

when god lets you catch and hold for a sec
you're too busy strutting your stuff
to listen so he makes
a grand show of hands, both sides,
you bet on a rabbit or a scarf, some smoke at least
to appear out of thin air. But deft,
he tucks with a play of light
into his fighter's vest, your self,

you say: oh my gosh
I didn't see it coming. He says: it's luck
Brushes it off and punches at the air.
As a bird to a barn,
you warm to this partner,
begin the round
as doves dance each season wing to breast
reach for the beak you want addressed
sparring for the love in it.

The Scarp of Flowers

Pick if you can, another's thoughts
it is fine work, and criminal, the locks
flying open to syntax.

Walk on marbles. A hundred hundred glass eyes. Try
to keep your balance when all the time you are losing it.
Pick a flower from Gustafson's scarp

(for safety). Discover it isn't a flower
but a yardstick held up like a cane,
or a power, and you're following a bishop
or a shepherd, god knows it's all the same body

into a glory: he called it resolution.
A star-flower to top and tie it all up.
I snip that flower, call it breath.

Now that I've got it, it isn't. Between the belly
and the brow of this hill something thieves
A Vertigo . . . consonance before,

and after consonance. The brute locks.
The begging sonants closing
this flower to the stem of this scarp.

Green Time

for Gerald

Your given name rhymes
with emerald
a bright green stone
that glistens
like your green eyes
those gems set
in high cheekbones.

You were born in April
that green time
when buds on the trees
pop in the warm pan
of the sky
lustily as the corn
from the prairie fields
outside your native city.

You were born when green
crocus leaves poke out
from the nut brown earth
and flower first.
You grew into a man
who loves tulips and freesias
and good manners.

The grass as a gift
turns green
under your light step.

Funny & Serious

Wallen, James R.

Boy's Night Out. Gutter \$15.00

Lemieux, Jean.

Red Moon. Trans. Sheila Fischman. Cormorant
\$14.95

Reviewed by Graham Barron

Someone once said, "If you're ever in doubt about whether something is meant to be funny or serious, it's probably meant to be funny." *Boy's Night Out* is clearly meant to be funny, but when it fails it isn't serious; *Red Moon*, on the other hand, is clearly meant to be serious, but when it fails it isn't funny.

Boy's Night Out is a comic novel about a straight Toronto boy spending his Friday night getting drunk and trying to get laid. The novel sets a quick pace from the outset and maintains it to the end. Though it occasionally tries to be more than it is (there are allusions to Ulysses and Christ), the novel succeeds by consistently not taking itself too seriously, a tactic the main character Abel sometimes uses himself:

Abel decided to make Nancy the object of his desire. He had never gone out with someone "devastated" before. This seemed to indicate some assembly required. He had heard that girls were "vulnerable" on the rebound. He assumed this meant they were more likely to "put out." He was looking for an edge.

That a novel featuring a self-confessedly sexist, racist, homophobic brat can succeed has to be a sign of something. A sign, perhaps,

that for all their power, straight white males are a remarkably pathetic and insecure bunch; or that we have gone through a phase of politically correct (self-) censorship and have emerged the wiser for it; or that with a little ingenuity and humour even the most noxious of personalities can be made digestible to readers. If there is a criticism to be made of *Boy's Night Out*, it is that the novel sometimes reads like a cut-and-paste job of Wallen's presumed notebook. He stretches Abel's drunken binge into 187 pages more through the use of adolescent flashbacks, such as the one above, and other such devices, than through anything resembling plot-complication or interior-monologic depth. Praise is also due to Gutter Press for publishing the novel and *Blood and Aphorisms* for excerpting its first six chapters: proof, if any was needed, that while the large Canadian presses pass on novels like *Generation X*, the small magazines and presses are keeping their collective ears to the ground for new good writing (the novel also, incidentally, features a handsome cover illustration and trendily ragged right margin).

If *Boy's Night Out* is a remarkably tight first novel, *Red Moon* is the opposite. The latter, by Quebec writer Jean Lemieux, is really three different main narratives, none of which is quite integrated with the others.

The first narrative is, presumably, semi-autobiographical. François Robidoux, like the author, is an urbane, intellectual doctor who has accepted a position on the remote, anglophone Entry Island in the Îles-de-la

Madeleine. The novel traces his day-to-day routine, his love life, and his relation to the islanders who comprise most of his practice and with whom he feels a mixture of camaraderie and alienation. This narrative ranges from the reciting of mundane and extraneous details to the quick, clever dialogue between Robidoux and his erstwhile companion, Gigi Bengale.

The second narrative is a murder mystery. *Red Moon* offers a variety of innovations on the genre, none of which, however, could be considered improvements. We are not introduced to most of the main suspects, for instance, until *after* the investigation has started. Another prime suspect, Robidoux himself, cannot be the murderer because we have followed him around throughout the novel. That only really leaves one remaining suspect, half of whose motive is obvious but undeclared, the other half of which is invented in the last few pages.

The third narrative, and the one that probably led to the decision to have Sheila Fischman translate the novel from French to English at this historical juncture, concerns the relations between an insular, minority anglophone community and the larger franco-Quebecois community that engulfs it. Readers looking for a story either of the tense franco-anglo relationship, or for a story of how the two respect each other's cultural differences, are going to be disappointed. Lemieux, instead, has treated the theme lightly, preferring to show the two groups as I suspect they are in actuality: they simply get along with each other, oblivious to the politics of their situation and to the machinations of Ottawa and Quebec City—and with a wry sense of humor.

The translation seems sound, though I confess to wondering at times whether the parts that dragged were the fault of the first-time novelist or the seasoned translator. After checking the French version I decided: both. Which makes me wonder why, given the length of time between the

versions, Lemieux could not have rewritten the occasional passage (the beginning is especially shaky); or why Fischman, or the editor of Fischman's translation, didn't work harder at making the weak parts of *Red Moon* stronger.

Northern Dreams and Nightmares

Frank James Tester and Peter Kulchyski

Tammarniit (Mistakes): Inuit Relocation in the Eastern Arctic, 1939–63. UBC P \$24.95

John Moss

Enduring Dreams: An Exploration of Arctic Landscape. Anansi \$16.95

Reviewed by Dale Blake

Frank James Tester's and Peter Kulchyski's *Tammarniit (Mistakes)* documents the incompetence and misunderstandings involved in Inuit relocation in the Eastern Arctic from 1939 to 1963. Tester, a professor in the School of Social Work at the University of British Columbia, and Kulchyski, a professor in the Department of Native Studies at Trent University, state in their introduction that their approach "was to use events to illustrate patterns of decision-making, control and power relations" in the political orchestration of Inuit resettlement. They trace the actions of a government at first unwilling to accept responsibility for Inuit, then viewing them as a welfare dilemma, then as symbols of Canadian sovereignty, and finally as candidates for assimilation. Throughout the moves, Inuit are treated more as experimental subjects than human beings; the obvious lack of empathy for their culture is striking.

Impressively researched, *Tammarniit* describes the relocation in 1953 of Inuit families from Northern Quebec and Baffin to Craig Harbour and Resolute Bay, as well as the resettlement of Inuit of the Ennadai Lake area in Keewatin in the 1950s, and the

later establishment of the community of Whale Cove. Separation, hunger, cold, darkness, and very different hunting conditions awaited those transported to the high Arctic. Despite the traumatization of these people, the Canadian government still viewed the moves as a success. "Cultural blindness and ethnocentrism of well-intentioned officials at all levels" continued and contributed to the famine that occurred amongst Inuit at Henik and Garry Lakes in 1957-58.

This book underlines a colonial, insular, and racist attitude amongst government, traders, and missionaries which resulted in great suffering for Inuit. Following the failure of the fox fur industry in the 1940s in northern Quebec, it was feared that widespread welfare payments would produce indigence. The conditions of Inuit lives were seen as a "disgrace to Canada." Relocation did not help and, in fact, the same statement can be made of some Inuit communities in Canada today. Problems that existed during relocation persist—particularly southerners' lack of understanding of Inuit culture. Inuit have not spoken out strongly enough and neither did their forebears. Similar dangers exist for them now with the creation of Nunavut, with outside "experts" emerging to manage Inuit affairs.

Thus Tester's and Kulchyski's book is indeed timely. It tells the stories that need to be told, though not without a degree of bias. It portrays the Hudson's Bay Company as an ogre of the North, but my interview with a knowledgeable Inuk from Sanikiluaq (Belcher Islands) suggested the opposite. Amongst the wealth of painstaking research accumulated for this book, the Inuit "voice" seems rather subdued. Gratuitous "politically correct" commentary on the evils of the patriarchy displays a certain ignorance of Inuit tradition and Inuit marriage customs. Nevertheless *Tammarniit* is an important book—prompting Inuit to remember these mis-

takes and be warned by them. It also forces other Canadians to look unflinchingly at the treatment of Inuit and to change the behaviour of the past.

John Moss's *Enduring Dreams* presents a very different "take" on the North. Moss, a professor of English at the University of Ottawa, has devoted much of his recent work to Arctic narratives and polar exploration and has travelled widely in the Arctic. The apprehensive reader may prepare to be submerged in yet another heady romanticization like Barry Lopez' *Arctic Dreams* (1986)—surely these southerners will never have their fill of being stoned on the North. But this enduring obsession with the Arctic has produced still another engrossing work.

Moss enters the Arctic to "become part of the extended text"; as endurance athlete/writer/explorer, he pushes himself to the limits in a northern landscape:

But you can write yourself into the present; as an explorer you can document your passing. The danger, of course, is in believing your own account, confusing your own vision of the world with the world itself.

This battle of the imagination is what Moss explores in his poetic version of the enthralling power of "Ultima Thule." To read the self into the North entails heroism, valour, disaster, even a kind of voyeurism as we listen in fascination to the tales of unfortunates like John Hornby:

John Hornby, educated at Harrow, of impeccable breeding and excellent connections, articulate, obsessed (surely the marks of a great explorer), enthralled with the mortification of his own flesh (his life random slashes across the tundra), we know him only through the records of others, and from the occasional sketch and grimy photograph.

Excitement stirs over the cold landscape. Other egos, other texts, crisscross Moss's narrative—Hornby, van Herk, Wiebe,

Hearne, Franklin. Explorers and Can. Lit. contemporaries vie with each other over an Arctic void that is not void, an absence which retains a presence and encourages the erection of monuments.

Like snow, the text of *Enduring Dreams* drifts, shaping and reshaping itself, playing softly against the mind, sometimes lashing out with the tragedy of Arctic death. Elusive and seductive, it stimulates and emulates the power of the imagination. People transform themselves into art by reading themselves into the North—that North like the whistling swans, “only a blur of moving white, a concentration of the sky.”

It is difficult to push away the romance long enough to realize that “English and Inuktitut are alternate realities.” Imagination and perception are rooted in language and culture. Arctic dreams appear to differ for Native Northerners, if we compare Moss’s work to the irreverent and amusing *Arctic Dreams and Nightmares* (1993) by Inuk writer/artist Alooook Ipellie. Tough and practical people, Inuit would probably be highly amused at the fancies of the southern mind. Pragmatism must intervene in order to survive in the North—but the dreams may indeed invade later, magically pervading your “reality,” reshaping and enriching your existence, as *Enduring Dreams* demonstrates with such artistry.



The Compulsion to Sing

Lillian Allen

Women Do This Every Day: Selected Poems of Lillian Allen. Women's Press n.p.

Sheree Fitch

In This House Are Many Women. Goose Lane \$12.95

Karen Connelly

This Brighter Prison: A Book of Journeys. Brick \$11.95

Reviewed by Lesley D. Clement

The poems in the three collections under review are songs, dances, and dramas of the blood and body. Experiences, landscapes, and intimacies have been rendered in exhilarating, sensuous movements with language so lush, voices so vibrant, and rhythms so resonant that the poems often seem to read, even perform, themselves.

A leading figure among *de dub* poets, Lillian Allen is a cultural activist who has performed extensively, produced several Juno Award winning albums (*Revolutionary Tea Party*, 1985; *Conditions Critical*, 1988), published books for children and adolescents, written plays and short fiction, and recently made her debut in filmmaking. In *Women Do This Every Day*, Allen captures in print, on bound pages, and “finalized” form pieces that, she confesses in the Preface, “are not meant to lay still”:

These poems breathe, they are alive.
Sit quietly with them, read them aloud or
shout them in public places.

And remember, always a poem, once a
book.

Allen’s compulsion to write has come from the suffering and joy, setbacks and triumphs, hardships and resilience of the Jamaican community, especially the women and children. With colloquial spellings, chanted phrasing, and pronounced rhythms, Allen validates the language that, while in high school in Jamaica, she discovered was being used as a weapon

"to degrade and destroy the very essence of who we are." Allen uses this language as a constructive weapon that gives voice to the revolutionary spirit that has enabled her people to survive poverty and oppression:

dis word breeds my rhythm
dis word carries my freedom
dis word is my hand
: my weapon ("Dis Word")

The first two of the seven groups of poems that make up this collection, "She would sing liberation" and "Sheroes, dreams & history," are primarily tributes to and inspirational songs for women and children. The third group, "Somewhere in this silvered city," records in generally upbeat rhythms the resilience of the immigrants who have come to a "postcard perfect," a "silvered city," only to find hunger, homelessness, and apathy. The fourth and sixth groups, "Dis" and "The life of a sound," capture the inspiration of poetry and music in the lives of oppressed people. The fifth group, "Conditions Critical," celebrates and forecasts the revolutionary spirit of oppressed people in Nicaragua, South Africa, Haiti, Jamaica, and North America, while the final group, "A mek wi," indicates that this revolution must come through charity, compassion, love, and art rather than through armed revolt. The most moving, although perhaps least polemical, poems in this collection are those that record what humans can do when

... we touch touch deep ...
music I come to you like a watering hole
sip/gulp/gapple/gasp
ripples skip out from my lips
watch those circles start up and grow
wonder just where those circles go
("Another Jazz Poem")

Like Lillian Allen, Sheree Fitch is better known as a performer, having worked extensively in radio and as a writer and performer of children's poetry. *In This House are Many Women* is Fitch's first publication in book form of poems for adults, many of

which have appeared in *Fiddlehead* and *Alpha* and have been aired on various CBC radio programs. The satin feel of the cover, with a detail from a series entitled "Women" by Jacqueline Riemer, and the fine quality buff pages with green print complement the sensuous content of Fitch's poetry.

To a greater extent than Allen, Fitch's experiences as a writer for children are everywhere evident in the collection's fantasies: from nightmarish through to whimsical. The first three poems—"The Runner," "Exit," and "Marie Leads the Way"—take us into the lives of the workers and the women and children residents of a shelter. The poems of the first section, "In this house are many women," are connected dramas replete with human interest, compassion, and tenderness as is conveyed in the first and last stanzas of the section's final poem, "Marie's Lullaby":

I am the angel of this house
house of broken dreams
house where dreams begin again
house of women
.....

I cradle pain within my wings
sing one more lullaby
pray that someday
in this house of many women
there will not be
any women

The second group of poems, "Propinquity," links with the first, Marie becoming a figure of the Madonna, both Biblical and contemporary, representative of all those women who have borne, loved, and lost children either to death or adulthood. "Ever-spinning cupid," the next group, focuses on the enigma of male-female attraction that leads so often to oppressive relationships and includes the delightfully whimsical "Lucy" poems. The humour that prevents the poems themselves from becoming oppressive carries over in a more fantastical way in the fourth and final section, "Diana's circus." Diana turns from the chores of the ordinary

housewife to practising the acts of a circus performer and to gain an audience takes the ultimate risk: walking the clothesline barefoot, blindfolded, in the dark. But as this is a fairytale, the poet spins the final lines:

I helped her escape

she lives where she must
on the moon of course . . .

up there where there are no laws of gravity
Diana free-forms
performs
old tricks
the merry-go-round makes
dish soap bubbles
that float alongside the stars
and the angels ("Postscript")

Already a seasoned writer for such a young woman, Karen Connelly, born in 1969, won the Pat Lowther prize for her 1990 collection of poetry, *The Small Words In My Body*, and has published a book about her experiences in northern Thailand, *Touch the Dragon*, which won the Governor General's Award. More important than the journeys through Spain (Part I), France (Part II), and the return to Canada (Parts III and IV), by which the poems in *This Brighter Prison: A Book of Journeys* are grouped, are the journeys to the edge of experience, both personal and observed. Out of violent sexual encounters, obsessive longing for lost love, abortion, drug addiction, and suicide, and with candid, flamboyant metaphors and fluid, subjective perspectives, Connelly has wrought searing poetry.

Connelly's compulsion to write arises from her physical identification with scenes and the joy and pain of actors in these scenes. In the opening poem of this collection, "Spanish Lessons," Connelly states: "Spain teaches that the body is its own absolute./The body is greedy and simple, honest, a hungry child." But to begin, the hunter after experience is too self-conscious, as she confesses in "Teeth of Garlic":

I do not tell her that I am hunting
for details, rooting around
like a barn animal after scraps.
That I believe bits of bone and gristle are
magic.
That I believe the silt of hearts is flecked
with gold.

In the final two groups of poems—"I Kneel To Kiss The Ice" and "A Grand Place, A Greeting"—with their images of darkness, ice, and graveyards, the traveller has been sated, and thus the prison atmosphere almost overwhelms any brightness. Two poems in the third section, however, mark a transition. "This Domain Of Dark Wing" opens with a description of the clouds coming "torn to this valley./They are ragged, refugees/weeping from their flight over mountains." Confronting the rocks of a huge slide, many of which "resemble the masks of old men," including that of her father's face, the traveller feels closer to the earth than the clouds.

In the poem that follows, "Living Nowhere," the first memory confronted is of "T., who committed suicide": "Living nowhere now, you are free/to follow me to every room." The memory never fades but rather fits more gently into who she is.

Memories of and visits with other women are now recorded until, in the collection's last poem, "Sleeping Near The Graveyard," she feels "the shadow of [her] life/surge over the shadow" of the gentle lover who is described as "the moon's brother . . . a swan asleep/too lovely, too distant to watch."

For both Lillian Allen and Sheree Fitch, the compulsion to sing arises from their participation with a community of women. Having "stumbled over the world's edges,/licked the candy windows/and spent endless nights with the wise" ("This Brighter Prison"), Karen Connelly ultimately discovers a similar sustenance that identification with and gratification of a body other than her own—the body of women—can bring.

Her Howl Inside Us

Chrystos

Dream On. Press Gang \$11.95

Not Vanishing. Press Gang \$10.95

Betsy Warland

Proper Deafinitions: Collected Theorograms. Press Gang \$11.95

Reviewed by Susan Rudy Dorscht

Vancouver's Press Gang Publishers describes itself as "a feminist collective committed to publishing works by women who are often made invisible and whose voices go unheard." Against the dominant culture's attempts at continuing their invisibility and silence, both Chrystos and Betsy Warland speak, lyrically, painfully, and with raw courage, their resistance. In their books they are "not vanishing" because they are "dreaming on," naming the present they find unlivable, the future they imagine. They ask us to hear against the "deaf"ness in dominant signifying practices.

Chrystos and Warland are both lesbian feminist and anti-racist activists and poets. They have both contributed significantly to lesbian, feminist and anti-racist publishing in North America in the last twenty years. Besides her own very compelling collections of poetry/prose, Chrystos' work has appeared in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Colour*, *Making Face, Making Soul/ Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color*, and *A Gathering of Spirit*. She is an Indigenous Land & Treaty Rights Activist, a powerful and empowering speaker, and an artist and writer.

Warland's collaborations with Daphne Marlatt, including *Double Negative*, her co-ordination of *Women and Words/Les femmes et les mots*, her co-editing of *Telling It: Women and Language Across Cultures*, and her editing of *In/Versions: Writing by Dykes, Queers & Lesbians*—the first such anthology to appear in North

America—has made her a significant presence in the feminist literary community in Canada.

Both women are excruciatingly aware of the ways the oppressions of colonialism, class, race, and gender affect the lives of women and of Native peoples. Louise Forsyth's "Foreword" to Warland's book, which she entitles "Giving Proper Deafinitions the slip in turns" is a useful introduction to the work of poets—like both Warland and Chrystos—who are compelled, by the horrifying and destructive powers of what Audre Lorde calls "a racist, patriarchal, anti-erotic society," to fight and to write back.

For example, in one of the "theorograms" in *Proper Deafinitions*, Warland reads Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash* to show the ways "[r]acism and sexism are strategies of patriarchal thought." Forsyth cites Warland's first use of the title *Proper Deafinitions* in *Double Negative* "here she can rest here she can play encounter her anima(l) self pre-sign pre-time [...] words forming then shifting [...] her desire to untrain herself undermine every prop(er) deafinition." Her *Theorograms* then are written "for the purpose of transgressing and displacing a system of signs which renders dominant culture deaf to the individual's vital sound," including the sounds we hear from each other across the oppressions of race, class, and gender.

Personal, anecdotal, painful, intimate, the "theorograms" document, for example, Warland's memories, while in hospital for gall-bladder surgery, of childhood incest, at the same time as they tell "how my life cannot be registered" in the terms of dominant culture, in this case, in the hospital admittance forms: "'married ... children... religion... employer...' I'm shocked to realize how ... utterly outside the formulae i am. within a handful of these questions my life is rendered invisible."

Chrystos makes visible the realities of her

life by writing, in *Dream On*, of her guilt at living in an apartment inaccessible to her disabled friend ("Dear Mary Frances"); of battery among lesbians ("WHAT DID HE HIT YOU WITH? THE DOCTOR SAID"); of white women's ignorance of the lives of women of colour ("Those Tears"); of the genocide of Native peoples ("WINTER COUNT"). *Not Vanishing* offers difficult, disturbing, necessary and empowering testimony for a white woman like myself to hear:

I WALK IN THE HISTORY OF MY PEOPLE
 [...] In my marrow are hungry faces
 who live on land the whites don't want
 In my marrow women who walk 5 miles
 every day for water
 [...] My knee is wounded so badly
 that I limp constantly
 Anger is my crutch I hold myself
 upright with it
 My knee is wounded
 see
 How I Am Still Walking

Gloria Anzaldua writes the following words of Chrystos, but they speak also to my reading of much of Warland's *Proper Deafinitions*: "Chrystos says no one is listening, but *we are, we are*. Her words slide into our throats, feed the hungry soul, fill the lost and homeless heart. Her voice binds into wholeness our severed selves with self-esteem. It calls us away from the death of invisibility, insists that we be seen and accounted to, no longer vanished, no longer vanishing. She leaves her howl inside us."



Lives & Elegies

Raymond Souster

Riding the Long Black Horse. Oberon
 \$23.95/\$11.95

Marco Fraticelli

Voyeur: Selected and New Poems 1972-1991.
 Guernica \$10.00

Lloyd Abbey

Abbey: Selected Poems 1959 to 1989. Ronsdale
 \$12.95.

Reviewed by Alexander M. Forbes

The first section of Raymond Souster's *Riding the Long Black Horse* consists of a single long narrative poem, "All the Long Way Home." In its account of a walk through Toronto taken by the speaker with his father in 1940, the poem tells its story through its images: spare and carefully selected images which reflect Souster's long-standing debt to imagism, and which are often productive of the most carefully balanced ironies. Passages of free direct discourse add to the vividness of the narrative.

The elegiac voice of the first section is heard again in the second, "T.O. Blues," which preserves the setting from which Souster's poems have so often sprung. Many different portraits are presented here: of a knife-sharpener who fails to understand the reasons for the collapse of his business ("Last Days of the Old Knife-Sharpener"); of Babe Ruth playing baseball on the Islands, before he becomes "Babe" ("The First of So Many"); of school children playing outside a nursing home ("Ages"); of the speaker's own earlier selves ("Fragment: The Valley," "Broken-Bat Blues, 1940," "Emergency").

"Stand Down, Cover Up," the third section, revisits the speaker's father: this time, as he is dying. The section offers an unexpected variation upon the *Arabian Nights* as the speaker attempts to postpone death (his father's rather than his own) by telling story after distracting story about the Blue

Jays. The narrative becomes a narrative about narrative, as well as about the passing of a life—with both narratives ending when the baseball strike of 1990 marks an end to narrative. A series of thirteen verse epistles to a dead father then concludes the section (“First Annual Report to a Battery Bombardier”).

The fourth section serves as an epilogue to the collection, and is accurately described by its title, “The Found and the Fanciful.” “Titanic Survivor Found on Iceberg, September 24, 1990” is, figuratively, a found poem—found in the prose of tabloid journalism, and delightfully turned into poetry by Souster’s hand. Two poems by Lampman are found in the pages of the *Toronto Globe*, and reprinted in an act of homage. A surrealist experiment in retelling classical mythology produces “Dream: The Aerial-Ladder Ballet,” and the idioms of jazz are heard in a playful retelling of children’s story in “Moon Swings.” The final poem, “Riding the Long Black Horse,” concludes the collection to which it gives its title by returning to the elegiac tone and subject matter of the earlier sections.

Most of the poems that comprise Marco Fraticelli’s *Voyeur* are haiku, or owe a clear debt to haiku. Fraticelli takes full advantage of recent developments in haiku theory, and of the scholarship that has freed haiku writing from many North American misconceptions. In his haiku Fraticelli does not limit himself to three lines, nor does he insert specific seasonal references in all cases. He freely borrows from the satirical tradition of *senryu*, furthermore, to produce a collection that demonstrates the wide-ranging possibilities of haiku (and haiku-influenced) poetry today.

Many of the poems (including those in the title series within the volume) are pure celebrations of life, in all its eccentric variations. Poems about death and the human response to death appear as well, however,

with perhaps the most poignant being “Still Life,” in which a woman, recently widowed, is portrayed watering “her lawn / in the rain.” The haiku sequence “After the Wake” similarly records responses to death—sometimes with an unexpected and gentle humour, a humour which proves not out of keeping since the focus is, ultimately, upon the living.

A wide range of writing is represented in a retrospective collection of Lloyd Abbey’s work, *Abbey: Selected Poems 1959 to 1989*. Poems about the awakening of repressed sexuality (in the section entitled “Limbs”) are followed (in the “Leviathan” section) by others that reflect the poet’s lengthy study of whales, as well as his interest in mythology. Poems about political killings in South America—“Vistas”—are accompanied by a long poem about political killings in East Timor: “Michael,” a complex poem which rewrites Wordsworth’s “Michael” in contemporary terms, much in the tradition of an eighteenth-century “imitation.”

Personal poems close the volume, as the speaker confronts his wife’s death. If, as the speaker laments, the “words” prove nothing but “games I offer / to myself” that can “change / nothing,” they form, nevertheless, the most moving tributes.

Breaking Out

John Newlove

Apology for Absence: Selected Poems 1962-1992.
Porcupine’s Quill \$12.95

Mary Choo, Margaret Fridel, Eileen Kernaghan, Sue Nevill, and Laurel Wade. J. Michael Yates, ed.

Light Like a Summons: Five Poets. Ronsdale
\$12.95

Reviewed by Alexander M. Forbes

Although most of the poems in John Newlove’s *Apology for Absence* have appeared in previous (and previously reviewed) collections, ten new poems are

included. Fresh expression is given in these poems to concerns long familiar to readers of Newlove.

Margaret Atwood's well known essay "How Do I Get Out of Here" noted that Newlove frequently sees the self as trapped in its own loveless corner, and requiring rescue. In a series of five poems, each entitled "Autobiography," a loveless corner is repeatedly revisited, while the speakers in the remaining new poems alternately explore the corner, or else raise the hope of breaking out of it.

In "The Weather" the speaker notes that present life is "a life / without an image," while in "God Bless the Bear" the speaker expresses the wish to break out of such a life by knowing, at least, "what my death looks like / no matter how fast it comes." "Poem with Ravens" is more optimistic, for it proposes that "the inside world" is one capable of being "understood," like "light" itself. "Such Fun, Such Fun" returns, however, to a difficulty which faces anyone trapped in a corner, although the difficulty is of special significance to any writer: namely, that the verbal expressions of one who is so trapped are bounded and conditioned by the corner itself. The speaker comes here to the unhappy perception to which earlier speakers in Newlove's poems also came, on many occasions: if the "lines" are "long," they are also "lying."

The final poem, "Progress," is a long poem which comes as close as any poem in *Apology for Absence* to offering a personal and poetic manifesto, with images and perceptions found throughout Newlove's poetry reappearing here with the power that comes from concentrated presentation in a single work. Human beings are typically ambivalent and self-contradictory ("wanting / to leave, wanting to stay"), and a hostile world proves never more mad than when it thinks itself reasonable ("experiencing everything, understanding nothing"). Hope remains for the speaker,

nevertheless, for he experiences "too much of a longing for colour, for green, / to endure this slow mixture easily"—and "only a disappointed optimist," after all, "could feel so bitterly towards the world as it is, / and love it as it might be."

Light Like a Summons is a collection of poems by five British Columbia poets who, in various ways, share Newlove's concern with corners, and with breaking out of corners.

The poems of Laurel Wade are especially close in their perceptions to Newlove's. The speaker in "Nearing Porteau Cove," for example, identifies herself metaphorically with the "Northwest September dusk" she both experiences and describes. A line in the ocean "divides water light from water dark," much as "the orange sea-skin of knowing everything" is divided from the "late-light sky of knowing nothing." The speaker's impulse, like that of many of Newlove's speakers, is to push beyond the constricting lines she encounters—and for her, as for Newlove's speakers, the escape from confinement cannot come from the "dusk of us," but from contact with something beyond the dark and bewildered self, the "figure / Trapped in spaces of a cold, cobbled way" ("Night Edge").

Eileen Kernaghan is perhaps the most consciously intertextual of the poets in *Light Like a Summons*. The voices of many writers—Blake, Yeats, Thomas, Stevens, and Plath—are echoed in her poems, as are the mythologies and philosophies to which she turns in her search for meaning not confined to the corners of present time and space. The myth of Baucis and Philemon is retold ("Winter Song"), Plato's cave is revisited ("Leave-Taking"), and the legend of Gilgamesh is invoked ("In the House of Dust"). The mythologies of contemporary science are likewise turned to poetic account ("Nova," "Tales from the Holograph Woods").

Although over half the poems in *Light Like a Summons* are by Kernaghan and

Wade, the voices of the other three contributors are also clearly heard as they suggest their own ways of breaking out of the corner of restrictive experience.

For Mary Choo, the experience of dreams offers one way out ("Morpheus and the Boy," "Moonpiper," "Necromancer—From the Edge of Dreams"), and the suspended rhythms and perceptions of haiku, another (not only in actual haiku such as "Pond" and "Hill Song," but also in individual stanzas of longer poems such as "Incarnate" and "Sentinel"). Margaret Fridel also turns to haiku ("Storm Genesis: Alberta," "The Tiger," "Death"), but where Choo's reflect larger surrealistic tendencies, Fridel's reflect the interests of metaphysical poetry (interests also in evidence in longer poems such as "Healing Old Wounds" and "Painting of Lady Playing Violin," where a freeing of perception is effected by the uncovering of the unexpected and paradoxical). The fifth poet included in the collection, Sue Nevill, similarly seeks to open the reader's eyes through the offering of unexpected insights: metaphysical ones, upon occasion ("November Bridges"), but, more often, the unexpected insights that come from a simple and direct perception of the pain of life ("In Loco Parentis")—and of the unanticipated possibilities ("Lucy on the Frontier").

Confessions

Genni Gunn

Mating in Captivity. Quarry \$12.95

Dennis Lee

Riffs. Brick \$11.95

Robin Skelton

Popping Fuchsias. Ronsdale \$12.95

Reviewed by Alexander M. Forbes

Genni Gunn's *Mating in Captivity* is a long self-documentary poetic cycle comprised largely of prose poems, with occasional poems in verse. Realism and surrealism

alternate as the speaker confesses to the distances she has created between herself and others, and between her conscious life and her inner self. The confessions are accompanied by social analysis as well as personal, however, as the speaker comes to realise that the patterns of distancing in her life are only partially a result of her own choices: she comes to recognise that her parents contributed significantly to shaping a life of uncertain self-identity and ambivalent relationships. An absent father who would periodically reappear helped to make his daughter "ambivalent as song" ("Aural Dexterity") and ensure that, for her, "need" would become "synonymous with fear" ("Safe Passage"). A mother who defined herself as "earthly" while being perpetually "airborne" ("A Matter of Genes") contributed to her daughter's penchant for frequent escapes, departures, and displacements, both literal and psychological ("Departures"). The insights gained prove genuinely integrative, however (confession proves healing, in a traditional way) and a return at the end of the poem to the speaker's place of birth signifies an acceptance of self and family, however difficult that acceptance ("The Return").

With *Riffs*, Dennis Lee extends the interest in jazz he long ago displayed in *The Gods* (1979), but this time the interest shapes an entire poem: a long poem which, like *Mating in Captivity*, is a self-documentary cycle composed of smaller poems. Eighty-eight songs ("riffs," or the melodic improvisations of jazz) both construct a narrative and comment upon it, in lyrical variations. The result is a delightful experiment in verbal wit and play, in the rhythms and idioms of jazz.

The songs recount the collapse of a love affair, but not before it has been vividly recreated—recreated in celebration, but also, as the singer confesses, in verbal compensation for its demise. As the affair proceeds, however, the singer becomes

increasingly unhappy, with anger replacing love and riffs becoming rifts (a “busted language”). At first the beloved is blamed, but personal responsibility is ultimately assumed when the singer confesses that he has long lied to himself, and that the loss of “centre” has been too high a price to pay for any supposed “fulfilment.” The “crippled roles that each has singled the / other to partner,” in the words of the *Civil Elegies*, come to be seen here as constituting a “voluntary betrayal.” Although the singer slips back for a time into his old “beat,” ironically ignoring his own admissions, a new rhythm is eventually established when a final and sincere confession is voiced, in the form of a prayer: “scour me, deepness, before I die.”

Robin Skelton’s *Popping Fuchsias* offers a number of experiments. Skelton follows Auden and Thomas in attempting to rehabilitate traditional forms such as the sestina, the triolet, and the villanelle, while also writing in other set forms that are today neglected (lays, madrigals, and various Welsh and Spanish forms). Innovation does not conclude here, however, for Skelton also invents his own forms, establishing them by offering repeated instances: a modification of the rondo (which he terms the “Catena Rondo,” or “chain” rondo), for example, and the “viator” (in which the initial line “travels” through the stanzas of the poem).

Many of the poems are confessional, and the confessions, like the forms, are innovative, for Skelton’s speakers depart from traditional patterns of confession by declaring a conscious determination to persist in the self-defeating errors they acknowledge. In doing so, they repeatedly reenact the title poem of the collection as a whole, in which the popping of fuchsias represents the deliberate destruction of flowering potential under the impetus of a “pride” which contradicts natural process by attempting to turn the “potential” into the “actual”

before its time. There is a “pattern” here in which “nurturing pride” gives rise to “loss,” as the speaker in “Garden Lore” recognises. As the speaker in “Cleaning House” remarks, however—in a form of confession typical of that of many of the other speakers—“I forget / deliberately”: “where I was is where I stay. . . .”

In their determined self-contradiction, the speakers become darkly coloured, thoroughly dramatic characters. Poems in which speakers “confess and know / confession false” (“The Bargain”) mark significant experiments in the art of the ironic confession.

Human Appetites

Bill Gaston

North of Jesus’ Beans. Cormorant \$13.95

David Bergen

Sitting Opposite My Brother. Turnstone \$14.95

Reviewed by P. J. Gerbrecht

In their more realistic plots, that is, in those whose actions do not depend on an abundance of coincidence and spiritism, Bill Gaston (b. 1953) and David Bergen (b. 1957) write about the conflicts of the nineties by creating protagonists whose attitudes were formed when they themselves were children. Their authorial voices present current mores for which the men of the 1950s and 1960s are responsible: without accepting any responsibility, their characters acknowledge the fact that pride-bound paternal attitudes endure. Poor men.

Because they are built around metamorphosing conflicts, the two books share some facets of content, attitude, and tone: their male and female characters are equal in their appetites, but the women-characters are incomprehensible to the men who speak, both because they exhibit maternal motivation for their actions, and because they have the cold strength to relinquish

what they cannot hold—husbands and lovers, children who will not be born, children who disappear or die young, children who are spoiled and just go bad.

Bill Gaston's title piece, "North of Jesus' Beans," describes a childless couple: Mark and Donna both work for the Canadian government and see the trouble in the Persian Gulf as a US war and television series. Once Mark and Donna were love-not-war hippies, living in a Big Sur café—a café called "North of Jesus' Beans"—with a Jewish angel named Ariel. Now, twenty years later, they are trying to adopt a child, doing the paper work in which neither believes. They evaluate every event as though it were a variation on being stoned: they make ill-proportioned jokes and puns; they are drugged by TV news reports; they work for the surreal "Canadian Office of Regulatory Services"; Donna is politically maternal; they smoke pot in the dark and look at one another through US Army-issue night-vision glasses. In innocent Ottawa, they are north of Jesus, watching an electronic green-lit war. Mark's jokes, bad as they are as jokes, contribute to the Escher-like quality in Gaston's prose: there is perception slippage in the words and images, in time and peace—in all the things important in the lives of Gaston's characters.

In some of Gaston's titles, ambiguity invites audience-participation. "Lying Lights" is a coming-of-age-without-understanding story, and the reader cannot avoid questioning: is *lying* the participle for *lie* or for *lay*? is *lights* a noun or a verb?

Gaston's characters are not extraordinary people; their problems have nothing to do with ethics or esthetics. Their senses are earth bound and deadened. Physical pain has the impact of reality, but the fantastic is always near the surface of these stories, and the characters' visions and illusions make the quotidian strange and intriguing. There is motivation even in the most unpleasant of Gaston's characters—that would be

Larkin in "The Revenge of Richard Brautigan." Irritation is Larkin's muse, and Brautigan's suicide is, in Larkin's interpretation, a "last poem." (Another story in Gaston's collection, "The Work in Progress," presents a nearly successful Larkin-think-alike who decides that "talent is in not caring.")

The most alienated of Bergen's sin-dependent characters is Timothy, the envied brother of the book's title. In "The Translator," missionary-diplomat Timothy describes a newly arrived assistant as a man with a "taste for organization and truth. I saw him as dangerous." And after an affair with a young Thai girl he has valued as a translator of emotions, Timothy begins to worry that the girl has translated him. In "Where You're From" Timothy, on leave in a Canada that is strange to him, values all symbols without discrimination—the cross, red hair, a gourd cod piece—while his brother, the narrator, claims to place value in women's smells and in the *idea* of babies.

Before readers approach Bergen's title story, "Sitting Opposite My Brother," they, or we, have already met all but one of the characters in "The Translator" and in "Where You're From." We have met the narrator, his wife, and his brother; the opening sentence of the title story introduces its one new character, "Timothy married an American woman who was really Guyanese." (Though the whole piece is in the past tense, the narrator waits until late in the telling to reveal that Timothy and the "American woman who was really Guyanese" have never married. Bergen has an annoying habit of dropping an "I just said that" turn into a difficult narrative.) The narrator, Thomas, dreams that his wife and his brother have a child, imagines his brother in bed with the exotic wife who is casting "this big, black shadow on a man who had always wanted to shine." Like many of Bergen's male narrators, Thomas

is jealous of another man's success with a particular female. He compares his own woman (ownership is more than a suggestion) to other men's. He whispers in his sleeping wife's ear, directing her to dream his brother's death. "Dream that dream," he tells her, in an extreme act of ownership commanding her to involve her self in his death wish for the brother of whom he is both jealous and suspicious.

Bergen is not going to be popular with his Mennonite friends and family; he sets up Mennonite characters as ignorant and intolerant. ("It's the make-up, it halts fertility.") And the PC police will surely attack his characters' gendered attitudes. Bergen's women are, as the first narrator explains, "too calm, too reasonable"; Bergen's men set up wife-rating criteria that award maximum points for physical capabilities (and possibilities), no points for intellect. A woman who is "an enthusiast" inspires a sudden and painful "disappointment in . . . marriage." The husband in "Hey" admires his wife's athletic body and, like other Bergen husbands, longs to share her with other men; he desires women who have attractive napes and other parts he'd like to lick, and women who smell good. He particularly likes women with "a needy smell."

Bergen's adult males, grandfathers and fathers, exist in metaphorized reality, agonizing over the peripherally possible; his grandmothers and mothers (even that mother who claims to have been abducted by aliens who impregnated her) are practical and self-contained—but not effective.

"I had wanted to marry a French woman, an Asian, someone exotic who would have spoken to me with a foreign lover's tongue, had a different blood type, placed dark skin against my own white body and talked to me of God and books, not cows and children. Still, I will lie down beside Constance my wife and run my fingers along her spine and wonder whose prayer she is an answer to." The sentiment is a good massah's;

Bergen's women respond as observant servants who rarely speak.

There is something sinister about Bergen's writing. His male narrators are such unpleasant and self-interested islands indulging themselves with their soapy daydreams. And Bergen's one-noun titles add to the reader's creepy suspicions that he has no plan to lift the darkness. A vision, any vision, will serve a male character who needs an excuse for self-indulgence, a man who does not suffer well, a man who is not, like Bergen's womanly character, "too calm, too reasonable."

Bill Gaston gifts his readers with a variety of subjects, characterizations, and styles; David Bergen's stories are identifiably, disturbingly marked "Bergen."

Our Social Fabric

N.E.S. Griffiths

The Splendid Vision: Centennial History of the National Council of Women of Canada. Carleton UP \$28.95/\$18.95

Malcolm MacLeod

A Bridge Built Halfway: A History of Memorial University College. McGill-Queen's UP \$39.95

Reviewed by Bryan N. S. Gooch

One is reminded—not infrequently—that it behoves anyone whose main interest is Canadian letters to take full measure of the society from which such literature emerges. Indeed, particular rewards are to be gained from perusing some more recent historical studies because of the quality of both documentation and discourse. Two volumes which might well not come easily into the view of the reader of consciously artistic endeavours are Naomi Griffiths' *The Splendid Vision* and Malcolm MacLeod's *A Bridge Built Halfway*, and these are both books which offer a variety of insights, provincial and national, which are, quite simply, too important to be neglected. Of course such works are within the purview of

historians, for instance, but under no circumstances should that prevent them from having a broader readership.

Griffiths' *The Splendid Vision* is a remarkable piece of scholarship—a highly detailed and utterly readable account, arranged chronologically, of the history of the National Council of Women of Canada. This book not only provides a thorough overview of an organisation which has had a profound and positive effect on society as a whole and the fortunes of women in particular, but it necessarily involves a survey of significant Canadian events and shifts in social patterns over the course of a century, particularly in terms of federal and other legislation. As a non-partisan and non-denominational organisation, the NCW has over the years drawn into its orbit an enormous range of individual societies, local, provincial, or national in character, with a host of individual concerns and missions. Yet, as Griffiths points out, the NCW's apparent lack of focus—except insofar as the centrality of the concerns of women in this country remains paramount—while seeming a disadvantage remains one of the Council's greatest strengths. One becomes aware, as the chapters roll smoothly by, of the importance of having such a channel for grass-roots concerns to be debated and, in many cases, put directly to government for action. Significant also in this account are the links with the International Council of Women (formed in 1888), particularly cemented through the influence and good offices of Lady Aberdeen, who was, when the NCW was formed in 1893, the wife of the then Governor-General; today both the NCW and ICW remain vibrant and vital, the latter being remarkable for its importance in the work of the United Nations. This is—quite apart from the spectacular record of contributions in the areas of, for instance, equality of opportunity and pay, alcoholism, prison conditions, immigration of

minors, education, the arts, electoral reform, and health care—the story of an astonishingly energetic and generous group of people who have given vast amounts of time and energy to improve the condition of the nation. It offers—in the best sense—an extraordinary picture of our social fabric. Thoroughly documented, with footnotes and relevant appendices, this represents a first-rate contribution to an understanding of who and what we were and are.

If Malcolm MacLeod's *A Bridge Built Halfway* largely concerns the history of Memorial University College before that institution became a fully-fledged university and hence focuses on pre-Confederation years, it nonetheless offers a tale which will often seem familiar to college and university students, faculty, and administrators across the land. Like Griffiths' book, this is also about vision, determination, frustration, and triumph, and ultimately it concerns the people who built and studied in a successful junior college. Consider, too, other now well-known institutions which began life as two-year colleges, often under the aegis of some larger and more distinguished academic relative and which have known financial and other constraints. Yet Memorial had no such sponsorship: though it had early British connections (University of London external examinations and personal links, especially through John Lewis Paton, Memorial's first head, who saw a college as a "bridge built halfway across a river") and sought advice and recognition from some Canadian universities, especially in the Atlantic region, it was very much a Newfoundland creation, emerging despite solidly-established doctrinal interests and to the credit of those with wide vision and tolerance. While graduates would have to pursue advanced studies elsewhere, they often returned to teach, and as the account unfolds one is confronted, as in Griffiths'

book, by an astonishing record of dedication, sacrifice, and concern for society. This is a story of long hours and low pay, of cramped facilities and lack of funding—indeed, without the help of the Carnegie Foundation, the College might well have ceased to operate. MacLeod has done an admirable job, especially given that he has developed his account not only from archival records but from personal reports of many former students of Memorial. Here is an example of oral history at its best. There was never any danger, I suspect, that this book would have joined the ranks of the aridly statistical—it is altogether human and anecdotal; yet the facts—the numbers and the dates and the lists—are all there, embedded in the text, in the tables, and in the appendices. This is indeed part of our country's story—what Memorial was, is, to a point, behind what we are today, and we would do well to take some lessons from the vision and dedication of some of our forebears when we come to contemplate the challenges of the present day.

Polar Attractions

Dean Beeby

In a Crystal Land: Canadian Explorers in Antarctica. U Toronto P \$29.95

Lisa Bloom

Gender on Ice: American Ideologies of Arctic Explorations. U Minnesota P \$34.95/\$14.95

Reviewed by Sherrill E. Grace

In a Crystal Land is an account of the lives of Canadian men—scientists, doctors, aviators—who participated in some of the most important twentieth century British and American “assaults” on the south pole. These men, and the roles they played, have been obscured by time and historiography (in one case by a deliberately edited British account) and marginalized. Their accomplishments have been ignored. Beeby's purpose, then,

is to reinstate them to their rightful place in antarctic and Canadian history by telling their stories. *Gender on Ice*, as its title suggests, is a highly critical reappraisal of American explorers in the high arctic and of the deliberate construction of these white, male adventurers as invincible American heroes. Again, others were marginalized in the process—the Inuit, all women, and a black American, not to mention the country whose territory would be crossed, penetrated, and claimed for the greater glory of the United States of America. Both books tell a tale of violent reconstructions of reality in the pursuit of imperialist agendas. And both aim to reinsert forgotten, suppressed voices into the polar discourse.

In the nine main chapters of his book, Beeby recounts the stories of fifteen intrepid men, often weaving their own accounts into more general descriptions of the expeditions on which they served. He begins each chapter with a brief *in medias res* narration of a dramatic moment and moves back from that moment to the wider context. His intention is to catch our interest and to draw upon the time-honoured traditions of oral story-telling and tall tales. Often this strategy succeeds; however, the cumulative effect is somewhat stultifying, and it makes the material itself seem predictable. But that is a small failing because there are many interesting moments recounted in a *Crystal Land*. The one that held my attention most forcibly was the story of Charles Wright, a young physicist from Toronto, who was part of the search team sent to find out what had happened to Captain Robert Scott. It was Wright who, on 12 November 1912, spotted the tent that covered the frozen bodies of Scott and his two companions, as well as their diaries and letters.

Beeby, a journalist, has done a lot of primary research for this book, from the Scott Polar Institute and Canadian government

archives to personal diaries, letters, and interviews with the few men still alive. An especially interesting product of this research is the set of photographs and maps chosen to illustrate the text. With one or two exceptions, these black and white pictures are unromantic snaps of men at work in a bleak, hostile landscape. For example, the image of Charles Wright chosen for the dust jacket shows a very young man, bundled up and seated on a loaded sledge, smiling forlornly, even wistfully, past the camera; he is surrounded by a blur of white. Beeby insists that his book is about "young men burning for adventure," and he repeatedly describes their endurance, skill, and courage—all qualities he claims are characteristic of the "Canandian character," which is moulded by our northern experience. Paradoxically, to my eye, the photographs tell a different story, none more so than the haunting image of Wright. In the last analysis (and in spite of Beeby's rhetoric at times) Canada's antarctic explorers were not larger than life heroes but real human beings. They were not setting an agenda (whether imperialist or personal); they were serving. And when Captain Andrew Taylor did take charge of the secret Operation Tabarin in 1943-44, the British refused to acknowledge him because *their* sovereignty in the antarctic was at stake.

Beeby provides little critical reflection or commentary on the activity of polar exploration itself or on the ideology supporting it, but Lisa Bloom picks up where the storytelling of *In a Crystal Land* stops. *Gender on Ice* is a disturbing and probing examination of the American discursive formation of heroism as it was constructed by Robert Peary and the *National Geographic* magazine. Bloom argues—and I find her arguments convincing—that Peary represented masculinist and nationalist ideologies that were exploited and validated by the *National Geographic* at a crucial point in its development and that once the investment

in Peary was made it could not be abandoned or discredited without diminishing the scientific credibility, mythological power, and economic success of the magazine. According to Bloom, "expeditions to the North Pole . . . were icons of the whole enterprise of colonialism," and Robert Peary was (and is) the symbolic hero of this American story.

In order to support her central argument, Bloom scrutinizes the records of Robert Peary's claim to have discovered the North Pole in 1909. He asserted this claim in the face of Britain's failure to do so after four centuries of arctic exploration, against his American competition, the hapless Dr Frederick Cook, and despite the increasing evidence (scientific and other) that he had missed his goal and had fudged his results. Bloom, however, gives full weight to various counter-claims, commissioned investigations, and other narratives.

The two most fascinating of these other narratives are the stories of Cook and of Peary's black American co-explorer Matthew Henson, who was excised from the story both by Peary and by others in subsequent accounts. The reasons for excluding Henson may seem transparent. First, a racist construction of the "negro" did not include the possibility that Henson could be anything more than a servant, like the local "Eskimos" whom Peary described as "cogs" in his expeditionary "machine"; second, the construction of the supreme, white American male could not permit his reliance, in any way, upon a black man. Even the publication, in 1912, of Henson's book *A Negro Explorer at the North Pole*, did not lead to his inscription within the polar story. Indeed, to this day, Henson's role is presented in racist terms, when it is mentioned at all.

The reception given to Frederick Cook, who claimed to have discovered the North Pole in 1908 (a full year before Peary) is harder to summarize. For various reasons,

his records were lost, his assertions discredited, and his life after his return was plagued by poverty, rejection, and imprisonment. Bloom examines Cook's treatment in some detail, but she highlights two possible, related explanations for his fate. One is simply that he was not backed by President Roosevelt and the *National Geographic* (as was Peary), and the other was that he did not conform to a pre-conceived and useful idea of the American explorer-hero. Of course, he could not have the former without the latter. Through a comparison of Peary's and Cook's comments about the pole, Bloom suggests that Cook presented himself as a human being who could reflect upon the folly of his ambition and the hollowness of his achievement, whereas Peary presented himself as the sole conqueror and individual victor. What was worse, Cook openly praised his Inuit guides and fully acknowledged his dependence upon them and their skill.

The role played in the dissemination of what I am tempted to call the "Peary Polar myth" by *National Geographic* is examined by Bloom in her second chapter, and it is a story of obfuscation and self-interest. She also examines the central roles played by science and technology, especially the advancing technology of the camera, in the *Geographic's* manipulation of the facts and the story told around the facts. Her discussion amounts to nothing short of an exposure of the magazine's vested interest in an ideology and discourse of exploration that posited white American masculinity as the supreme force dominating the world. Also of importance in this study are Bloom's discussions of gender representation and construction in the pages of the *National Geographic* and in Peary's treatment of his Inuit lover. In her final chapter, Bloom compares British and American narratives of polar exploration—Scott's in the antarctic, Peary's in the arctic—and suggests that

the British and American models for heroism, like the means they used to dramatize and validate these models, differ sharply. Where the British place their faith in individual male nobility within a narrative of potentially tragic self-sacrifice, the Americans rely on scientific methods and rhetoric to disseminate, through photographs, film, and video, an image of world domination. The arguments and evidence in support of these two discursive formations are too complex to consider here, and Bloom needs to develop them more fully and critically to my mind, but on the whole she is persuasive in her demonstration of how these two positions underlie current policy and behaviour—Britain's in the Falklands and the United States' during the Gulf War.

In the light of Bloom's critique of the ideological agendas fuelling polar expeditions, I am tempted to re-read Beeby's *Crystal Land* as a naive representation of story that leaves largely unquestioned the masculinist and nationalist biases inscribed in the stories of his young Canadians. However, the re-reading works both ways. Nowhere does Lisa Bloom mention the role of Canada and of Canadians in the north that Robert Peary so determinedly crossed and so ferociously claimed as his prize. Interestingly, it is Frederick Cook whom I find the most sympathetic personality in either Bloom or Beeby. Cook *lived* in the arctic *with* his Canadian Inuit guides and companions; he attempted to speak for them, as well as for himself, and he testified to the ultimate supremacy of a formidable natural world that no one could claim as "his" own.



A Collective Narcissism

Valerie Raoul

Distinctly Narcissistic: Diary Fiction in Quebec. U of Toronto Press. \$55.00

Reviewed by Mary Jean Green

The topic of gender and genre has long served as a catchy title for panels at literary conferences, but few critics have presented as strong a case for a linkage of the two almost homonymic concepts as Valerie Raoul in her recent study of diary fiction in Quebec. Moving well beyond the scope of her earlier study of the fictional journal in modern France, Raoul confronts the questions of gender inherent in the diary form and in the numerous examples she presents of its textual practice in Quebec. Pushing her analysis one step further, she goes on to relate these issues to the construction of Québécois collective identity.

In Raoul's reading, the fictional diary is a fundamentally narcissistic form concerned with the construction of an acceptable representation of the self. Her understanding of narcissism is informed by the theories of Freud, Lacan and others and their feminist revisions in the work of Kristeva and Irigaray. Freud, of course, identified narcissism as a feminine condition; whether or not this is true, diaries and diary fiction have historically been associated with women. In the European tradition, Raoul tells us, diary fiction commonly featured a female narrator and allowed room for a female author as well. And thus it is not entirely coincidental that Quebec's first known example of diary fiction, Laure Conan's *Angéline de Montbrun*, was also the first Quebec novel written by a woman.

While the effects of narcissism in the individual have been widely studied, Raoul extends the concept to include a "collective narcissism" that "function[s] in the interests of the self-representation of a national or ethnic identity whose survival is per-

ceived as at stake." Thus, she argues, the struggles to represent and even engender the self appearing in much of this diary fiction may also be read as part of a historical project of self-definition by the people of Quebec.

Bringing together Simone de Beauvoir's famous characterization of woman as the "other" and the concept of the "colonized" as described by Albert Memmi—who had himself seen its applicability to the situation of Québécois—Raoul argues convincingly that the situation faced by the colonized man is in many ways like that of the woman, since both are relegated to the status of "other" by a dominant society. Although by this argument Quebec women would seem to be doubly colonized, they have, somewhat paradoxically, been placed in the role of oppressor by men conscious of their own disempowerment. This situation accounts for the feeling of female domination noted by cultural commentators like Jean Larose and sets the stage for the murder of the woman, as has been powerfully outlined by Patricia Smart. As they work themselves out in the fictional journals Raoul studies, these questions of gender and culture are anything but simple. Nevertheless, by bringing different diary texts into contact with each other, she is able to draw striking conclusions about the way gender relationships have been represented in fiction by men and women at certain moments in Quebec cultural history.

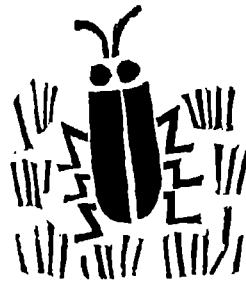
Such a theoretical structure could easily overwhelm the texts under discussion, but as Raoul proceeds to the analysis of individual diary novels, arranged in chronological groupings, it becomes clear that the theoretical framework has been generated by study of the literary phenomena, rather than the other way around. In certain cases, this approach points up the importance of texts often omitted from the literary canon or sheds new light on canonical texts that remain enigmatic. Both these comments

are true of the paired chapters in which Raoul brings together Quebec's first diary fiction, the canonical *Angéline de Montbrun* along with several other works by Laure Conan, and a real diary written by a woman at about the same time, the journal of Henriette Dessaulles. Raoul herself was among the first to submit the Dessaulles journal, published only in 1971, to serious literary study. Although Conan could not have known of Dessaulles' diary, she has almost uncannily provided her protagonist with a situation not far removed from that of the real adolescent, and Raoul shows how both writers use their diaries in the construction of a female self. The plot of the real diary follows the fictional model of the romance and the Freudian model of feminine submission, terminating with Henriette's marriage; in the fiction, however, romance ends in tragedy and loss, and Angéline uses her diary to retain possession of herself and, in Raoul's reading, to become her own father and mother. Like other critics before her, Raoul sees a parallel between what she calls Angéline de Montbrun's "moral narcissism" and the traditional "refuge values" (to use Memmi's terminology) of nineteenth-century Quebec: moral superiority and self-denial. Finding a similar pattern in Conan's other diary fiction (I would contend it occurs in her historical fiction as well), Raoul concludes that although Conan's protagonists use their diaries as a way to emerge from the "impossible" feminine condition, the only course of action available to them is one of self-denial.

Raoul's privileging of the fictional diary form permits her to focus exclusively on texts whose narrators are preoccupied with the construction of a self. In some cases, this focused study permits her to provide precise textual evidence to support more generalized hypotheses advanced by other critics. This is true, for example, in her analysis of the misogyny apparent in the

fictional diaries written and narrated by "colonized" Quebec men in the 1940s and 50s. In other cases, Raoul's willingness to pursue the genre beyond the restricted circle of canonized texts yields new insights. It has been a matter of critical consensus that male writers of the 1960s were able to find a relatively unproblematic equation between their assertion of masculine identity and their quest for autonomy as Québécois; the use of the diary, as a means of self-production, is evident in texts like Gérard Bessette's *Le Libraire* and Jacques Godbout's *Salut Galarneau!* But this relationship between gender and national identity was by no means clear for women writing in the same period. Examining little-studied texts by such writers as Paule Saint-Onge, Yolande Chéné and Hélène Ouvrard, Raoul underlines the greater complexity of the quest by female diarists to situate their own search for personal autonomy as women within the terms of the nationalist discourse and to relate women's traditional role in reproduction to the production of a text.

Some readers will certainly have bones to pick with Raoul's interpretations, but I am not among them. She is respectful of her texts and of her critical predecessors, yet she is not afraid to move beyond the limits of an individual text or writer to arrive at broader observations on genre, gender and culture. In so doing, she has made a major contribution to the understanding of Quebec literature and its role in cultural self-definition.



Journey to the Inner Self

Helmut Markus

An der Grenze: Reise nach Quytá

Wissenschaftlicher. Verlag Trier 10DM

Reviewed by Stefan Haag

As the subtitle indicates, this book is an account of a backpacking journey from Winter Lake, located about 300 km north of Yellowknife, NWT, through the wilderness back to civilization. The physical demands on Markus and his companion, such as carrying 35 kg each, enduring the relentless mosquitoes, and marching through the tundra in the heat of the summer, quickly explain the first part of the title which may be read as: "On the Limit" (as well as "On the Border"). However, as Markus points out, the limit of this journey is not only physical; rather, there are many limits: the limit of his character, the limit of his friendship with his companion, the limit of his memory, the limit of his will to survive, and so on. The first few pages describe the physical exertion so intensely that there seems no escape, neither for Markus nor for the reader who suffers in mental sympathy. But once Markus learns to deal with the unremitting pain (we learn, for instance, that the sores on his feet do not heal throughout the journey), his mind is free to pursue yet another journey—this one into the repressed territory of his character and past.

Being a literary scholar, Markus seeks to shape the account of that journey into some literary form. While this attempt in itself is at times successful, Markus's self-conscious comments test the patience of the reader: there is too much navel gazing and altogether too much egotistical prattle in this book. Why was a sentence such as the following not eliminated: "Being two writing desk people from one of the most densely populated and most civilized regions of the earth, we have succeeded at an unbelievably long

and unbelievably difficult journey through a land that is utterly unpopulated and for long stretches as alien as the moon" (my translation)? Even more insufferable is the passage in which Markus daydreams himself into being judge of all criminals that have ever set foot on earth: the Nazis, members of military juntas, murderers, torturers, and so on. Of course, they are all executed, "hygienically" and "painlessly (as a concession to [his] humanistic upbringing)." The dubiousness of these methods does not occur to him. Yet I am glad for Markus that "now [he] knows what [he] would do, if [he] were God for a short time to be God," for self-knowledge is the first step to self-improvement. That he confesses to be afraid of that knowledge, however, indicates that he remains in awe of his daydream instead of thinking self-critically about it.

After reading *An der Grenze*, then, one wonders about the reasons for such a journey. While Markus's journal provides an answer for Markus, I think the general reader remains unconvinced. I, for one, do not need to hike three weeks through excruciatingly difficult terrain to discover that deep inside me there is something that would not hesitate to condemn Nazis and the like. It is here that the why—at least for this reviewer—transformed itself into a rather disinterested so what.

Intertextual Readings

Martin Kuester

Framing Truths: Parodic Structures in Contemporary English-Canadian Novels. U of Toronto P \$50.00/\$18.95

Robert Kiely

Reverse Tradition: Postmodern Fictions and the Nineteenth Century Novel. Harvard UP us\$34.95

Reviewed by Gabriele Helms

In *Framing Truths*, Martin Kuester promises to analyze the role of parody in six contemporary Canadian historical novels by

Timothy Findley, George Bowering, and Margaret Atwood. By focusing on “the formal and structural relationships between texts,” he wants to examine how novelists have taken narrative structures developed by their Canadian, American, and European predecessors and how they have integrated them into new Canadian contexts and frames. Kuester defines parody not as a genre but as a rhetorical strategy that is characterized by repetitions with a difference and a purpose. He understands parody “in the original sense of talking alongside the original text while changing its meaning”; the parodic process is therefore not necessarily humorous as the usual connotations of the term ‘parody’ may suggest. Right from the beginning, Kuester’s study is guided by—yet also tries to set itself apart from—Linda Hutcheon’s work on parody and irony. *Framing Truths* focuses on examples of progressive parody that support generic change because they play a crucial role “in the self-definition of a ‘new’ literature that is situated between the influential poles of the European and the American traditions.”

Kuester introduces his analysis of historical novels with a brief but valuable discussion of the problems involved in defining the genre and the connections between contemporary historical novels and historiography. Ultimately, as Kuester explains with regard to Findley’s *Famous Last Words*, it seems impossible to arrive at any truth that is not a parody, that is not framed. Parodic frames indicate a range of strategies for historical re-visioning. To indicate the prevalence of parody in Canadian writing, Kuester first identifies parodic structures in forerunners of contemporary historical novels such as John Richardson’s *Wacousta*, but also in less obvious examples such as F.P. Grove’s *Consider Her Way* and Ernest Buckler’s *The Mountain and the Valley*.

While Kuester usefully integrates familiar criticism on the work of Findley, Bowering,

and Atwood to support his main argument that these novels qualify as sophisticated metahistorical parodies, his classifications of these writers into “three different schools of writing” are certainly debatable. After analyzing *The Wars* and *Famous Last Words*, Kuester concludes that Findley can be characterized as a modernist who is still striving for “a coherent universe and a coherent cosmology”; the coherence finds expression in his “primarily monologic way of using parodic structures.” Bowering represents the playful postmodernist whose novels *A Short Sad Book* and *Burning Water* are noted for their “structural acrobatics of parody” rather than “the political arguments that are the intention behind these parodies.” Throughout *Framing Truths*, Kuester seems to define postmodernism as ahistorical, arbitrary, aesthetical, and apolitical; he does not take into account that what he presumes to be the inherent ahistoricity or lack of political concerns of postmodernism has been challenged not only by revisionist historical novels both in Canada and internationally—Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan*, Christa Wolf’s *Cassandra*, and Julian Barnes’s *A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters* come to mind—but also by contemporary feminist and post-colonial studies. Finally, Atwood’s writing is classified as “feminist”; *Bodily Harm* and *The Handmaid’s Tale* are presented as the culmination of the study. Revisions of history from marginalized perspectives are crucial in contemporary historical novels in Canada but Kuester’s discussion of feminism and its political dimension in Atwood’s writing remains vague and the study loses some of its stamina here.

Framing Truths does not merely identify sources; rather, Kuester distinguishes his analysis from other intertextual studies by focusing on the purpose and intention of the encoders, that is why and how writers integrate “foreign elements” into the new Canadian texts. This quality may set his

study apart from others; however, it is also one of its weaknesses because Kuester does not provide the reader with a methodological framework to analyze the “social and psychological background of the encoder” that could move us beyond intentional fallacies. In spite of some shortcomings, *Framing Truths* should be noted for its contribution to theories of parody and the provoking material Kuester presents in his analyses of Canadian historical novels and their narrative structures.

While Kuester concentrates on the evolutionary force of parody, he acknowledges that parodies also affect the way we will (re)read the original text because our perspective has been changed by the parody; thus, parodies can lead to a reevaluation of literary tradition. Robert Kiely's *Reverse Tradition* focuses on this “old but often unacknowledged habit” of “consciously anachronistic readings.” By presenting reverse readings of nineteenth-century novels through postmodern fictional lenses, Kiely does not claim to establish intentional connections; rather, with the help of these largely arbitrary and subjective juxtapositions, he seeks to identify formal and ideological “latencies” in nineteenth-century novels. Thus, he hopes to disrupt and enliven our readings of these novels and to challenge notions of transparency in nineteenth-century realism. Equally, he challenges assumptions about ahistorical opacity and non-referentiality in early postmodern texts.

Two thirds of the study concentrate on the early postmodernists Samuel Beckett, Jorge Luis Borges, and Vladimir Nabokov whom he pairs with Herman Melville, Mark Twain, and Nathaniel Hawthorne in part one of *Reverse Tradition*. The second part focuses on postmodern rewritings of history by American women of colour whose novels illustrate that postmodernism needs to be neither necessarily elitist nor apolitical. Kiely reads Charlotte Brontë's

Villette after Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Thomas Hardy's *The Woodlanders* after Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*, and George Eliot's *Romola* through the lens of Maxine Hong Kingston *The Woman Warrior*. Kiely's pairings result in many surprising findings; he convincingly shows that the strategy of reading through postmodern lenses can awaken our resistance to received interpretations or provide different explanations for silences and strategies in nineteenth-century novels.

At times, the actual discussions of the paired novels lack interconnections; their readings are not as interwoven as may be desirable. Moreover, the discussion of revisionist historical novels would have benefited from the kind of discussion of fiction and historiography that Kuester provides in *Framing Truths*. And, like Kuester, Kiely uses terms such as gender and marginality rather simplistically. While often relying on traditional literary distinctions and categories, Kiely succeeds in defamiliarizing and questioning conventional understandings of literary periods and notions of evolutionary progress and proper chronological readings. Overall, Kiely's *Reverse Tradition* is an important contribution to literary criticism as it explores a countertradition of intertextuality and shows that postmodernism can become a productive reading strategy that allows the reader “to think openly about what it means to superimpose (as we always must) the structures of the present on the past.”



Ritual and Survival

Sandy Shreve

Bewildered Rituals. Polestar \$12.95

Lynnette Dueck

sing me no more. Press Gang \$12.95

Reviewed by Beth Janzen

Sandy Shreve's *Bewildered Rituals* and Lynnette Dueck's *sing me no more* give rise to different reading experiences, but these works are good companions to each other. Shreve's second poetry collection "leads us on a journey through the small acts that make up our daily lives" (back cover). Dueck's novel also leads us on a journey; we follow Nemah's painful exodus from an underwater-like existence of abuse and addiction, to her healing conviction that in the future "she will breathe in air." Both writers are concerned with the politics of survival. Shreve's speaker examines daily occurrences and ritual looking for justice, examining her own complicity, and exploring joy and beauty. Dueck's protagonist Nemah moves from avoiding the recollection of years of abuse and abusers to being able to unpack the metaphorical boxes she carries with her, to start living. Dueck's piece is the more forceful one—but both books express vitality in their use of language, image, and structure which culminates in powerful and often moving writing.

An epigraph to *Bewildered Rituals* comes from Marge Piercy: "There is no justice we don't make daily." The negotiation of political issues is a facet of the speaker's attempt to go through the daily "bewildered rituals" of the collection's title and to do so with an eye for observation, reflection, and growth. Shreve's poetry is often concerned with recent political issues such as low-level flights over the arctic, the gulf war, and violence against women. Her awe for the natural world accompanies her ambivalence toward technological changes in the urban world which give us toxic paper, chemically-

fattened turkeys, and ducks strangled in plastic litter. The speaker continually questions her level of complicity in injustice and the effects on others of her daily rituals.

The juxtaposition of the urban world and the natural world provides a rich fund of metaphor for Shreve. I particularly like the yoking of garden imagery with that of the office in "Spring Cleaning." The "metal seeds" that the speaker throws to a panhandler in "Eye Contact" represent the down side of this juxtaposition. The urban landscape sometimes makes the speaker nostalgic for her country past, but she views this nostalgia with scepticism in "Surfaces," a complex poem which explores surface metaphors: the surface of an iced-over lake, the surfaces of the skin (colour/race), and how a "community singing on ice" ultimately stays in "the same / clutches and gaggles as ever."

Shreve uses a variety of forms to express her ideas. Her fascination with the "math in words" ("Snow Sestina") is evident in her appropriation of more traditional poetic forms like the sestina, triolet, and palindrome. Notable is "Dust," a beautiful reflection on time and memory in a cycle of dust and dance. "Cameo," an unrhymed villanelle, conjectures about the perspective of the cameo at the speaker's neck. She (the cameo) observes "strings of verbs and nouns" which amount to "polemics [that] weave air thick, ossifying language / with thoughtless repetition." This piece is followed by poems concerned with writing (and writer's block), form, production, and technology, and reminds the reader of the collection's first poem, "Learning to read," which examines the power of language, especially the power of thoughtless repetition to "haunt a lifetime." Shreve's exploitation of repetition as a technique is mirrored in her metaphors of cycles, both destructive and redemptive.

Cycles of "bewildered rituals" are present as well in Dueck's story of Nemah, *sing me*

no more. Nemah's rituals, however, are different rituals for physical and mental survival. She:

Sits slowly and examines her body, she knows there will be fresh bruises. This is the ritual morning mystery time. Who the fuck is she?

WHO. THE. FUCK. AM. I. WHY. AM. I. STILL. ALIVE.

Dueck makes innovative use of language in her novel. She juxtaposes obscene language with poetic language and biblical cadences. Her characters' names and functions are iconic at times. Dueck's fragmented titles for each short section convey her original style. The title "drying out for" heads a section which begins: "Drying out for the millionth time, her own private Hell." The title asks "Drying out for what? Why bother?" Similarly, "brother tugs" alludes to a myriad of possibilities: brother tugs/pushes/bullies...what? Whom? The section's brevity, along with Nemah's other fearful experiences during childhood, suggests not just one incident, but a whole range of interaction and abuse, just as the brutal incidents between Nemah and Source (her first boyfriend) suggest a complete hell of existence. Dueck's use of titles also accents her skilful word play. In "dismissed," two meanings are applied to Nemah: she is both discharged from the doctor's presence and dismissed in his mind. He asks: "Could you have imagined it?"

Fragmented titles and puns are only two examples of a range of creative language play in Dueck's novel. Throughout the novel, perspective and voice shift. Sometimes we hear a child's voice; sometimes we hear the terse language of Nemah in dry-out hell; and sometimes the language soars on brief poetic flights. When the doctor asks Nemah if she wants to blot out good childhood memories along with the bad, Nemah replies:

even the beautiful sky is filled with nothing more than anger. Even that happy sky

is full of blood-lined clouds. Shut it out. The fragmented rhythms eventually change as the novel progresses. After Nemah has dried out successfully into "the painful air of sobriety" (back cover), the rhythm is less choppy, more fluid.

Dueck's spare ironic language—the dark humour of Nemah's critiques of patriarchal society, religion, and psychiatry—make this book not a depressing catalogue of horror and degradation, but a book about a tough, intelligent woman's journey toward healing. As Elly Danica says on the back cover, "Not an easy read, but certainly a transforming one. What fiction ought to be—moving, even searing, yet elegant in every way."

Dueck and Shreve both stress the need to examine the motives and rituals of life, the need to know oneself and one's environment. These materials prove grist for powerful writing.

Indias of the Mind

Ven Begamudré

Van de Graff Days. Oolichan Books \$14.95

Bharati Mukherjee

The Holder of the World. HarperCollins \$24.95

Reviewed by Chelva Kanaganayakam

While commenting about the sense of loss that accompanies the experience of exile and the relation between literature and displacement, Salman Rushdie claims in *Imaginary Homelands* that writers like him "create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind." In fact, his novels, despite their specificity, do flaunt their constructedness in order to express the "space" inhabited by exiles. Along the same lines, in a recent article that appeared in *Brick*, Nuruddin Farah comments that he "dwelled in the dubious details of a territory" which he describes "as the country of [his] imagination." For these writers, and

for several others like them, the reality of estrangement is accessed through fictive constructs that self-consciously establish a distance between the "real" and the imaginary. For others, and certainly for Ven Begamudré in *Van de Graff Days*, the world of exile is captured through an insistently mimetic narrative. Notwithstanding the intriguing title, the novel is in many ways a referential work that is less preoccupied with constructing imaginary worlds than with portraying seemingly real ones. Such binary formulations are not always accurate, but it is important to make the distinction that Begamudré's writing is closer to say, Rohinton Mistry, than it is to Rushdie.

Van de Graff Days begins in the 1950s in India with a young academic called Krishna who decides to leave the country, no longer able to accommodate the general apathy of the newly-independent nation. What follows is a familiar pattern of separation from the family, migration first to the States and then to Canada, reunion with Krishna's wife Rukmini and their son Hari, domestic upheavals caused by the new context, encounters with systemic racism and finally, reconciliation in the family and acceptance of the new culture. Such a bald summary, however, hardly does justice to the intricate plot that takes the narrative from Benares to Mauritius and then to Madras and Ottawa. The novel is also strongly allegorical, and it self-consciously establishes a close relation between the private and the collective. Granted that the class affiliation of the main characters separates them from the majority of Indians, the pattern of frustration, displacement, disillusionment and compromise is still recognizably common among expatriates. Even the closure, with its symbolism of the piano and the picture of Ganesha, drives home the symbolic dimension of hybridity and reconciliation. As an allegorical text, the novel is well-written and competent, but it is also predictable.

Van de Graff Days is the author's first novel, his earlier work being a collection of short stories entitled *A Planet of Eccentrics*. Perhaps the movement from one to the other has had a salutary effect, for the real strength of the novel lies in its individual episodes that are created with remarkable skill and precision. Even the ending, despite the overt symbolism, is a wonderful piece of writing in its attention to detail, to nuances of tone, and in its richly textured prose. Other episodes, striking in their evocative power, include the farcical scene at the Madras railway station, the medical examination of Hari to secure a visa to Canada, the meeting with McAulay at the university club, and so forth. It is in the power of these episodes that one becomes aware of genuine talent.

The isolated episodes connect in curious ways, often to suggest hidden layers of meaning. For instance, the relation between the Van de Graff which stores up a huge voltage and discharges it in an arc of lightning and the god Vishnu whose eyes are always covered so as to prevent him from destroying the world in a blinding flash is a suggestive and important one. Similarly, the notion of absolute truth evoked by the name Harischandra and the gradual transformation of Hari's name to Gopal Harris Chandra draw attention to the predicament of Krishna and Rukmini (both strongly religious names) who are compelled on more than one occasion to suppress the truth. These links have the power to lift the narrative above the level of simplistic allegory. *Van de Graff Days* is an important first novel.

Bharati Mukherjee's fourth novel, *The Holder of the World*, too works with images, but does so in a manner that makes the text distinctly antireferential and self-reflexive. On more than one occasion, the narrator of novel draws attention to a painting in the maritime trade museum in Massachusetts, one entitled *The Apocalypse*. The painting is

described as “the Old World’s first vision of the New, of its natives, of its ferocious, improbable shapes, of its monstrous women” The scene depicted is one of carnage, of severed limbs, of scattered corpses, and of senseless destruction caused by the battle between the Muslims and the Hindus in India. Having thus described the painting, the narrator offers an alternative title: *The Unravish’d Bride*. In suggesting this title, Beigh Masters, the narrator, shifts the focus away from the battle to the image of Salem Bibi, the *frangi* from Salem who miraculously escapes injury and in fact later avenges the humiliation of the Hindu King. The title is enigmatic for Salem Bibi, who is hardly an unravished bride, particularly after her transformation from the wife of Gabriel to the mistress of Jadav Singh. Her role in the novel is intentionally problematic, and the two titles point to the ambiguities that underpin the text. If the former title is about the referential and historical dimensions of the novel, the latter points to the imaginative and metaphoric aspects of the text.

The teleological movement of the novel has its own appeal, despite its closeness to the more traditional historical novel. It is this level of narrative that traces the life of Hannah Easton, who grows up in seventeenth-century Salem, leaves for England with her husband Gabriel, finds herself in South India with the British East India Company, becomes the “bibi” of the Hindu king Jadav Singh and ends her life in the court of Aurangzeb. A meticulous and detailed description of Puritan America and Mughal India sustains the linearity of the novel. As a novel about the decline of the old order in India and the entrance of Western colonial powers, the novel is significant, although the text consistently warns the reader against an overly referential reading.

If Mukherjee’s novel has all the trappings of postmodernist, self-reflexive writing, it is

at least partly a result of the strategy of “framing” the pseudo-historical narrative with a micro-narrative in which Beigh Masters, an assets hunter by profession and a graduate student at Yale, attempts to track down a diamond with the help of her boyfriend Venn Iyer, a computer specialist who makes possible the recreation of the past through a complex interactive computer program. The virtual reality thus created by Venn links the past with the present and provides a closure for the narrative. The frame is enigmatic and important, not only because it defamiliarises the text, but also because it becomes a reflection and distortion of the main narrative. Beigh and Venn recapitulate and parody in many ways the story of Hannah and Jadav Singh. The frame distances the text, holds the emotions of the reader at bay, and foregrounds the intertextual references that connect the novel with Keats’s “Ode to a Grecian Urn,” Pynchon’s *V* and more specifically Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*.

The intertextual link with Hawthorne’s work is clearly intended to be crucial to the narrative, and with characters being called Hester, Prynne and Pearl it is difficult to miss the various connections. If Rebecca is a version of Hester, then Hannah, who exiles herself from Salem, is an image of Pearl. Bhagmati the maid who remains loyal to her English “husband” is later named Hester by Hannah. In Mukherjee’s text the women choose to be agents of change rather than passive witnesses to the dictates of patriarchy. In short, the novel is a possible version of Hester’s or Pearl’s story told from their point of view, from what it meant to cross boundaries that Hawthorne’s creations were incapable of doing. In fact, the narrator wonders at the end: “Who can blame Nathaniel Hawthorne for shying away from the real story of the brave Salem mother and her illegitimate daughter?”

The notion of crossing boundaries is cen-

tral to the novel, and the central myth that is alluded to several times is that of Sita, who crossed the line drawn for her by her husband's brother and had to endure the humiliation heaped upon her by her husband. Hannah, the Salem bibi, in the fort of Jadav Singh, surrounded by the Mughal army, and determined to abandon herself to sheer sensuality is at least partly a parody and reversal of the Sita myth. But in a curious way she strengthens and alters the Sita myth through her willingness to cross boundaries, and through her commitment to individual choice.

Mukherjee's work is clearly a major achievement. It is a contemporary work in its awareness of artifice, of contingent identities, of indeterminacy, but it also remains a work underpinned by a strong sense of causality and conviction, and a tendentious edge that spares neither the Puritan ethos of Salem nor the patriarchy of Indian society.

Exploring Multiculturalism

J. W. Berry and J. A. Laponce, eds.

Ethnicity and Culture in Canada: The Research Landscape. U Toronto P \$65.00/\$30.00

Dany Laferrière

An Aroma of Coffee. Trans. David Homel. Coach House \$13.95

Reviewed by Linda Lamont-Stewart

Ethnicity and Culture in Canada records the findings of a research project entitled "State of the Art Review of Research on Canada's Multicultural Society" which was sponsored by SSHRCC and Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada. The project, completed in 1992, consisted of a report, a bibliography, and a register of researchers in the field. The present volume makes the project report available to a general audience.

In their introductory chapter, Berry and Laponce suggest that "Ethnicity is likely to be to the twenty-first century what class

was to the twentieth—a major source of social tensions and political conflicts; hence it will be a major focus of attention for an academia that will be asked to provide facts, explanations and theories." Ethnicity will also, they argue, become, "increasingly, a source of creation and diversification . . . that will sustain the interest of the social sciences and the humanities alike." The disciplinary range of *Ethnicity and Culture in Canada* supports this thesis. The contributors represent a broad range of social science and humanities disciplines; the volume includes studies of research in demography, ethnography, political philosophy, immigration policy, law, media, ethnic writing in English and French, language learning and multicultural education, and concludes with a survey of bibliographic resources. In addition to surveying the state of multicultural research in their fields, contributors were asked to identify gaps and offer suggestions for future work; all of the essays provide useful bibliographies, many of them very substantial. The book's greatest strength is the opportunity it affords to read across disciplinary lines and to acquire a sense of the theoretical and methodological issues shaping research in the various fields.

Several themes and issues emerge as central to the study of Canadian multiculturalism, such as inconsistent definitions of the term "ethnic" and disagreement as to the place of studies of native cultures within the multicultural context. But the most fundamental difference evident throughout the volume is that between attitudes towards multiculturalism in English-speaking Canada and Quebec. English-speaking Canadians generally appear favourably disposed towards multiculturalism, valuing the ideal of tolerance of cultural differences, although many anglophone Canadians are less than enthusiastic about tax-funded institutional support for heritage language and culture programmes,

and many express concerns about the implications of the reinforcement of cultural differences for national unity. Whatever the reservations about multiculturalism expressed by respondents to opinion polls, in the chapters that focus on multiculturalism in English-speaking Canada, the authors' evaluation of multiculturalism as both ideology and policy is, implicitly if not explicitly, positive. In the chapters that examine the issue in the Quebec context, however, multiculturalism meets considerable resistance both on ideological grounds and as official policy. As Denise Helly makes clear in "Politique québécoise face au 'pluralisme culturel' et pistes de recherche 1977-1990," the Québécois prefer a concept of cultural pluralism which promotes the integration of immigrant groups into Quebec francophone culture. Quebec government policy has focused on "*francisation*" of immigrants rather than on support for heritage languages and minority culture maintenance. The most provocative critique of multiculturalism is offered by Gilles Paquet, who argues, in "Political Philosophy of Multiculturalism," that multicultural policies have produced *ressentiment* between "charter" and "non-charter" groups and calls for a reorientation of cultural identity in terms of a priority language (French in Quebec, English in the rest of Canada) and a redefinition of citizenship which would recognize not only the obligation of the dominant culture to accommodate immigrant groups but also the obligation of immigrant groups to adapt to the dominant culture.

The two chapters on literature illustrate clearly the divergent views of multiculturalism in English-speaking Canada and Quebec. In "Canadian Ethnic Minority Literature in English," Enoch Padolsky focuses on the marginality of ethnic minority writing to the canon and discusses the institutional barriers that need to be dis-

mantled in order for ethnic minority texts to achieve their rightful status. His approach is essentially sociological. As Sherry Simon and David Leahy explain in "La recherche au Québec portant sur l'écriture ethnique," Québécois critics have rejected such a sociological approach in favour of a more formalistic focus on "*écriture migrante*." The emphasis again is on integration: the marginality of ethnic minorities within Quebec is seen as consonant with the marginality of francophone culture in North America. Consequently, ethnic minority texts share the same fundamental concerns as Québécois literature as a whole and are amenable to the same critical paradigms.

The novels of Haitian-born Montreal novelist Dany Laferrière are of course mentioned in Simon and Leahy's essay. The first two of Laferrière's novels to appear in English translation by David Homel, *How to Make Love to a Negro* and *Eroshima*, in both of which a black narrator, marginalized in Montreal society, explores themes of race, sex and violence, certainly fit the paradigm of *écriture migrante*. *An Aroma of Coffee*, however, which is more fictionalized memoir than novel, departs radically from Laferrière's earlier setting and themes. The unnamed narrator looks back over the space of thirty years to his childhood in Petit-Goâve, a small Haitian town not far from Port-au-Prince, and recalls the summer he was ten years old, confined because of recurrent bouts of fever to the gallery of his grandmother's house, where he watches the life of the town unfold. The grandmother, Da, is the pivotal figure of the book, nurturing her grandson and constantly brewing, drinking, and serving to whoever comes along endless cups of hot, rich coffee.

The tone of *An Aroma of Coffee* is idyllic. There is a large cast of characters, many of them amusingly eccentric; through the ordinary, and occasionally extraordinary,

events of a childhood summer, the narrator learns various lessons about life and death, sex, love and friendship. Laferrière's prose is lyrical and sensuous, evoking the sights, scents and sounds of his tropical setting. Although there are a few indications throughout the text of the existence of a great social inequities and a repressive regime, the painful political realities of Haitian life remain largely at the level of subtext. Laferrière's reticence adds poignancy to his gentle, humorous, nostalgic evocation of a fundamentally happy and secure childhood lived in what the reader knows to be a society rife with corruption, social injustice and violence.

L'histoire mémorielle

Maurice Lemire, ed.

La Vie littéraire au Québec, tome II : "Le projet national des Canadiens." Les Presses de l'Université Laval \$45.00

Jacques Mathieu et Jacques Lacoursière

Les Mémoires québécoises. Les Presses de l'Université Laval \$34.95

Reviewed by André Lamontagne

Témoin que le postmoderne représente un réel changement épistémologique, le discours critique qui s'écrit au Québec est de plus en plus marqué, comme avant lui le roman, par la prégnance des histoires individuelles. L'intérêt de cette démarche est manifeste à la lecture des présentes publications: l'une qui s'inscrit dans le projet d'une histoire de la vie littéraire (et non de la littérature) québécoise, et l'autre qui propose un portrait synthétique de l'identité québécoise centré sur les personnes plutôt que sur les institutions.

Sous la direction de Maurice Lemire, une équipe de l'Université Laval s'est lancée dans une histoire de la constitution de la littérature québécoise, depuis son émergence jusqu'à sa reconnaissance comme

objet d'étude. S'intéressant autant à la production et à la réception qu'aux textes eux-mêmes, les auteurs étudient chaque période en fonction de cinq processus: l'enseignement littéraire, le milieu des créateurs, la formation des frontières, le discours sur la littérature et la manifestation du littéraire dans les oeuvres. Après un premier tome qui portait sur la Conquête, le présent ouvrage s'articule autour du projet national, depuis la fondation du premier périodique en 1806 jusqu'à l'échec des Patriotes et des libéraux en 1839.

Le premier chapitre est consacré au romantisme européen, qui exerça des déterminations profondes sur la littérature canadienne-française: d'une part, par sa valorisation de l'histoire et du nationalisme, et d'autre part, parce qu'en tant que modèle étranger, il entraînait en conflit avec la volonté d'autonomisation des pratiques intellectuelles de la colonie. Les pages suivantes se concentrent sur la trajectoire des individus, qui est primordiale dans une histoire de la vie littéraire. De courtes biographies permettent d'établir le profil des principaux agents; l'étude des conditions générales dans lesquelles ils évoluaient est également instructive. D'un très grand intérêt est l'étude détaillée des différentes formes de pratiques associatives (littéraires, scientifiques, patriotiques), qui jouèrent un rôle central dans la résistance à l'anglicisation.

Le corpus de cette période provient en grande partie de la presse périodique, vers laquelle se tournèrent les Canadiens français pour assurer leur socialisation littéraire et définir leur projet national. *La Vie littéraire* propose donc une analyse de ce médium, depuis les démêlés du *Canadien* avec les autorités britanniques jusqu'aux satires politiques du journal *Le Fantasque*. La prose d'idées se déploie également sous d'autres formes. Outre un résumé des essais les plus importants, les chercheurs se livrent à une étude stimulante des stratégies discursives présentes dans la pensée poli-

tique d'un Papineau ou d'un Parent, ainsi que dans certains sermons représentatifs de l'éloquence religieuse. Dans leur analyse du discours de l'appropriation du pays, ils s'intéressent non seulement à l'histoire, mais aussi à des disciplines comme la géographie, la bibliographie et l'archivistique. Enfin l'essor de la lecture qui caractérise l'époque se mesure aussi à la relative exhaustivité des catalogues des librairies et des bibliothèques, dont on a ici un aperçu.

Sur un plan strictement littéraire, la maigre production des débuts se traduit, après l'essor romantique de 1830, par une poésie plus subjective et l'apparition de genres nouveaux: récits d'aventures, contes à thématique amérindienne, récits d'explorateurs et de voyageurs apostoliques, écrits intimes, etc. Cette richesse et cette diversité, souvent occultées par l'effet rétroactif de l'idéologie messianique, se donnent également à lire dans le processus de réception. Ainsi, malgré un rejet affiché de XVIII^e et des auteurs contemporains, on lit Voltaire sous le manteau tandis que Chateaubriand, Béranger et Lamartine jouissent d'une grande popularité. On note aussi une ouverture à l'égard des auteurs non francophones: Byron, Walter Scott et, étonnamment, Kant et von Kleist, auxquels Michel Bibaud consacre des notes. Par contre, la réception des oeuvres canadiennes se traduit souvent par des commentaires condescendants, voire des manipulations du texte.

Cette image renouvelée d'une période trop souvent jugée sommairement constitue un apport certain aux études sur le XIX^e siècle québécois. Mais la grande contribution de l'ouvrage est d'avoir mis à jour une activité intellectuelle suffisamment dense pour qu'on puisse parler d'un processus de spécification nationale, même si le champ littéraire circonscrit demeure virtuel. Avec sa bibliographie exhaustive des écrits publiés pendant la période et sa chronologie très détaillée, mais surtout par sa rigueur analytique et érudite, *La Vie lit-*

téraire au Québec deviendra vite un ouvrage de référence aussi indispensable que le *Dictionnaire des oeuvres littéraires du Québec*, dont il est en quelque sorte le fruit.

S'il est le fait d'historiens, l'ouvrage de Mathieu et Lacoursière se situe à la croisée des recherches littéraires sur l'identitaire, c'est-à-dire l'identité considérée comme une construction. Son apport méthodologique repose sur le concept de mémoires: il consiste à partir du présent, des personnes et des sensibilités pour rejoindre le passé, les collectivités et les faits.

Après un excellent premier chapitre qui passe en revue les différentes définitions de l'identité, l'étude se divise selon les fondements les plus importants de l'identitaire québécois: l'espace, la population, la famille, l'encadrement des grandes institutions, les savoir-faire techniques et culturels et le symbolique. Reprenant chacune de ces représentations, les auteurs y confrontent les mythes aux faits qui les supportent. En s'appuyant sur de nombreux documents d'époque et de données statistiques souvent inédites, ils proposent une lecture fascinante du passé, loin de la doxa: l'image unitaire du médecin de campagne est battue en brèche par le nombre de médecins spécialistes au XIX^e siècle; la Révolution tranquille n'est que la continuation de la révolution culturelle des années 30; loin d'être replié sur lui-même, le Québec a multiplié les emprunts de l'étranger et ce, jusque dans ses productions culturelles réputées les plus folkloriques; contrairement à l'imagerie populaire, la différence était minime entre le coureur des bois, l'habitant et le bûcheron.

Qu'il s'agisse de l'histoire de l'assistance publique et des pensions de vieillesse, du nombre d'employés dans les principales industries de Montréal au XIX^e siècle, des héros québécois ou des objets symboliques, *Les Mémoires québécoises* contient une mine inépuisable d'informations. Et cette exhaustivité ne s'exerce pas aux dépens de

l'interprétation. Au contraire, la dimension analytique est très riche, et j'en prends pour exemple le chapitre qui démontre que si, par compensation historique, la collectivité francophone a toujours entretenu un rapport imaginaire avec l'espace, les activités qui ont le plus contribué à transformer le paysage n'ont pas réussi à imprégner la mémoire collective. La conclusion à laquelle en arrivent Mathieu et Lacoursière est également fructueuse: le Québec a toujours été, malgré le mythe de l'authenticité, une culture de convergence, et c'est à partir de cette piste qu'il convient d'interpréter le passé comme d'anticiper l'avenir.

S'appuyant sur une bibliographie soigneusement établie ainsi qu'une disposition graphique et une iconographie des plus intéressantes, *Les Mémoires québécoises* est un modèle de vulgarisation intelligente, qui par son style mi-narratif mi-analytique séduira tous les publics.

Micro-Studies

Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek

The Social Dimensions of Fiction: On the Rhetoric and Function of Prefacing Novels in the Nineteenth-Century Canadas. Vieweg Publishing
DM 68

Reviewed by Mary Lu MacDonald

As indicated by its subtitle, the book is actually a comparative study of prefaces to nineteenth-century Canadian fiction published in French and English. It deals with the social dimension of those prefaces only in a systemic sense. The methodology is based on Siegfried J. Schmidt's *Empirical Theory of Literature*. Chapter one presents the arguments for considering the preface as a distinct genre with particular characteristics; chapter two lists the elements of a typology and discusses their application; chapter three considers systemic data relating to the prefaces; and the final chapter

analyzes both typology and systemic data.

The German publisher has produced a text which is visually easy to follow, even in its most complex sections, and merits thanks for placing the notes on the same page as the reference. Unfortunately, the index is of little use. It was evidently prepared before the text was in final form, since some page numbers are wrong, although the subject sought can be found on a nearby page, and some subjects are just not there at all. The text is written in English, with generous quotations in French. An understanding of academic German would be useful to readers of the theoretical chapters.

There is a need for such detailed micro-studies of the nineteenth century Canadian literary institution, but there are evident limitations. The novels themselves are not studied, only their prefaces or introductions, and only those novels, or editions of novels, accompanied by prefaces are considered. Although some of the most famous nineteenth-century prefaces are attached to volumes of poetry, these are excluded. A further caveat: the analysis is based on the microfiches produced by the Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproductions, a data base which may also limit or determine the result of a study. CIHM filmed the best available copy of all nineteenth-century monographs which have a Canadian author or publisher, or in which the subject matter is Canadian. While Tötösy goes outside CIHM for ten English prefaces, in particular editions not filmed, his dependence on CIHM results in an "English Canadian Novels with Prefaces" appendix in which 31 of 239 titles are the works of R. M. Ballantyne, who spent six years in Canada before returning to the United Kingdom, where he wrote adventure stories about the north for a British readership. Even Tötösy seems a bit nervous about Ballantyne but decides to include him because CIHM did, and because he thinks Canadians probably

read the prefaces. There is a similar problem with the "Canadian" novels of H.-E. Chevalier, published in France when the author returned home after his seven years' residence in Canada. Any statement about Canadian prefaces which includes the works of Ballantyne, Chevalier, and others like them, whose novels were intended for non-Canadians, is on very shaky ground. The nature of the data base also ensures that Tötösy will conclude that "the theme and/or setting of both English-Canadian and French-Canadian novels was in the majority Canadian."

While accepting the premise that empirical questions about a particular genre can yield illuminating answers, one can still wonder whether all appropriate questions have been asked of the material. Tötösy has been more successful in analyzing the rhetoric than in explaining the function of the prefaces in relation to the community. The human element could be dealt with empirically as well, by analyzing biographical data on the authors of prefaces. Certainly some analytic distinction needs to be made between prefaces written by publishers and those written by the author of the novel, or by a third party. Although Tötösy links the presence of prefaces to authorial confidence, he attempts no explanation of why some authors wrote no prefaces, or prefaced one novel and not another, or one edition and not another.

It is tempting for both author and reader to draw conclusions about the novels and their intended audience, based on the prefaces as "an element of the literary system." However, if the preface is truly a separate genre, this is not always possible. Similarly, statements about Canadian readers, based on the form of address in the prefaces and the assumption that they read only Canadian fiction, will be flawed. Any findings about chronological development can apply only to the preface, since prefaces were not always inserted in first editions or

written by the original author. A series of tables shows the frequency of types of prefaces in the decades between 1800 and 1900 but provides no reference point by noting the total number of novels published in the same time periods. It is thus difficult to judge the role of the preface in the system.

Within its self-established limit as an empirical study of the preface in nineteenth-century Canadian literature this is a valuable work. Perhaps the greatest value of micro-studies is that they raise more questions than they answer, thus leading to further enquiry.

Lucidité Inquiète

Walid Bitar

2 Guys on Holy Land. UP New England us\$22.50 / \$10.95

Taïb Soufi

Riverains rêves: poèmes. Les Editions du Blé \$12.95

Saad Elkhadem

Crash Landing of the Flying Egyptian. Trans. Saad El-Gabalawy. York P \$9.95

Michel Lemieux

Voyage au Levant: de Lawrence d'Arabie à René Lévesque. Les Editions du Septentrion n.p.

Reviewed by Mahmoud Manzalaoui

All four of these books explore the interplay between the familiar and, to use a useful vogue word, the Other. The fourth is a Canadian traveller's impressions on a Middle Eastern journey, but the first three are by immigrants from the Arabic-speaking world. Bitar and Soufi often glance back nostalgically at their countries of origin, Lebanon and Algeria; Elkhadem looks back with relief and a spritely good humour at his escape from Egypt. For Bitar and Soufi, respectively, English and French are the languages in which they express their thoughts and emotions. Elkhadem is the author, in English, of two encyclopedic handbooks which are to be found on refer-

ence shelves, but in his half dozen or more of slim volumes of seemingly semi-autobiographical fiction his feelings and imagination are laid out in a mixture of literary and colloquial Arabic. As far as I know, these works are therefore the first to make Arabic into one of the literary languages of Canada, and, for the first time we are given in that language the misfortunes and, it must be said, the sometimes wilfully induced troubles of a roving bohemian intellectual in the main cities of this country.

Not so much exile as the dividing of the self is a recurring topic of Bitar's. The poet sees himself as "2 guys," his two cultural backgrounds tugging him in opposite directions, neither—or both—being "Other" to him, and neither being wholly authentic. In the last lines of the collection, he finds a peace by accepting his conflict as the main fact about himself:

I could easily be 2 guys—at least 2
guys, each an off-forgery of the other, a
cheap
imitation. I'll expose them
even if I have to go out and be
the 2 guys. That's what I'll do. I'll be 2 guys.

I'll make myself like peace.

Elsewhere, in a poem intitled "Ambivalence," he puts his dilemma more surrealistically as:

here I am.
a head on each of my shoulders
(I'm dating twins)

And again:

I'm in between dialects
You might say
I'm Cinderella's carriage changing into a
pumpkin,
neither carriage nor pumpkin.
+

Both imagery and thought are jerky and breathless. "Morse code tap-danced on the coffin's lid," Campbell McGrath writes of them, seeing a coffin perhaps because in Bitar what predominates over the tug-of-

war of two cultures is rather the floating, culturally uprooted state of the late twentieth century. For that reason, it is surprising to find the press release calling these poems "engaged"—just as it is an overstatement to call them "funny," while praising them as "an antidote to the decorous" will arouse in some people hopeful expectations that are sure to be disappointed. Bitar's imagery varies in its effectiveness; his Middle Eastern echoes range from calm memories ("the whites / and marbles of villas back home") to the contemporary horrors of the opening line of "Habitat":

I manage to murder even during this war
when most of my cousins are merely
killing,
and their gunfire slaps the biblical faces;
mine
has a silencer and no history.

To turn from Bitar to Soufi is to meet a more contemplative conscience, speaking in melodic firmness; he is a poet-philosopher whose sense of the past deepens his personal nostalgia, an intellectual who succeeds in masking his philosophical training when he sees fit, but who remains contemplative at other times, whether he is expressing his cultural nostalgia, as in the first section of his *Riverains rêves*, or writing of love and the erotic, as in much of the second section.

In his introduction, Soufi speaks of his "trois pays sur les trois continents," and in spite of his nostalgia for his Algerian birthplace, his regret at leaving it:

O cheveux frisés plus fougueux que le
plus furieux des vents pourquoi avez-
vous déserté vos racines

And his emphatically-expressed refusal to assimilate:

Et si je ne joins pas vos rangs
c'est que mon nombril refuse toute
greffe d'un ventre étranger.
Et je vous aime! pourtant je

ne veux point être assimilé!

He seems at other times much at home with the Franco-Manitoban, and succeeds in finding in him a fellow-victim on to whose past he can transfer his own nostalgia:

La dure froidure de ton bel hiver
... n'est plus qu'un souvenir de grande
aventurière.

... Le Franco-Manitobain a si peu de place
Qu'il crie et écrit qu'il cherche un pays

Parce que ni sa langue ni sa race
N'ont reçu pouvoir de se maintenir effi-
caces ...

But of course the main images of the past are those of Soufi himself and of the community he has abandoned ("j'ai négligé ta chair de caroube / pour embrasser la neige froide / et les sépulcres de l'amour"), the minarets and the bangles in the city of Tlemcen (in "Triste sablier"), the Algerian War of Independence, ("Le chemin") and its heroine ("à Jémila Bouhired"), and the desert background ("La terre chaude et rouge entre mes orteils fait lever les cailles. / La vigne de ses grains que le soleil a cuit et que la poussière balsame abrite la chacal ...", "Puis la montagne s'aplatit / Comme la tente d'un nomade / en voyage. / L'aube déverse sa blancheur / sur la rosée que boit un / chameau à l'ombre d'un palmier.") Much as these metonymic images are the product of modern western technique, they are simultaneously the images out of which Arabic poems were constructed as far back as the sixth century, just as Soufi's language is modelled upon Arabic idiom when he calls the bedouin "Les fils de laine"—for a traditional kenning for these tent-dwellers is *ahl al-wabar* "the camel's-wool folk." And another aspect of the symbiosis is the use of wholly western imagery to express an Arab aspiration: Aphrodite, Eros, the waltz and a wayside cross are called up in recollection of the bullets and dying of the Algerian War ("Le chemin"). It is surpris-

ing that the advance handout for this volume, while it lists among its themes the "loss of the past" and the fragility of human relations, makes no mention of the longing for a lost homeland and culture.

In Elkhadem, there is less thoughtfulness, less learning, but much vigour, spriteliness, satire and experimentation. This book is the concluding volume of his second trilogy. The Flying Egyptian has already died in part II, *Chronicle of the Flying Egyptian in Canada*, but this does not stop him from resurrecting his comments and remarks and making a final "micro-novel" out of them.

The Flying Egyptian is, in terms of social categorizing, more of an average Egyptian than I suspect the author is. But the principal character is far from having developed into an average Canadian. His many wanderings, his cosmopolitanism, his cavalier notions of making a living, his kaleidoscopic relations with women, many ending unhappily, and some acrimoniously, place him in a more exotic category. But the positive qualities of the Flying Egyptian compensate for his weaknesses of character. His justified anger with the memory of the Nasser regime—the eponymous subject of Elkhadem's earlier book, *The Plague*—has not abated. Even in Egypt he is, to use Toynbee's term, an *internal émigré*, suffering under "the rule of the mindless majors and witless colonels." He also addresses that more deeply-rooted problem of Egyptian society, the father-son conflict, which makes him sensitive—perhaps unduly—to the forms which family tyranny takes in Canada, this "kingdom of melancholy butterflies." Yet his upbringing is such that in the western world the Flying Egyptian is, he tells us, regarded as socially "reactionary." But his strong commonsense and fairmindedness make him criticize those immigrants who try to change Canadian ways and customs. Having been granted the gift of Canadian freedom, it is at Egypt that

most of his criticism is directed.

Elsewhere I have distinguished two types of writers who treat of countries and cultures not their own: the "visitant" who writes after only a brief stay in a land he has not come to know well, and the "sojourner," to whom the country of Otherness has become a second home. Elkhadem, writing his imaginative works in a language which not more than one in a thousand Canadian readers can understand, finds a strength and freshness in remaining a visitant after many years. Michel Lemieux, a visitant who is writing of a roving journey in the Middle East including many personal reflections and reminiscences not directly connected with his observations, nevertheless comes near to speaking like a sojourner, because he shows unusual understanding and empathy in his writing about Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel and Egypt. The political and social problems of the area, the opinions held locally and the tensions of family life there are unusually well understood and presented.

The subtitle of Lemieux's book, *De Lawrence d'Arabie à René Lévesque*, is misleading, for it makes one assume that at some time in his career, Lévesque paid a visit to the Middle East. In fact, the book is a combined account of observations and reflections which Lemieux made during his journey: an enthusiasm and close knowledge of T.E. Lawrence's exploits was one of Lemieux's driving forces in undertaking his travels; Lévesque was his political chief and his hero, and he learnt of his death from a radio broadcast as he sat in his camper on the south coast of Anatolia. The loss preoccupied him throughout his journey. Since the book is a subjective account of thoughts and of sights, the structure of the book and its title are fully justified: the writing is insightful and in parts deeply thoughtful. The interlacing of interior and exterior reminiscence and actuality, literary knowledge and direct observation and interac-

tion, give *Voyage au Levant* its distinct quality. There are, of course, gaps and weaknesses, and repeated errors: Assad's name is misspelt throughout (just as it is unfailingly misaccented by CBC newsreaders), the water buffalos that Lemieux sees are not only named *zebus*, but are even imagined to have zebus' humps. The better-known monuments are scarcely referred to, perhaps to avoid treading on very conventional ground, so that one finds the book jejune on the temples and tombs of Upper Egypt. However, Lemieux's excitement rises as he perceives lonelier and more isolated sites, and he is stimulated by what others may find the duller and more arid reaches of his itinerary. There is a slight amount of overblown romanticism, a slight amount of modernistic inverse holier-than-thou attestation—is there much point in the way he praises himself for having ventured to have a Turkish bath? By contrast, Lemieux's writing is enlivened by his gift of evocative phrases and compound words, usually as terms of contempt: the holiday makers of Eilat are a "faune simili-floridienne"; the dull road hugging the Anatolian plateau is an "interminable tautologie de kilomètres"; the lavatory of a cheap café an Istanbul is "ce trou merdique."

Lemieux's selections form embedded essays: there are thoughts on Lévesque, on T.E. Lawrence, on memory and transience, on the Palestine problem, on politico-military strategies. But the most valuable contributions are the thoughts on the tug between Self and Other, both in individuals and in cultures, as seen and as felt by a traveller. To travel, for Lemieux, is to loosen one's selfhood, or rather, to transform it, by abandoning the props of the familiar and habitual, by reducing oneself to a state of "nudité sociale" which becomes a positive stimulant. External voyage is, then, also an inner journey, it is choosing beneficent growth through anxious lucidity, "la lucidité inquiète."

Canada, Oh Canada!

Giles Gougeon, ed.

Histoire du nationalisme québécois. Entrevues avec sept specialists. VLB Éditeur et la Société Radio-Canada \$16.95

Scott Reid

Lament for a Notion: The Life and Death of Canada's Bilingual Dream. Arsenal Pulp P \$18.95

Reviewed by Ekaterini Nikolarea

What do SRC (CBC), Canadian history, ethnolinguistics and sociolinguistics have in common? *Histoire du nationalisme québécois* (: *History of Nationalism in Quebec*). In this book the journalist Giles Gougeon, six historians and one political scientist trace the change of *les Canadiens* into *les Québécois francophones*, and the different faces of *le nationalisme québécois*. The book consists of a transcription of a series of interviews which were organized by Giles Gougeon and Pierre Devroede and broadcast by the SRC in Quebec on 21-24 January 1992. Although the interviews were the fruit of a meticulous research of Robert Lahaise, Jean-Paul Bernard, Réal Bélanger, Pierre Trépanier, Richard Desrosiers, Robert Comeau and Louis Balthazar, this does not mean that the published form of these interviews is a collaborative effort of these scholars; it is rather their personal, and sometimes contradictory, responses to the questions which were organized and asked by the journalist Giles Gougeon.

Histoire du nationalisme québécois is divided into four parts. The first examines how the notions of *les Canadiens* and *le nationalisme* emerged and developed from Cartier's voyage to Canada (1534) to the defeat of the French in the Battle of the Plains of Abraham (1759) and to the Confederation (1867). The second part is a commentary upon the period extending from the aftermath of the Confederation to 1917. It discusses how *les Canadiens* opposed to the desire of *les Anglais* (the

English who were born in, or immigrated to, Canada) to see Canada be part of the British Empire. The third part of this book covers the period from 1920 to 1960 and explores how *les Canadiens* were gradually transformed into *les Canadiens français*, a name which was particularly applicable to the French-Canadians who lived in the province of Quebec. Three historians—Trépanier, Comeau and Desrosiers—analyze *le nationalisme* advocated by Lionel Groulx and Maurice Duplessis, and discuss how indissolubly, despite differences of perspective, it was related to the politics of the Catholic Church in Quebec and the fascist movements in Europe. In the fourth and the final part, the change of *les Canadiens français* into *Québécois*, and from *Québécois* into *Québécois francophones* from the early 1960s to the late 1980s is explored and briefly analyzed.

Histoire du nationalisme québécois is a breathtaking book. Its strength can be found in the structure of the book as well as in the presentation of the historical material. First, the questions that Gougeon asks are so clear and well-organized that both the respondents and the readers never confuse historical events and periods. Second, the answers given by all the scholars are concise and understandable, as any jargon that would disconcert the readers is avoided. Finally, the most important asset of this book is the question-and-answer technique which gives a speaking likeness to the book and is impressive in its vitality. *Histoire du nationalisme québécois* is among the more fascinating essays in history which makes the history of Quebec move before one as a kaleidoscope of events and retains its interest to the end.

But if Gougeon's book of the history of Quebecois nationalism is short and pleasant to read, Reid's *Lament for a Notion: The Life and Death of Canada's Bilingual Dream* examines a long and gloomy aspect of Canadian life: Canada's Official Language

Policy and its economic impact upon the Canadians.

Lament for a Notion is a book written by the journalist Scott Reid who details Canada's history of bilingualism and scrutinizes Canada's language laws in effect since the 1960s. In this book, Reid argues that, although these language laws have long been regarded as very important means in promoting and strengthening national unity between English- and French-speaking Canadians, they have not only failed to create a workable bilingual state, but also been the chief cause of Canada's continuing unity crisis.

In Reid's opinion, Canada's Official Language Policy was designed primarily as a response to the threat posed by Quebecois separatists, who became a serious political force during the 1960s, and was based on the belief that the threat of separatism in Quebec would disappear if growth and dynamism of the French language could be achieved within a united Canada. In other words, as Reid convincingly reasons, Canada's bilingual laws have been built around the belief that in Canada the French language is in a weak demographic position relative to English and that the only way to cancel out this inequality is to support it vigorously.

During his thorough and well-documented discussion, however, Reid attacks the myths and misunderstandings that underlie most of these federal language policies. He persuasively argues that a careful analysis of the way in which language and population patterns respond to language legislation reveals this belief to be false. He further supports the position that Official Asymmetrical Bilingualism has failed to unify Canada because it is incapable of guaranteeing Quebec's French-speaking majority that its language will survive in its linguistic heartland, Quebec itself.

In *Lament for a Notion*, Scott Reid examines the impact of the current language

policies of the federal government from a strictly economic point of view and discusses the pervasive and often destructive impact of Official Asymmetrical Bilingualism on fields as diverse as education, public service hiring, and cross-border shopping. To support his argument, Reid provides a well-researched estimate of the annual cost of federal official languages programs and proceeds to a careful statistical analysis of it. Finally, Reid holds that, if left unreformed, the present system of language laws will eventually cause the rupture of the nation, and he suggests that Canada should adopt the Finnish model of practising bilingual policies. According to this model, the *communes*, or municipalities, which contain a Finnish-speaking majority of over 90% are designated unilingual Finnish and government services are available only in Finnish. Likewise, a small number of communes which contain a Swedish-speaking majority of more than 90% are designated unilingual Swedish and services are offered only in Swedish. It is only when the Swedish-speaking population of any commune is 10% or more that the commune is declared bilingual and government services are offered in both languages. In *Lament for a Notion*, Reid holds that if the Finnish model of practising bilingual policies would be slightly modified, it could limit federal French-language services outside Quebec to four regions (northern New Brunswick, eastern Ontario, northern Ontario and some rural townships in Nova Scotia) and restrict English-language services within Quebec to two sections of the province (west-end Montreal, Pontiac County and a portion of the Eastern townships).

Lament for a Notion is a well-documented study with excellent graphics, tables and statistical analyses and a thought-provoking research which has the potential of generating further research and studies on this field. Nevertheless, it would be a more accessible

if the writer had avoided some controversial statements, such as: “[i]n function, language is nothing more than a system of audible code ... Language, unlike living things, can vanish from common use and survive only upon library shelves” or “[t]he further expedient of firing or reassigning everybody in the Translation Bureau and shutting down this incontinent institution would have the effect of transferring the remaining translation work to Ottawa’s legions of fast and efficient private sector translators. In a single blow, it would cut the cost of government translations in half.” Such statements show either an ignorance of sociolinguistics and translation studies or a very narrow-minded economical standpoint.

Eclectic Vistas

George Elliott Clarke

Lush Dreams, Blue Exile. Fugitive Poems: 1978-1993. Pottersfield \$9.95

Jocelyne Villeneuve

Marigolds in Snow. Penumbra \$19.95

Rhonda Batchelor

Interpreting Silence. Beach Holme \$11.95

Reviewed by Neil Querengesser

Although the subject matter of these three collections differs widely, they share an intellectual and emotional honesty essential to all good poetry. Each book deals with perennial concerns of the human spirit, and each does so with technical competence and thematic consistence, offering fresh perspectives of various inner and outer landscapes, and in the process perhaps striking in the willing reader some vital chords of emotional response and/or spiritual recognition.

In *Lush Dreams, Blue Exile*, George Elliott Clark has organized his most significant creations of the last twenty-five years along the lines of a compelling mental landscape. These “lyrical lies,” as Clarke refers to the

poems, bespeak some significant truths from both personal and public perspectives, and are grouped according to geographical referents which represent various states of mind. Thus, the “Zarahemla” section, with which the collection opens, while it refers in *The Book of Mormon* to a location between Desolation and Bountiful, positions the poet between the metaphorical equivalents of these places, indicating the possibility, perhaps the necessity, of making a fundamental life-determining choice. The final section, entitled “Sierra Leonia,” like the opening section consists of two poems; instead of looking backward, however, it anticipates the future, as the poet gazes figuratively if not literally toward a “new” homeland of Sierra Leone, where a colony for freed slaves was established in 1787, and to which over one thousand Africadians (Black Nova Scotians) journeyed in 1792. Between these two sections, the poet moves through the hellish landscape of “Gehenna” with its twentieth century assassinations, crises, and upheavals, and then through the tender, beautiful, and richly rewarding landscapes of the “Axum-Saba” section, where the lyrical intensity of these personal poems implicitly alludes to the finer qualities of those ancient and once flourishing African and Arabian empires. The book’s longest section, “Africadia,” features the closest relationship between poetic subject and geographical referent. The “Africadia” poems are notable not only for their fine lyrical qualities but also for their historical relevance, raising the reader’s awareness of over two centuries of Black settlement and culture in Nova Scotia. *Lush Dreams, Blue Exile* resonates with several significant literary, historical, and spiritual traditions, including those of exile, expatriation, and deep-seated longings for literal and imaginary homelands. This collection is also notable for its gracefully designed cover and its interesting thematic and documen-

tary photographs that effectively complement the text (although the picture on page 48 appears to be inadvertently uncredited).

Rhonda Batchelor, the author of *Interpreting Silence*, is certainly not the first poet to contend with the fact that "... we're poor interpreters of silence," but in these compelling poems she succeeds admirably in reminding us once again just how much of our existence—beyond all the restless fiddle of language—is surrounded by silence, and just how little we really understand of silence as presence. Along pathways of the human soul at once familiar and unfamiliar, the poet walks beside her reader, sometimes telling, sometimes showing, always, even in the more indirect poems, speaking honestly about matters of the heart and mind, often probing territory traditionally the domain of silence. Her desires and jealousies, her frustrations and fulfilments, her successes and failures are laid bare in these poems by a poet who just as often denudes images of her own body throughout the text with complex reflective intentions. Literal and metaphorical mirrors permeate these poems, but they are seldom mirrors that reflect a comforting sense of fixed reality; instead, they hold often surprising images that in other contexts might be called false or distorted yet which here seem unmistakably fitting. Domestic details of ordinary family life—husband and children to love and fight with, friends to entertain, bills to pay, and chequebooks to balance—are freshly and insightfully refocused in several of these poems. So too are the poet's less public erotic longings and (bi)sexual desires, passions in conflict with the more conventional but no less real and demanding aspects of her life. The conflicts are not resolved, but resolution is not necessarily the poet's task; conflicting desires are often held in a remarkable aesthetic and emotional tension in such poems as "Want."

Integral to the collection are the sixteen

interspersed "Muse poems" that explore the often baffling relationship between poetic inspiration and poetic craft.

Depicted in these poems is a muse who has come a long way since being invoked by the likes of Homer and Hesiod. Among other things, she takes taxis, often arriving too late, "has never had children" or "learned to cook," is "bisexual" but "no poet" and "not post-modernist," and—so essential to her function—prone to losing her way. The Muse poems are set in an ever-shifting, often frustrating, but always necessarily shared territory of intimacy between poet and muse, particularly on those slippery slopes of poetic genesis between language and silence. The muse's currency, we are told in "The Muse is No Poet," consists solely of images, not words; images are silent, present for the the poet's interpretation. And although we are told that the muse (evidently deigning not to touch what the poet or critic must) "does not embrace the subtext," throughout this collection the subtext is present for the embracing. In Batchelor's reworkings of such familiar standards as "Westron Wind" in her poem "Afternoon Nap in Montréal" and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in "My Day," new combinations of words surround familiar emotions and images with effective innovation. Spoken and unspoken desires, hopes, and fears are perennial to human experience. The poet's task is to discover fresh ways of seeing and hearing what might be overlooked or unheard. In *Interpreting Silence*, Batchelor has succeeded admirably.

Jocelyne Villeneuve is an accomplished bilingual writer of both prose and poetry. *Marigolds in Snow*, a collection of close to three hundred haiku (her first book of haiku in English), is a fitting display of her gifts with this particular poetic form, providing the reader with a satisfying impression of the haiku's compelling versatility. Although many of these poems have

appeared separately in various publications, in the present collection they offer a thematically unified portrait of Villeneuve's craft and some intriguing insights into her life and character. The two primary sections, "Seasons" and "Off Season," of which the collection consists, adroitly manipulate the conventions of the haiku, particularly in the narrative sequences which the poems comprise. With the measured phrasing, imagistic minimalism, references to seasons, and subtle objectification of emotional states essential to the haiku, the poems progress through not only the seasons of nature, but also the seasons of emotional states and human relationships. Thus, while the "Seasons" section is perhaps more formally conventional, "Off Season," as it in part traces the speaker's emotional states through a poignant relationship of love and loss, is no less mindful of external seasonal changes that reflect her inner reality.

Objective and subjective states of being are appropriately intermingled in some refined patterns throughout the collection. For example, "Musings," one of the sub-sections of "Off Season," opens with natural images implicitly juxtaposed with the speaker's emotional state. Soon after, the haiku "somewhere / hidden from view / the blue jay" becomes "one-sided love / butterfly / with broken wing"; and "in your absence / silent pines / surrounding me" becomes "twisted pines / and the ache of / rejection," the latter images in each instance effectively extending and elaborating the previous images and emotional allusions. The imagistic nature of each discrete haiku invites clusters of associative connotations. But grouped sequentially, their narrative and lyrical qualities suitably complement each other. Villeneuve covers some significant personal and poetic territory in this beautifully designed collection, a collection finely complemented by Peter Schwarz's vividly appealing cover art and interior motifs.

Speak Memory

Alice Kaplan

French Lessons: A Memoir. U Chicago P
U.S.\$19.95

Harold Kaplan

Conscience and Memory: Meditations in a Museum of the Holocaust. U Chicago P
U.S.\$24.95

Reviewed by Norman Ravvin

Early in *French Lessons*, an exhilarating and moving memoir, Alice Kaplan recalls the language of her childhood home in Minneapolis:

We spoke American in that house It was American more for what we talked about than how it sounded, although it is amazing to think that in one generation, a language could become so native, so comfortable

Kaplan describes the characteristic dialect of a prosperous Jewish Midwestern family in order to set the stage for her turn away from things native toward all things French. She was captivated as a child by the French taught at school, and by the allure of a girlfriend's father who bought Mondrians in Paris and dispensed *Joy* perfume on birthdays. A year of high school in Switzerland left her with the "feel" of "French sticking in [her] throat," with a different way of dressing and thinking that made her feel like a foreigner among American teenagers. Kaplan has a sharp eye for the way language influences a mysterious, buried part of our identity, and she investigates, with honesty and humour, her immersion in French language and culture, as well as her decision to teach French literature and confront some of its more compromised practitioners.

In both her private and professional life Kaplan has had the unusual fortune of crossing paths with figures influential and notorious, people at the centre of debates over the uneasy relationship between the

twentieth century intellectual and fascism. Her graduate work on Ferdinand Céline led her to seek out one of the last surviving French fascist writers, Maurice Bardèche, and her account of their meeting is a model of measured self-reflection and engaged reportage. Kaplan studied deconstruction at Yale when Paul de Man's influence on American literary theory was paramount, but she never spoke to him directly about her thesis on French fascist writers. "He seemed," she writes, "the least interested of anyone on the faculty in that topic." In moments of self-doubt over her fascination with the legacy of fascism, Kaplan thinks of her father, who was a judge at Nuremberg. An image of him as he appeared in a newspaper photo, "wearing his headphones" while listening intensely to the trials' proceedings, is recalled often in her memoir. The death of this important but distant man when Kaplan was only eight had a lasting impact on her, leaving her to work out her relationship to recent Jewish history on her own.

Looking back on her own scholarly intervention into the scandal that ensued upon the discovery of de Man's wartime writings, Kaplan chastises herself for perhaps having "reproduced the dry analysis" and "emotional deadpan" she recognizes in her teacher's literary style. But there is nothing dry or deadpan about *French Lessons*. From her description of her grandmother's senile retreat into a mish-mash of Yiddish and Russian, to her depiction of a Paris Bouillabaisse — "a ritual of croutons, aioli, special thin forks" and bibs — Kaplan conveys the unconscious theatre that lies behind each culture's daily routines and its relationship with language. By wedding the ethnographer's keen eye to the novelist's appreciation for the movement of words and memory, she has written an uncommonly good book.

The University of Chicago Press must have had a difficult time producing jacket

blurbs and promotional material for Harold Kaplan's *Conscience and Memory: Meditations in a Museum of the Holocaust*. Very little in the volume comments directly on the Washington museum, and Kaplan's provocative chapters on the endurance of anti-semitism, Hitler's manipulation of the cult of power, the nature of human rights and crimes against humanity, do not resemble conventional "meditations." Kaplan's style is engaged and clear but he does not reveal his personal motivations for his work; little connection is drawn between the recently opened museum and his consideration of philosophical, historical, artistic and religious response to the Holocaust.

At the outset, these features of *Conscience and Memory* seem troubling, but ultimately, the book's dramatic effect is furthered by Kaplan's refusal to produce a more conventional response to his subject.

Conscience and Memory is a meditation in the style of Wim Wender's 1987 film *Der Himmel über Berlin/Wings of Desire*, whose most affecting motif is the tour of Berlin made by a pair of mournful angels who overhear the thoughts of the city's populace. Kaplan resembles Wenders' angels, positioning himself as an earwitNESS to the most telling commentary on the Holocaust and to the most unsettling utterances of its perpetrators. *Conscience and Memory* is filled with quotations both familiar and surprising, uplifting and awful, and examines them within the larger context of Holocaust response. On the side of the angels, we hear a prescient Heine criticizing a growing German devotion to national romanticism and the "racial soul": "These . . . have developed revolutionary forces which only await the day to break forth and fill the world with terror and astonishment." The "factual sobriety of Raul Hilberg" and the "dignified simplicity of Primo Levi" are favorite resources of Kaplan's; he relies on the writing of

Emmanuel Levinas for a critique of institutional, philosophic, and political “commands,” affirming Levinas’ insistence on the imperative of recognizing one’s responsibility for the Other.

Kaplan reminds us, however, that the words of the criminals still resound all too clearly. “The law of existence,” in Hitler’s words, “prescribes uninterrupted killing, so that the better may live.” Dr. Josef Mengele describes himself as a “biological revolutionary . . . a man committed to the bold task of remaking his people and ultimately the people of the world.” “I obeyed,” intones Eichmann, “Regardless of what I was ordered to do, I would have obeyed”; and Heidegger is quoted affirming his belief that the “Führer himself is the only present embodiment and future embodiment of German nation and its law . . .”

The value of Kaplan’s approach is its ability to overcome the common impasse at which many writers find themselves referring to the Holocaust as incommensurable. Striving for a “comprehension of the incomprehensible” he initiates a discussion between the most articulate of commentators and provides a context for his own thoughtful examination of how the Holocaust presents us with an “eternal problem for human self-understanding.”

Forays into Polyvocality

Caroline Adderson

Bad Imaginings. Porcupine \$12.95

Jane Urquhart

Away. M & S \$17.99

Reviewed by Sheila Ross

Adderson’s first collection, has won her this year’s B.C. Book Award and a nomination for the Governor General’s award. Besides her bewildering facility for heteroglossia, if we allow the term to be used for the short story, Adderson’s prose is carefully distilled

of anything superfluous, and is richly concrete and uncommon in its imagery. Here is a detail from “The Hanging Gardens of Babylon,” the story of two children sent out on the Easter holiday to collect the mail to distract them from their mother’s weary pregnancy. They encounter a cat on the road: “Small white worms, like grains of rice, tumbled out of the throat. On the wide crusted-over eye was a pivoting fly. They remained there, in the middle of the road, crouching silently.” This image of decomposition also indicates what unifies the collection: the exploration of death in all of its vegetable and spiritual forms.

Three stories suggest both the collection’s range and this concurrent preoccupation. In “Gold Mountain,” Adderson creates a complex hybrid of travel narrative and dream-vision. In what is essentially a parody, she takes up the voice of a 19th-century English peddler of shoes, who by rationalizing that he can no longer continue “thrusting the corns and calluses of peasants into the shoes of lords,” embarks on a hellish expedition to find gold in the B.C. interior. The misguided traveller discovers in the end that “gold washed in blood loses all its lustre, makes an ugly trinket and a foul currency.” Both “The Chmarnyk” and the final story, “The Hypochondria Club,” contain macabre supernatural events: “The Chmarnyk,” set in the dust-bowl thirties, concerns an ostracized family of vaguely Ukrainian, possibly Dukabour origin. The Chmarnyk, Teo, has a gift for augury that is bogus (“If you see stars in the morning from one to three, the price of wheat rises.”), but his rain-making rituals have miraculous—but fatal—success. And in “The Hypochondria Club,” set in first-world-war Victoria, a woman consults a spiritualist who can summon her husband, Andy, from the dead, and who, at a climactic moment, embraces a mummified baby whose tongue then “slid wet over her finger and sucked.”

tained analysis of the complex relationship between language, the visual and social practice than is possible in the individual articles in Heusser's collection.

War Paint focuses on five buffalo robes that record the war exploits and acts of bravery of 8 Sarcee and Blackfoot chiefs. Donated to the Royal Ontario Museum in 1913, the robes were the result of a commission by artist Edmund Morris who travelled among the Plains Indians between 1907 and 1911 and who sought to document for posterity what he understood to be that culture's disappearing traditions. Brownstone's study of the Morris robes is first of all an excellent research tool. Photographs of the robes, meticulous drawings of the pictographs based on an innovative tracing technique developed by the author, and English translations of the original explanations of the narratives given by each of the warchiefs, make this publication a valuable resource for students and scholars of Plains culture. However, of particular interest to historians and theorists in a broad range of disciplines will be Brownstone's analysis of the commission itself and his argument that the robes do not pre-serve static or "traditional" practices as Morris might have wished, but rather register the complex changes to which Blackfoot culture was forced to adjust in the early 20th century.

Supporting this assertion is that the Morris robes attempted to recreate a way of life that had been eradicated more than four decades prior to the commission. By the 1870s the Buffalo herds that had been central to the Plains economy had disappeared, and this factor, along with the signing of Treaty #7 in 1877, facilitated Government efforts to move Natives on to Reserve lands. While Brownstone discusses the ways in which the new Reserve context meant new social and economic issues for natives, his analysis of the robe's pictographic forms is particularly useful in

terms of underscoring the ways in which cultural practice was affected by these developments.

Brownstone demonstrates that the pictographs on the Morris robes merged earlier Blackfoot representational conventions with Euro-Canadian pictorial modes. The resulting formal innovations—greater concern with anatomical accuracy, the use of overlapping figures to give a sense of three-dimensional space, and increased use of figural detail—is explained at one level by native artists' familiarity with Euro-Canadian visual conventions, particularly following settlement on Reserves. Yet the new pictorial language is also linked to the new social, economic and political relations that characterized the interactions between the Blackfoot and the Canadian government. Brownstone argues that the changed pictographic forms of the Morris robes were designed to appeal to a new constituency—the non-native viewing public for which the robes were produced. At least four of the chiefs, the author suggests, were willing to paint their exploits on one of the buffalo skins supplied by Morris because they knew the finished robe was destined to be exhibited in the Ontario legislature. At a time when the Canadian government was "cutting food rations to pressure the Peigan and Siksuka into selling part of their reserves," and engaged in implementing a new farm program that would undermine traditional forms of wealth, native leaders were eager to convey their own historical narrative in a language that could be comprehended by the new Euro-Canadian audience.

War Paint is clearly written and is accessible to a broad public. Yet while the author avoids the specialized terminology associated with current literary theory or post-colonial studies, this work offers a useful model for the way in which language and imagery take form in relation to dynamic social and political forces. Importantly, this

is not the kind of analysis where context is added as a supplementary backdrop or where the text or work of art are viewed as passively mirroring historical circumstances. Brownstone makes clear that the visual, like the spoken or written word, plays an active role, addressing specific audiences in order to resist or support a range of competing representations. This study of text and image as social practice is much needed in the present when it is important to challenge notions of First Nation cultures as passive or unchanging. It also serves to illustrate the value of a vital interdisciplinary inquiry to a broad range of historical studies and critical analyses.

Other Women

Anita Levy

Other Women: The Writing of Class, Race, and Gender, 1832-1898. Princeton UP US\$35.00/\$9.95

Ruth Frankenberg

White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness. U Minnesota P US\$44.95/\$16.95

Reviewed by Nicole Shukin-Simpson

Both Frankenburg and Levy pursue the particular ways in which constructed discourses have come to seem 'natural,' or common-sensical, rather than contrived. By taking a slice of British history as her subject, Levy aligns sociological, psychological, and anthropological inquiries with literary discourse in order to show how the latter is as much an ideological force as the former. *Wuthering Heights*, Levy argues, educates the period about the criteria of an acceptable middle-class family. Race, class, and gender intersect in the female figure who is both put in her domesticated place, and then beholden to keep order among the family ranks. This construction of women, Levy argues, makes possible the violent othering and ethnography of both

'primitive' races and of 'the London poor.' Both racial and the working-class Other were held up against the middle-class female, and inevitably found wanting. Their women (the Hottentot and the prostitute, respectively) were deemed either too sexually feminine or lacking in refined feminine characteristics, and became symbolic of the chaotic communities that needed to be marginalized for the 'centre' to be defined. Rather than viewing women as victims in this scheme, however, Levy reconstitutes them as self-willing agents of middle-class reform. Yet Levy does not explore the difference between those women who were in a position actively to engage in the creation of social norms and those women who had no access to the role of domestic sovereign.

Levy, unlike Frankenberg, fails to place her work within a 'postcolonial' context. On the one hand, a study of this ideologically rife period in Britain is important, since British imperialism and colonialism extended its 'ideas' throughout much of the modern world. But on the other hand, by not examining her own limited social and topographical site, Levy falls into the same 'natural' traps that she sets out to undermine: she does not find it necessary to explain why *this* particular white colonialist empire is taken to be the paradigm for other women, although she admits that she "was haunted by all the things [she] hadn't said in this book, and by all the traces of the women whose thought and desires were suppressed in nineteenth-century England with the rise to power of the new middle classes."

By contrast, Frankenburg is sensitive to the problems accompanying a study of white women and racism: "[this] is by intention and investigation of self rather than of other(s), since it is a study of whiteness and women undertaken by a woman who is white." Although Frankenberg realizes the dangers in a project that seems to

privilege a white voice at the cost, yet again, of other voices, she believes that white ignorance is at the heart of race. "My study," Frankenberg states, "and the exploration of white women's life histories upon which this book is based, share these women's commitment to careful and detailed analysis of how racism enters and shapes white women's lives."

Frankenberg interviews thirty white American women from a range of ages and classes. Her interview style is itself highly conscious, trying to supply rather than hide the method pursued, transcribing the glitches, the stumbling, and the incomplete sentences in a way that reminds us at all times of the interviewer's presence and agenda. If she suggests any consensus, it is perhaps the common feeling that white culture seems to barely exist, is bland, indistinct, "land of the kleenex" non-culture: "white," Frankenberg notes, "as an unmarked category." Similar to Levy's view, then, is Frankenberg's: we must begin to examine what constitutes the invisible norms that maintain systems of exclusion and domination while appearing vague and inconsequential.

Monuments & Magpies

James Carscallen

The Other Country: Patterns in the Writing of Alice Munro. ECW \$40.00

Reviewed by Christine Somerville

In *The Other Country*, James Carscallen has produced something new in the growing critical canon devoted to Alice Munro's writing. The book's sheer size (581 pages) is impressive. Monumental in scope and meticulous in detail, this study offers an integrated structural interpretation for Munro's characteristic blend of ordinary life and mythic otherness. In a scholarly work that includes hundreds of end notes

to each chapter, Carscallen attempts to argue from the point of view of an exploring reader who sees associative connections between Munro's stories and other literature. Unfortunately, the story-centred method conflicts with the requirement to elucidate a long, complicated argument. Frequently, I longed for a chart that would help me to visualize the "model" to which Carscallen keeps referring. The non-specialist reader whom he envisions would need to have done considerable reading in the literature of the past. In the Northrop Frye tradition, Carscallen, a Spenser scholar as well as Munro specialist, reads Munro in the reflected light of the Bible. Whereas virtually all of Munro's critics refer to her use of allusions and embedded stories, Carscallen goes further, linking allusions together in a system of sustained biblical metaphor. In this interpretation, Munro's entire *oeuvre* becomes an analogue to a sacred text.

My first response was a splutter of indignation: how improbable! Why would Alice Munro, that ironic post-Christian woman, write fiction whose meaning derives from a belief system to which she does not adhere? Although Carscallen is careful to absolve her of authorial intention, the notion that the biblical parallels so evident in *Lives of Girls and Women* continue throughout her work still seems unlikely. But, having struggled to suspend disbelief and welcome an unusual approach, I find much to admire in the book, particularly the impressive textual evidence that Carscallen gathers in support of his view. For example, the title *The Other Country* comes from the title story of Munro's first collection, *Dance of the Happy Shades*, in which an unexpectedly brilliant performance of a piano solo by an unnamed girl student with an unnamed disability arrests an embarrassingly pathetic music recital and offers a flash of insight from an "other country," an elysium of timeless grace and purity. For

Carscallen, the prevalence of other countries is the key element in Munro's fiction. In his view, all fiction falls into two classes: sense and sensibility. Munro's fiction belongs to that of sensibility, with its emphasis on a moment of epiphany or revelation. The meaning in such stories seems to arise not out of the narrative of events in the story, but out of a moment of vision outside the main action of the story that the reader experiences as a communication from another order of existence.

Although weighted in favour of the early short story collections and the two "novels," *Lives of Girls and Women* and *Who Do You Think You Are?*, *The Other Country* examines all Munro's published work up to the end of *Friend of My Youth*. In Part 1, the author considers individual stories and explains his structural model, while in Part 2 he places the individual stories in groupings. Subtitled *Patterns in the Writing of Alice Munro*, Carscallen's study traces these patterns back to biblical archetypes. For example, he divides the stories into structural types that he calls Genesis, Wilderness and Judges. A Genesis story features patterns of innocence collapsing, falling Titans and victims and oppressors. By contrast, the Wilderness group are initiatory stories. Like the biblical crossing of the Jordan and journey to the Promised Land, these stories are about trust and betrayal, sacrifices and visions. The Judges stories are distinguished by kingly figures like the biblical King David, references to Egypt, violent quarrels and eventual reconciliation.

Although Carscallen's structural interpretation is sure to generate interest and discussion, he is at his best when he temporarily abandons theorizing and offers close readings of individual stories. My own favourite is his chapter on Munro's names. As he points out, she delights in the sheer giving and listing of names. Although other commentators have discussed the connotations of Del Jordan's surname

(River Jordan crossed over by the Israelites on the way to the Promised Land; river in which John the Baptist performed his baptisms), Carscallen notes that a jordan is also an old slang term for a chamber-pot, an outrageous fact worthy of Munro herself. In studying Munro's names, he also discovers that the most common ones in her fiction begin with the letter "m," such as Mary, Myra, Moira, Mr. Malley, Morgan and Murray. Through their association with the New Testament Mary, the woman of sorrows, he links this family of names to black, fate, sorrow and death.

For this reader, another excellent feature is a twenty-six-page index to story titles and characters. When I looked up Uncle Craig, whose funeral Del Jordan disrupts by biting her cousin Mary Agnes, I found forty-three references listed—but not the one for which I was searching. Since Carscallen's approach tends to collapse the boundaries of individual collections by regrouping stories into the patterns that he discerns in Munro's work as a whole, the list provided of the short stories found in each collection is also helpful.

Will this book lead Munro studies in an exciting new direction? My guess is that women in particular will resist Carscallen's interpretation as altogether too systematic and patriarchal. *The Other Country* treats Munro as an intellectual writer comparable to T.S. Eliot or James Joyce. I, on the other hand, see her as an inductive writer, whose stories are linked not by a system of biblical imagery, but by a distinctly feminine viewpoint. Above all, Munro is an iconoclast with a magpie mind like that of Del Jordan memorizing bits from the encyclopedia to show off for her mother's potential customers. For me, Carscallen's immensely learned and carefully researched study carries much the same oppressive weight as Uncle Craig's history of Wawanash County that Del feared might "deaden my things too and bring me bad luck."

Récits et récitant(e)s

Dany Laferrière

L'Odeur du café. VLB Éditeur \$15.95

Sylvain Trudel

Zara ou la mer Noire. Quinze n.p.

Huguette O'Neil

Belle-Moue. Triptyque n.p.

Jeanne Painchaud

Le Tour du sein (scrapbook). Triptyque n.p.

Ingrid Joubert, ed.

Accostages: Récits et nouvelles. Éditions du Blé \$19.95

André Gaudreault

Du littéraire au filmique: Système du récit. PU Laval \$23.00

Reviewed by Paul Matthew St. Pierre

"Je ne parle pas français," dit Kat Beauchamp. "Moi-même, je parle français," dit Paul Matthieu Saint-Pierre, "mais je parle *mal* le français, parce que je suis un canadien *déraciné*." "Déraciné? Comme Racine?" demande-t-elle. "Oui, comme la racine d'un mot, du mot *racine* sans l'homme Racine." "Pauvre enfant! Pourquoi?" "C'est une équation de premier degré: *père* (canadien français, de St. Boniface) + *mère* (anglaise, de l'Angleterre) = *fil*s (français *déraciné* ≠ *maudit anglais*): je suis *une* solitude!"

The six very distinctive texts here under review have in common the politics of recitation, that is, the twin acts of reciting by heart (orature) and narrating by design (scripture).

In the novel *L'Odeur du café*, for example, Dany Laferrière strikes an indelicately perfect balance between the sensuality of a ten-year-old boy and the author's nostalgia for his youth in Haïti. In its direct address, its predominantly vocative prose (evoking experiential childhood and provoking indifferent adulthood, all through incantational acts of naming), this narrative could be seen as an obverse observation on Laferrière's own *Comment faire l'amour*

avec un Nègre sans se fatiguer. The opening passage of *L'Odeur du café* draws the reader directly into the otherness of narration, and establishes a pattern for naming:

J'ai passé mon enfance à Petit-Goâve, à quelques kilomètres du Port-au-Prince. Si vous prenez la Nationale Sud, c'est un peu après le terrible morne Tapion. Laissez Rouler votre camion (on voyage en camion, bien sûr) jusqu'aux casernes (jaune feu), tournez tranquillement à gauche, une légère pente à grimper, et essayez de vous arrêter au 88 de la rue Lamarre.

Il est fort possible que vous voyiez, assis sur la galerie, une vieille dame au visage serein et souriant à côté d'un petit garçon de dix ans. La vieille dame c'est ma grand-mère. Il faut l'appeler Da. Da tout court. L'enfant, c'est moi. Et c'est l'été 63.

Here the narrative event is not so much an imaginative transition back to 1963 as a vocative transposition from "je" to "vous" to "on" to "moi," and finally into the now immediate reality of Da. The novel, which ultimately names itself as a eulogy to Da, is in fact a lament on the transience of memory, prose, and narration.

Another multi-layered narrative about childhood and death is Sylvain Trudel's second novel, *Zara ou la mer Noire*, which is based on the premise of a series of communications that serve to announce the events of life, death, and rebirth, especially the re-emergence of the narrator's dead friend in a found notebook. This diary is a poignantly beautiful record of suffering—the diarist is dying of leukemia—at once emotionally pointed and lyrically economical. Here Trudel reverses the conventional roles of author and narrator. He seems to wish the reader to be concerned more with the real author within narrative—in this case the diarist—than with the implied author outside narrative—Trudel, or his authorial persona. In a sense, Trudel exploits this narrative situation to distance himself from the diarist, whose confessions

are filtered as if through a death mask:

Ma quête me poussait vers l'Orient; je m'éloignais, chaque jour davantage, de l'Europe. Un pressentiment—vieux comme mes jours—m'étreignait [puisamment]: là-bas, dans l'écume de la mer Noire, je recevrais la révélation qui ébranlerait ma vie.

The phantasms “Zara” and “la mer Noire” come to have a more pronounced verisimilitude than abstractions like “author” and “narrator,” though “author” Trudel appears in the narrative in an editorial role. In the end *récit* becomes indistinguishable from *récitant*, just as death becomes interchangeable with life.

In *Belle-Moue*, journalist Huguette O'Neil takes an at once meticulous and extravagant approach to the obituary narrative. The narrator's mother dies at the very beginning of the novel, the textual body of which is an anatomy of the body of the subject. Predominantly an empirical record of the circumstances of death—medical procedures, dates and names, antecedent action—the narrative comes alive in the “dialogue” of the narrator and Belle-Moue, whose shared voice-presence exist beyond the page:

maman maman tout est bien fini il n'y a pas de paradis pas de ciel pas de purgatoire pas d'enfer pas de saint Pierre pour t'accueillir là-haut pas de jugement dernier comme il n'y a pas eu de jugement premier pas de bon Dieu pour te faire justice pas de seigneur selon l'expression moyenâgeuse pour tel distribuer ses bienfaits

O'Neil's “pas de” narrative ontology turns *une récitante décédée*, the dead mother who can never talk back, into *un récit décidé*.

In *Le Tour du sein* (scrapbook), Jeanne Painchaud takes the pathology of anatomy into the politics of women's bodies, not just from the now of feminism but also in the then of patriarchy. Painchaud's imagery of mutilation and dismemberment is disturb-

ing but ultimately her prose discloses the designs of women's breasts in herstory, in direct contrast to the phallocentrism of history. The story collection's closing words seem to sum up Painchaud's views on women's control over their bodies within political and physiological circumstances that are often out of their control: “Peut-être, un jour, je n'aurai pas de seins. Et ce sera sans doute aussi bien comme ça. Comme quand j'étais petite.” Here the speaker claims a space between “peut-être” and “sans doute.”

Ingrid Joubert's edition *Accostages: Récits et nouvelles* features stories, sketches, and fragments by René Ammann, Pauline Johnson-Tanguay, Monique R. Jeannotte, François-Xavier Eygun, and René La Fleur. Together, these fragmentary narratives “accost” the reader not only from the margins of society but also from the margins of the page, with many gaps, ellipses and illustrations. This anthology features some of the best new francophone writers from outside Quebec and New Brunswick (specifically Alberta and Manitoba), and is yet another reminder that Les Éditions du Blé is the preeminent voice for franco-canadien writers in the West, allowing even *un homme déraciné comme moi* a francophone identity.

As a (con)summation of all these ontological récits et récitant(e)s, André Gaudreault's *Du littéraire au filmique: Système du récit* offers a fascinating narratological theory based less on traditional-critical terminology such as author and narrator, mimesis and diegesis, and story and discourse than on such *au courant* matters as the line (or, more accurately, the reel) of development from scriptural narrative to filmic narrative. This commentary on narrative in film best complements the work of Seymour Chatman, but Gaudreault seems to be more most indebted to the temporal theories of Paul Ricoeur (who wrote the preface to this

book), in that time is arguably the foremost element in film narrative. The other side of this question, of course, is that cinema is by nature a non-narrative medium, accommodating narrators, but only awkwardly. Gaudreault refutes this idea by discussing narrative elements in early cinema and developing a highly credible "système" on "narrateurs filmiques délégués."

There are no Racines here, yet nor are there any *déracinés*.

Postmods and Rockers

Philip Auslander

Presence and Resistance: Postmodernism and Cultural Politics in Contemporary American Performance. U of Michigan P \$34.50

Jon Thompson

Fiction, Crime, and Empire: Clues to Modernity and Postmodernism. U of Illinois P \$32.50/\$14.95

Reviewed by Paul Matthew St. Pierre

Auslander has written an engaging commentary on subject-position-politics in the theatre of the post-absurd that is the (re)venue of postmodern performance artists and their participatory audiences. Within the intertext of postmodernism—both the periodicity and the movement—Auslander addresses Jamesonian decadent capitalism as a screen on and through which artists might perform and audiences might perceive encoded subject-positions of otherness, hegemony, pluralism, imperialism, marginality, minority culture. Contrasting himself to Jean Beaudrillard, Auslander argues from the premise that "mediatized culture" has not entirely superseded reality, and that true performance art (as distinguished from screen-simulacra), may actually help to mediate between culture and media. Precisely in systematizing mediation and mediatization, Auslander observes the political functions and agendas of the performance arts. With reference to Spalding Gray, for exam-

ple, Auslander remarks categorically, "his work is important for the ways it engages mediatized culture at a structural level, not for its ostensible political content."

Similarly, with reference to performance artist Laurie Anderson, Auslander argues that "Anderson's persona in these pieces is so detached that one begins to doubt the autobiographical status of the stories she tells, even when one is familiar with them from other tellings." Thus, in "mediatized culture," one might suggest, *the messenger becomes the medium*.

Much of the discussion in *Presence and Resistance* focuses on well known performance artists such as Gray, Anderson, Sarah Bernhart, Madonna, Eric Bogosian, and the Wooster Group. But the book is remarkable also for its insights into performance artists who are usually thought of mainly as comedians and actors, people such as Lily Tomlin and Andy Kaufman. Auslander makes a very convincing case for some stand-up comics and television actors as the most innovative of performance artists. His discussion of Andy Kaufman is particularly striking, because Kaufman, in my estimation a gifted comic actor, emerges in this text as a singular performance artist who elected not only on stage but also throughout much of his "unstaged" life to make very few distinctions between the dancer and the dance. Auslander, quoting Kaufman's friend comedian Elaine Bosler, points out that when even Andy Kaufman was in hospital dying of cancer many of his fans believed he was simply staging another media event, this time portraying a dying man. Auslander's discussion convinces me Kaufman's figuration of a dying man was the ultimate performance.

My only reservation about *Presence and Resistance* has to do with its scholarly documentation. Although the book is well annotated and indexed, it lacks a list of works cited, which would be an invisible

obstacle to further reading on performance artists, the very sort of work this book encourages. Otherwise, I feel *Presence and Resistance* does deserve a standing ovation.

Whereas Auslander sees culture as uniformly mediatized, Jon Thompson in *Fiction, Crime, and Empire: Clues to Modernity and Postmodernism* discerns a divide of “high” and “low” culture into which works within the crime fiction genre (and the espionage, thriller, conspiracy subgenres) can be arranged for critical purposes. Thompson arranges the top and bottom shelves of his crime bookcase most meticulously, but in my view his shelving system is somewhat unsteady as a data reserve on culture itself.

Clearly, hierarchical values are more appropriate to the modern than to the postmodern period, and, in the present climate of political correctness, they could be summarily dismissed as classist or elitist. This qualm notwithstanding, Thompson’s consideration of crime fiction within the context of empire is quite sound historically. In this regard, crime writers as diverse stylistically and aesthetically as Rudyard Kipling and Joseph Conrad, to cite two of his more prominent examples, fall naturally into binary opposites of low-high or popular-scholarly.

Thompson is particularly strong on Kipling’s narratives, and his main accomplishment in the book is to contextualize Kipling within the crime genre (against writers such as Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, Dashiell Hammett, as well as Conrad) and within what imperialists accepted as the historicity of empire.

In linking historicism with the city, Thompson stakes out a convincing locus for modernism, but seems almost to abandon postmodernism in the suburbs when he ends the book with a fairly cursory discussion of Thomas Pynchon and *The Crying of Lot 49*. I agree that *Lot 49* “offers a paradigm for understanding postmodern

crime fiction,” but I believe a fuller consideration of Pynchon as postmodernist was needed here to complement the detailed discussion of modernist crime fiction in the body of the text. Here Thompson misses an opportunity to consider Pynchon as a writer of empire, as earlier he fails to empiricize Dostoyevsky and to recognize him for what he was, the greatest crime writer of the 19th century. The shortcomings seem quite minor, however, given Jon Thompson’s thorough examination of his “lower” shelves.

In the end, Philip Auslander and Jon Thompson are postmods and rockers, exploring literature from the pin-prick vantage-point of postmodernity, and taking on the push and pull of binary opposites. Yet whereas Auslander chooses to deconstruct the contemporary binary of “mediatized culture” and “reality,” Thompson elects simply to bolster the traditional duality of “high” and “low” literary cultures. Ironically, these critics, so different from each other politically, together form a binary of critical pluralism, leading one to wonder if postmodernism is not just a media event, *une mise en scene* in critical politics.

Education & Women Today

Henry A. Giroux

Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education. Routledge \$19.95

Tania Modleski

Feminism without Women: Culture and Criticism in a 'Postfeminist' Age. Routledge \$17.50

Reviewed by Steven Taubeneck

At least since 1989, the consequences of postmodernity have become visible across a range of cultures and institutions. With the end of the Cold War, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the various attacks on U.S. hegemony, the apparently fixed alignments of the last fifty years are under

reconstruction. Different borders are being drawn, different assemblages are emerging, while education seems more out of step and women face more pressure than ever. One key problem is the need for a new understanding of identity based on a sharper sense of the differences involved; yet there is almost complete disagreement over the best models to pursue. Henry Giroux and Tania Modleski enter the discussion highly critical of the contemporary situation. Though not everyone will agree with their assessments, their books also suggest important alternatives. For thinking about identity and difference, contemporary education and feminism, these are two of the most provocative studies available.

Giroux has worked, through a series of articles and books, to reform North American teacher education and public schools. Now his agenda has changed. He believes that journals and schools of education have ignored developments in other disciplines and become "increasingly irrelevant in addressing the key problems facing public schools, higher education, and the larger society." He suggests that "wider movements in feminist theory, poststructuralism, postmodernism, cultural studies, literary theory, and in the arts are now addressing the issue of pedagogy within a politics of cultural difference that offers new hope for a deteriorating field." Ultimately, he argues that "the concepts of democracy, border, borderlands, and difference must be rewritten so that diverse identities and cultures can intersect as sites of creative cultural production."

To describe these movements more systematically and to elucidate the preferred concepts, the book is organized into two sections, each with an interview followed by four chapters on related topics. Giroux introduces the notion of "border pedagogy" by considering a number of postcolonial theorists and their ideas about "the language of history, power, and difference."

His argument is that if students "engage knowledge as border-crossers" in the classroom, they might help outside the classroom to construct "a new type of politics, language, and subject, which would be both multiple and democratic." The first section concludes by showing how ideas about identity and difference from feminism, modernism, and postmodernism can lead to a "decentering" of the canon and a rethinking of politics "beyond pluralism." The second section extends the argument through a description of cultural studies, the "decolonization of the body," and in-depth analyses of the film *Dirty Dancing* and paintings by Leon Golub.

Giroux wants to counter the arguments of "conservatives such as Allan Bloom, E.D. Hirsch, Diane Ravitch, Pat Buchanan, and Senator Jesse Helms" by "redefining pedagogy as a form of cultural politics and production." He argues that "educational reformers and other cultural workers" should see the real purpose of their work against a broader set of social questions: "What kind of society do we want? How do we educate students for a truly democratic society?" While one can sympathize with these interests, two features obscure their presentation. The book would be strengthened by better editing of, for example, the commas that wander to the beginning of lines and the many spelling errors ("redundant," "an" instead of "and"). And at many points the vocabulary becomes so shrill that one might too easily dismiss the argument as dogmatic. Throughout, but especially for example on pages 32-33, the words "must," "needs to," "cannot be," and "should be" recur incessantly. Despite these problems, the book gives a useful overview of the developments in various disciplines and can be recommended for anyone interested in the reconstruction of education.

While less heavy-handed in her book *Feminism without Women*, Modleski has an equally critical argument: under the guises

of "postfeminism" and an "anti-essentialist" approach, women are being delivered "back into a prefeminist world." Although the "death knell" has been sounded for "the humanist notion of identity" by "poststructuralist writings," she wonders "why women, much more so than any other oppressed groups of people have been so willing to yield the ground on which to make a stand against their oppression." Above all, she emphasizes the situation of women as subjects. Confronted with changes in the notion of identity, Modleski seeks to preserve the basis for effective self-assertion and social improvements.

Modleski's book is divided into three parts: "theory and methodology"; "masculinity and male feminism"; and the third on "race, gender, and sexuality." The opening analyzes the consequences of postfeminism and anti-essentialism for feminist theory. She wants "to hold onto the category of woman while recognizing ourselves to be in the *process* (an unending one) of *defining and constructing the category*." Her examples are drawn from theory and mass culture. She moves from an analysis of Manuel Puig's novel *Kiss of the Spider Woman* and Jean Baudrillard's theories of mass culture to a consideration of Janice Radway's work on women's romances and the theories of Stanley Fish, Annette Kolodny, and Jacques Derrida, in order to articulate the relation between women's voices and bodies. Her point is that, despite the talk of postfeminism, "we have not come close to realizing the vision that would make the radical struggle possible."

The second and third parts consider women's roles in mass culture in light of gender and ethnic studies. For Modleski, a hasty commitment to the notion of "male feminism" may blind critics to "popular culture's latest attempts to come to terms with feminism by appropriating it." As examples of this appropriation, she describes "the misogyny at the heart of the

warrior mentality" in war films; the "reconceptualization of the paternal role" in films such as *Three Men and a Baby*; the "disavowal" of sexual difference in the case of Pee-wee Herman's persona; and the depictions of race and gender in films such as *Gorillas in the Mist* or the *Lethal Weapon* series. She stresses that none of these has "put into question the contempt for women that has been central" to the patriarchal tradition. It is still necessary, therefore, to strive for "solidarity" in the face of women's "common oppression." Unfortunately, the presentation is also weakened by two problems: the disjunctive quality of the writing and the ambivalence of the ultimate recommendations. The examples proceed somewhat haphazardly, and the worries over anti-essentialism avoid a specific set of alternatives. Nevertheless, Modleski offers an insightful account of the difficulties facing feminists today.

In other words, both books can be recommended for those concerned with the effects of postmodernity on education and women. A response to their arguments might lead to even more creative suggestions.

In Flight

Betty Vogel

Pilgrimage. Blue Flower P \$12.95

Barry Dempster

The Ascension of Jesse Rapture. Quarry \$14.95

Reviewed by Ulrich Teucher

While Betty Vogel introduces her novel *Pilgrimage* as a traditional autobiographical novel of development, Barry Dempster's *The Ascension of Jesse Rapture*, engages the reader with a number of characters, in a composition of many voices, each independently vying for the attention of the reader. A novel of development, one would imagine, especially one with autobiographical contents, would invite the reader to trace

the changing narratives of the main character's sense of 'self' towards an integration of identity, while the polyphonic novel's plurality of voices challenge his or her belief in the unity of self. However, the reader struggles to see how these objectives are met.

Vogel's observations as a Canadian exchange student in postwar Europe in 1953/54 are the basis for the experiences of Louise, the novel's main protagonist. The preface introduces the young woman briefly as a "young, neurotic, and very introverted student" who suffers from an "oppressive inferiority and persecution complex." Thus prepared, the reader might expect to discover more about and, perhaps, empathize with, a person whose high expectations about her visit to Germany are disappointed and who ultimately feels forced to admit that her search for "the key to the universe—the secret which would unlock her inner being?" was "only an illusion—that she was again locked into the insufferable incarceration of her soul."

However, while we read much about Louise's judgements of others (hiccuping fellow travellers, obsequious waiters, German landladies, and American students doing the bunny-hop), we learn little about her emotional life. Although Vogel tells us frequently that Louise is depressed, the narrative does not help us to imagine what it feels like for her when she is depressed. For example, one chapter ("The Last Lap") tells us that Louise, while looking forward to her "wild adventure" . . . "relaxed and luxuriated in her surroundings," not feeling sad—"only poignant—and pierced by the unutterable hopes and expectations of life." However, a few lines later, and concluding the chapter, we hear that she felt her depression lift and her anxiety subside as she was, for a few moments, protected from her own environment by a hermetically sealed world of her own imagination in which she exulted, however briefly, in the glory of life.

Here the reader needs more help: What are Louise's hopes and expectations, how does it feel not to utter them? Could these be comments made by Vogel in retrospect? When had Louise become depressed? What does Louise imagine? How does it feel for someone who is "insufferably incarcerated in her own soul" to 'exult'? What does "glory of life" mean for her? Possibly Louise finds her emotional life as "unutterable" as her hopes and expectations. However, the reader finds it very difficult to put him- or herself into Louise's shoes.

Louise's distance from herself might explain the distanced narrative style of Vogel. The author tells the action in the past; third-person pronouns abound (their referents are often not clear); the writing is stilted (" . . . this did not deter them from partaking in the refreshments . . . "), and many important details are withheld. For example, while we read that Louise "despises" her father for his alleged "deprecating practicality" and feels suffocated by her mother, we are not given any details that would allow us to judge whether Louise is justified in her criticism. In addition, Louise does not seem to know more about herself when she returns, leaving the reader to wonder what makes *Pilgrimage* a novel of development. If Louise understands her feelings, she guards them closely, as the writer shields these feelings from the reader. The latter may find it laborious to enter into the hermetically sealed world of the young woman and, thus, the novel is a difficult book to read.

The contrast in narrative style with the novel *The Ascension of Jesse Rapture* could not be more extreme; Barry Dempster draws the reader immediately into the action. The prologue opens with a first person 'I', with Jesse Rapture, the main protagonist, inundating the reader with questions about his condition; for he is "up in the air" over his father's death: Jesse finds himself levitating (at times

above the clouds) and considers his condition as hard to accept as the reader does. However, the immediacy of the first-person narration leaves little space to ponder the (meta-)physics of gravity; in fact, Dempster lets each member of the strong-willed Rapture family narrate the action in his turn from his own perspective. Since the father (“the Daddy Rapture, renowned Baptist minister with a tongue like an avenging angel’s wing”) held a prominent position in the family, Dempster privileges us to share a first person impression of his dying hours in the hospital, on life-support (Rapture, in mid-sermon, has fallen from the pulpit). Unable to speak and believed to be unconscious, he is forced to listen to the ‘coarse’ language of his adolescent sons Jesse and Jacob and grandmother Nana’s “travel informations on eternity.” Finally he can make himself understood: “Turn it off.”

What is to become of his Toronto church and congregation? Rapture’s wife Tilda, in contrast to her husband’s “fire and brimstone” attitude, finds her own calling and converts the church into “Tilda Rapture’s Church of Incredible Love.” Dispensing hugs to everyone, she soon hosts her own program on TV. Her son Jacob, a convinced atheist, denounces what he believes to be mediahype and hypocrisy and tries to burn the church to the ground, while grandmother Nana, a fundamentalist Christian, crucifies herself on the churchsteps and sets up her own service. Meanwhile, Jesse perfects his ability to levitate and becomes a talk-show host and healer. Unfortunately, he cannot fully control his ability to levitate. During a struggle with Jacob, Jesse lifts off, his brother clinging on to him for dear life. When Jacob drops into Lake Ontario, Jesse crashes into the Niagara Falls, to awaken in a full body cast.

What makes *The Ascension of Jesse Rapture* entertaining, is the immediacy of the various voices equally proclaiming their

own perspective. Nevertheless, one doubts if Jesse is a real person and finds it hard to care for him and the other characters.

Ungendering Ideas

Judith Butler

Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. Routledge \$13.95

Rosemary Hennessy

Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse. Routledge \$56.50/\$18.95

Sheila Rowbotham

Women in Movement: Feminism and Social Action. Routledge \$49.95

Reviewed by Hilda L. Thomas

In the unlikely event that Judith Butler were to read *Maclean’s* magazine, she would find reported in the December 19, 1994, issue the following remarks by the Most Reverend James W. Wingle, bishop of Yarmouth, Nova Scotia:

There is a kind of very dangerous theory which seems to be gaining popular ground, that I would call a kind of unisex mentality, as though the sexual differentiation of man and woman is an accidental feature of human existence, and that’s just bonkers. Men and women are distinct and unique, . . . and their contributions—to the world, to the church, to society—are specific to the gender.

The same issue of *Maclean’s* contains a review of two movies, *Disclosure*, starring Michael Douglas, and the film version of David Mamet’s *Oleanna*. In both these dramas, the familiar pattern of male predator (he who *has* the phallus) assaulting female victim (she who *is* the phallus—the affirmation of heterosexual desire—) is reversed. But while in these and other recent films (*Fatal Instinct*, *Thelma and Louise*) the conventional wisdom about gender-specific roles is turned on its head,

the binary categories of gender itself are never called in question.

Stripped of its burden of postmodernist language, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* could be read as a comment on these two items from the popular press. To begin with, Butler completely rejects the notion that "men and women are distinct and unique." Sexual differentiation is not, however, in Butler's view, an "accidental feature of human existence." It is, rather, discursively constructed, a product of the "phallogocentric signifying economy" within an "epistemic regime of presumptive heterosexuality." Nor is there such a thing as a "feminine" desire or demand that is masked or suppressed within the phallic economy, but which, if released, "would establish an insubordinate alterity to the masculine subject and expose the necessary failure of masculinity" as is perhaps the intended message in *Disclosure* and *Oleanna*.

For Butler, there is no such thing as a pre-ontological feminine. Rather, the "masquerade" which women are compelled to enact is the "performative production of a sexual ontology" that serves to sustain the binary categories of a regime of "compulsory heterosexuality and phallogocentrism."

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler sets out to explore the many ways in which gender categories are constructed—and deconstructed. Her work encompasses the kinship theories of Levi-Strauss, the psychoanalytics of Freud, Lacan, and Kristeva, Foucauldian genealogy, and the analyses of feminist critics from de Beauvoir to Irigaray and Wittig, among others. Interdisciplinary and post-disciplinary in its approach, the text seeks to "resist the domestication of gender studies or women (sic) studies within the academy," to "radicalize the notion of feminist critique" and move it from the margins of disciplinary life where it has been located by, in Gayatri Spivak's words, the politics of "epistemic

imperialism." By making 'gender trouble'—that is, by disrupting the reified categories of identity, sex, gender, and sexuality, Butler seeks to "occasion their resignification and proliferation beyond the binary frame," and to demonstrate that gender is "a fabrication . . . and a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies"; that being the case, "genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity."

In Butler's view, the way to achieve this resignification is by means of "subversive laughter," parody, and, for example, the "double inversion" of drag, in which inner and outer, appearance and essence, masculine and feminine are at once mocked and undermined. (The 1982 film *Victor/Victoria*, might serve as an illustration of her point.)

To define gender as a "stylized repetition of acts" as Butler does is to render the very notion of "natural" gender "radically incredible." And, she warns, making "gender trouble" is risky business. For feminists battling the pronouncements of the pulpit and the perversions of the box office, the risk is worth it.

Like Judith Butler, Rosemary Hennessy focuses her argument on "the problem of the subject—more specifically, the discursively constructed subject." Hennessy is equally suspicious of the totalizing narratives which have shaped western civilization; but in *Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse* she is also concerned to "make use of postmodern notions of the subject in conjunction with a theory of the social which is congruent with feminism's political goals." Hennessy defines her stance as "emphatically postmodernist marxist feminism"; her goal is to further the "emancipatory aims" of feminism by means of a "resistance postmodernism." There is no question that "social totalities like patriarchy and racism *do* continue to structure our lives." For Hennessy, one of

the most important legacies of feminist theory is its analysis of these totalities. However, if it is to go beyond the economic determinism of classic marxism and the limitations of a gender-based critique, feminist theory must draw upon postmodernist discourse while continuing to be grounded in a "systemic conception of the social."

From this starting point, Hennessy embarks on an analysis of the "contingent" social logics which inform the work of Foucault, Lacan, and Mouffe, as well as Kristeva's ahistorical and "corporealizing" theory of signification. She assesses both their usefulness to a materialist feminist analysis and the way in which the conservative aspects of these various positions cohere with an "identity politics which continues . . . to trouble and tame the radical potential of feminist thought."

Hennessy then turns to an examination of critics such as Sandra Harding and Donna Haraway, claiming that their "theory of standpoint rooted in a notion of 'position' as the objective condition of *people's lives* strains against postmodern formulations of 'position' as *discursive*." She argues that in posing women's lives as "an empirical point of reference prior to feminism," while at the same time accepting that "feminist standpoint is a socially constructed way of making sense of the world," standpoint theory provides no analysis of the relationship between the empirical and the discursive.

Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse and *Gender Trouble* are dense and difficult books. Both are rigorously argued, and they are informed by a comprehensive grasp of the postmodern theories with which they engage. While they approach the question of gender from markedly different perspectives, both works are well worth reading, not least because of their shared insistence that for feminists the "task of writing history . . . is to labour continuously to release that "other," the

unsaid of feminist praxis, and through this process of ongoing critique, strengthen the oppositional power of feminism's collective subject and emancipatory aims."

Sheila Rowbotham's *Women in Movement* belongs on the same shelf as the other two books under review, but only just. Rowbotham's own suggestion that (like a catalogue) her work could "conceivably . . . even be read backward by those who prefer to approach the past from the present" points up the profound difference between her study and the close arguments of Butler and Hennessy. It also serves to illustrate Judith Butler's assertion that "theories of feminist identity that elaborate predicates of color, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and abled-bodiedness invariably close with an embarrassed 'etc.'" — "a sign of exhaustion as well as of the illimitable process of signification itself."

The fourth in a series entitled "Revolutionary Thought /Radical Movements" developed by the World Institute for Development Economics Research at the United Nations University where Rowbotham is a Research Advisor in the Women's Programme, *Women in Movement* is clearly designed as a textbook for an introductory course in women's studies. It undoubtedly serves a useful purpose in recording and acknowledging the contributions of individual women throughout the long history of women's struggle for liberation, many of whose names and most of whose arguments have been all but lost. Who, for example, has taken note of Stella Browne, a "young Canadian socialist feminist living in England in the 1920s who proclaimed that "abortion must be the key to a new world for women . . . For our bodies are our own"?

But it is not enough to compile lists of names, of historic 'events', or even to record the global evidence of women's oppression in the form of child prostitution, wife battering, rape, genital mutilation, forced

marriage, compulsory motherhood, unsafe abortion, war, famine, the feminization of poverty (here it is necessary to add an exhausted "etc"). *Women in Movement* is, somewhat paradoxically, a reminder of the vital importance of theory in illuminating the masculine metanarratives and the regimes of power that maintain that oppression, and in developing effective strategies of subversion, displacement, and resistance.

La Critique mythologique

Victor-Laurent Tremblay

Au Commencement était le mythe. U of Ottawa P
n.p.

Reviewed by Jack Warwick

In proposing the myth analysis of five selected French-Canadian works published between 1837 and 1933, Victor-Laurent Tremblay remarks that "la critique mythologique" has had few adepts in Quebec. Despite our venerable tradition of English-Canadian myth theory, "myth-analyse" and "mythocritique" have been much less adopted in Canada than other recent trends in French theory and critical practice; as a result, Tremblay's opening chapter on his methodology is a significant innovation in Canadian literature. Of the two current myth approaches to literature, he has chosen "mythanalyse," a sort of cultural psychoanalysis based on the hypothesis of one primordial myth, developing and signifying within given cultures. Gilbert Durand's is the dominant voice along with René Girard's and substantial reference to other cognate theories such as those of Mikhail Bakhtin. "Mythocritique," the method Tremblay has not chosen, emphasizes the function in literature of well known myths. Tremblay's is a significant contribution to the debate, in that it attempts to unite cultural, psychological

and social genesis in literature; it is particularly welcome after a generation of structuralists and mythoclasts.

The method works admirably in analysing *Angéline de Montbrun* (1884), a novel with no overt historical or sociological theme. The lightly veiled murkiness of father-daughter love is related to the inherent myth of a patriarchal society. The surface individualism of the novel and the personal conflicts beneath that surface are mercilessly scrutinized to unearth the incest taboo, as might be expected, but also the historical situation of a petty bourgeoisie bereft of real (economic) power, acting out the dictates of its ultra-montane clergy. The awkward formal problems of this novel are explained by the same hidden currents. The same approach is less successful, though equally probing, in dealing with *Les Anciens Canadiens* (1863), for it is hard to compete with Aubert de Gaspé's own historical vision.

A more surprising fresh reading is that of *Un Homme et son péché* (1933 plus endless radio series). Claude-Henri Grignon's best seller is an ostensibly straightforward novel; one cannot miss the caricatural miser's passion for gold, his suppressed sexuality or the author's sardonic treatment of a rural setting supposed by the cultural pontiffs of the time to be idyllic. Tremblay adds to these known readings; the miser's immense vitality arouses ambiguous admiration, before culminating in his role as scape-goat for a community which hates and envies him. In this dialectic, Séraphin emerges as a rural Faust, his cynical egoism being a form of frustrated individualism. This in turn is related to the Ultramontane vision of society at odds with the reality of capitalism.

The brief, late mention of the myth of Faust raises a major question: Tremblay has drifted from his initial *mythanalyse* into *mythocritique*. It is not his only infidelity; he misses no opportunity of playing with other methods, such as parenthetical refer-

ence to real or fake etymologies which might enlarge the polysemiosis of the text. This is distracting, because language-generated mythemes, if taken seriously, would be at variance with the monotheism implicit in the hypothesis of a (single) myth of origins. I also find various other quibbles and minor irritations. Referring to New France as Quebec is a serious anachronism and citing Hector Beaugrand's written version of "La Chasse-galerie" as a pre-literary folk take is at best ambiguous. These occasional losses of focus, with other vestiges of the original doctoral thesis, do not outweigh the vigorous approach to major and complex questions.

Gentlemen of Letters

Patricia Morley

As Though Life Mattered: Leo Kennedy's Story.
McGill-Queen's UP \$29.95

Laura Smyth Groening

E.K. Brown: A Study in Conflict. U Toronto P
\$40.00/\$26.00

Reviewed by Patricia Whitney

Leo Kennedy was a boy of six years when he landed at Quebec from Liverpool in 1912. It was the feast of Corpus Christi and the Roman Catholics of the town were in procession. This event marked two tendencies in his life: one to physical movement (he celebrated his fifteenth birthday at sea as a cabin boy) and one to an ambivalent relationship with his natal faith, a relationship that marked him with a Jansenistic idea of sexual repression and an admirable attention to duty.

Kennedy was a working-class Irish boy, son of a Liverpool docker and loving mother who made a home where her family would be "snug as mice." Although prodigiously talented, this class-consciousness bedeviled Kennedy all his days. Perhaps it still does as he lives out his old

age in the California sun, a success at last in his son Peter's eyes now that the father has "made a budget, learned to live on his income, made a home for himself." This is a voice of, I think, a deeply wounded man, the son of an alcoholic poet and advertising copywriter, the son who saw the effects of drink on a family.

Morley's viewpoint is different, immeasurably warmer. Although she acknowledges Kennedy's life-long addiction, her focus is Kennedy's "story": the hard-working man, the gifted poet, the deeply moral Roman Catholic idealist. She intends to celebrate this writer, one of the nine million emigrants who left the port of Liverpool for the "white" dominions and the United States between 1840 and 1930. Like many of these, Kennedy was a frail child who would leave school with barely six years of education but whose aesthetic sense thrived in the ancient liturgy and music of his Church.

Kennedy must have been a curious figure among the Brahmins and intellectuals around the *McGill Fortnightly Review*, men such as F. R. Scott, A. J. M. Smith and Leon Edel. Only Kennedy, passionate reader and fine poet, was not a McGill man. Yet he published in the journal between November 1926 and April 1927 and his poems later appear with those of Scott, Smith, A. M. Klein and the Torontonians Robert Finch and E. J. Pratt in *New Provinces* (1936), the landmark anthology of Modernism in Canada.

Another remarkable achievement was Kennedy's role on the editorial board of the *Canadian Mercury* (1928-29). The magazine published Dorothy Livesay, Stephen Leacock, B. K. Sandwell (later to edit *Saturday Night*), F. R. Scott and the young Leon Edel's "Montparnasse Letter" and "Montmartre Letter," sent from Paris where Edel was a student at the Sorbonne.

In 1933, Macmillan published *The Shrouding* (launched in the Scotts' apartment in Montreal), Kennedy's only poetry

collection. By this time Kennedy was married to Miriam Carpin, the father of Stephen, a close friend to Abe Klein, and an advertising man, a role he would occupy to considerable professional and financial success throughout his life. Kennedy became politically committed, joining a Communist Party cell organized by Margaret Fairley in Toronto. Other members included Stanley Ryerson and W. P. Lawson, later the editor of *New Frontier*. Through these associations, Kennedy began to publish in the *Canadian Forum*. His career, nevertheless, took him away from the arts and Canada and towards the advertising business and the U.S.

Kennedy was to divorce and marry again, to father two more children and to spend his working life at agencies in Chicago, Minneapolis and New York. He wrote witty book reviews and poetry for children, but his creative energy went to the copy he wrote for a living. He developed a disconcerting fondness for guns and a great zeal for hunting and fishing. His art and his family seemed to slide further from his mind as his other enthusiasms, not the least for drink, consumed him.

Kennedy's charm lies in his beautiful facility of language and his great heart. He's a tormented Irish Catholic whose demons have chased him down the years. Patricia Morley has captured him and those demons and has succeeded, in Carlyle's words from *Sartor Resartus*, "from the Writing to construe the Writer."

If Kennedy is the son of the Liverpool docks, E. K. Brown is the child of Upper Canadian privilege. Also a Roman Catholic, also deeply moved by the beauty of traditional Catholicism, Brown followed a trajectory from a boyhood at the University of Toronto Schools to residence in Paris at the Maison Canadienne in the 1920s (Leon Edel was a fellow student) and a degree from the Sorbonne. He returned to Canada to teach at the University of Toronto, next

becoming Chairman of the Department of English at the University of Manitoba before the age of thirty. When he went to Winnipeg in 1935 he took an associate editorship of the *University of Toronto Quarterly* with him.

Laura Groening takes great care to establish the social purpose of Brown's criticism and does so in prose that is learned and graceful. Yet I remain unconvinced. Although one can accept Brown as an Arnoldian critic, it seems a strain to read him as a cultural nationalist, one who "emphasizes the political and social dimensions of cultural experience" to the degree Groening argues the case. Brown was a gifted scholar and highly effective critic who set out for the United States, to take up an appointment at Cornell, as soon as opportunity beckoned. How then does his behaviour differ from that of the unrepentant advocate of the cosmopolitan, A. J. M. Smith? This is not to find either man wanting, but rather to question this skilful biographer's assertions about Brown's nationalism. Brown's allegiance was to his craft, one that he developed with astonishing capacity.

Brown certainly proved himself a patriot however, returning to Ottawa in 1942 as speech writer to Mackenzie King. In spite of Brown's diligence and good humour, King proved a hard man and Brown was back at Cornell within months to join the other "4Fs" in the English department, as he somewhat diffidently referred to himself and his faculty colleagues working out the war in the ivory tower.

Brown's proper work was not as minion to King but as a distinguished critic, producing articles, reviews, his brilliant *Victorian Poetry* (1942) and in the following year his edition of Lampman's *At the Long Sault and Other Poems* and the work for which he will be best remembered as a Canadian critic, *On Canadian Poetry*, which took a Governor-General's Award.

However out of fashion Brown's evaluative criticism may be today, Groening's argument for its importance in the development of our literature is sound. She finds his work at least as significant as Smith's and more to her liking in its respect for a Canadian tradition.

Brown's career in the Chair of English at the University of Chicago, his devotion to teaching and to the growth and development of English studies, climaxed in his correspondence with and subsequent biography of Willa Cather (completed by Leon Edel after Brown's untimely death from brain cancer).

Groening, like Morley, has written a passionate book. Each of these biographers has not only rescued these men of letters for Canadian literary history, but drawn portraits of enormous feeling and dignity. Distinguished works both.

Archetypal

Marilynn Reynolds

Belle's Journey. Illus. Stephen McCallum. Orca \$14.95

Margaret Smith

Margy Misunderstood. Maxwell Macmillan \$14.95

Reviewed by Gernot Wieland

These two books are aimed at different audiences: *Belle's Journey* is intended for children ages 4 – 8, while *Margy* will find its audience in the 10 – 14 year old age group. Despite this difference, both books contain archetypal Canadian stories, the journey from an inhospitable wilderness to the coziness and warmth of a home.

In *Belle's Journey* this journey is very real. Belle is a horse, too old "to pull the plough or the big wagons," but strong enough to take the little girl Molly the eight miles to the piano teacher's house and back. Father was thinking of selling Belle and getting a new pony. Molly grew quite excited at that

prospect, until one terrible winter day, when Molly and Belle got caught in a blinding blizzard on their way back from the piano teacher's house. There was nothing Molly could do to escape the snowstorm's fury, but Belle stubbornly and defiantly plodded on, feeling "the trail beneath the snow with her hooves, as only horses can," and returned the child, cold and frozen to the horse's back, to her parents. Needless to say, neither Father nor Molly ever talked or thought of selling Belle again.

Two journeys are superimposed on each other here: Molly's return from the piano teacher, and Belle's journey into the hearts of Molly and Father. At the same time, the horse's stubborn defiance against the fierceness of the winter storm becomes a symbol for the plodding determination of those early prairie settlers who struggled against the onslaught of the elements to eke out a living in a dangerous and threatening environment. But the story deals with more than just survival: the warmth to which Molly returns, and which is shown to Belle, is the warmth of civilization in the face of a cold and hostile Nature.

McCallum's illustrations perfectly capture Belle's stoic plodding, Molly's and the horse's fear in the blizzard, the biting cold of the blizzard itself, the radiant warmth emanating from the house and, in the last picture, from Molly to the horse which had rescued her life. All pictures are muted, almost in sepia tones, or in the grey of swirling snow, except for the last one in which the rescue of Molly and the friendship between child and horse are celebrated in pastel colours.

Margy, being aimed at an older group of readers, does not contain any illustrations, but there are three photographs at the end of the book showing a four-year old Margy with her mother, an eleven-year old Margy with her father, and the two aunts Alice and Edith. These three photographs provide the outline of the story: after Margy's mother

had died, the father got married again, but Margy and the stepmother did not get along. Margy was therefore sent to her mother's sisters, aunts Alice and Edith, whom, in time, she got to appreciate and love.

While the photographs give the bare outline of the story, the major theme is that of the journey. Three chapters (out of fifteen) describe in detail the roughly three days in which Margy travels from her father's home in Manitoba to Bancroft in Southern Ontario; and we get to know her as a somewhat shy and timid, but also curious bespectacled gangly twelve-year old, one that is initially completely adrift with conflicting emotions towards her Daddy, who, though he loved her, had sent her away, and towards her aunts, who had been kind enough to take her in, but whom her father's descriptions had caricatured as snobbish and priggish. The next eleven chapters deal with the approximately nine months it takes Margy to come to accept her aunts' house as her home. This narrative disproportion (three chapters for the three days' journey; eleven chapters for nine months) gives pre-eminence to the journey, and thereby signals that Margy's gradual acceptance of her new surroundings is but the internal continuation of her external journey. The book significantly ends with these words:

"Home. I decided to come home. I decided to come home with you, Auntie."

They turned in at the gate together and started up the walk towards the welcoming warmth of the Fine House.

Like Molly, Margy finally comes into the warmth of a home.

Margy has been selected as the "Canadian Childrens Book Centre Choice," a selection it fully deserves. A blurb informs us that "with the exception of Margy, her two aunts, grandfather and father, the characters in this narrative are fictional," but although this information is supposed to be helpful, it actually raises more questions.

In what relation do Margy, the aunts, and so on stand to the author? The characters may be real, but are their stories? How did the photographs get into the hands of the author? Maybe 10 to 14 year-olds will not bother to ask these questions. This adult reader, however, wonders whether he has read biography or fiction, or whether the blurb and the photographs are intended to draw attention to the thin line that separates biography from fiction.

French Newfoundland Folktales

Thomas, Gerald

The Two Traditions: The Art of Storytelling Amongst French Newfoundlanders. Breakwater \$49.95

Reviewed by Claire Wilkshire

From the late 1700s to, roughly, the turn of this century, the ancestors of today's French Newfoundlanders settled on the west coast of the island. Breton fishermen, some as young as twelve or thirteen, sought to escape the rigours of the shore fishery or the required stint in the navy: they deserted and hid from French authorities on the Port au Port Peninsula. Acadian farmers, dispossessed of their lands in the 1755 expulsion, moved farther inland to the fertile Codroy Valley. A smattering of others arrived from Normandy or the French islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon. French Newfoundlanders now constitute less than one percent of the population of the island; their language and culture, however, have survived thus far the pressures of assimilation to the larger anglophone community.

The Two Traditions examines aspects of one of the practices which has contributed to the preservation of French language and culture in the Port au Port area. Storytelling, Gerald Thomas contends, has developed in two domains in French

Newfoundland: the public and the private. The public tradition of storytelling is all but extinct; it belongs to a time before television. The *veillée* was an evening's entertainment in someone's kitchen, a group of people gathered around a well-known storyteller who would perform narratives over several hours, sometimes even several evenings. The tradition of private storytelling, on the other hand, continues; it involves not an official storyteller but anyone who knows a few stories. Here the setting is the same but the narration and circumstances differ; the private tradition is informal and familial; in the public tradition, the stakes are higher: the storyteller's reputation is at stake and s/he is expected both to remember the tale exactly and to deliver it in an appropriate fashion.

Gerald Thomas is a folklorist at Memorial University. His *Les Deux Traditions* appeared in 1983 (Les Editions Bellarmin, Montreal); *The Two Traditions* is his own translated and revised version of that text. In it he provides a brief history of the French presence on the west coast, outlines the two oral traditions he has isolated, and proceeds to analyze each one in detail. This takes up less than half the book; the remainder comprises a series of transcribed folktales, each followed by Thomas's commentary and notes.

The Two Traditions is a valuable document in many ways. The first chapter provides a useful historical survey of French settlement in the area. Those which follow record and preserve a considerable variety of oral narratives. The descriptions of the context and circumstances surrounding the cultural practice of storytelling are precise. Most of the problems with this book arise not from its purpose but its execution.

The Two Traditions should have been edited. It is long (350-odd large pages of tiny print) and its principal arguments are repeated unnecessarily; there are grammatical and syntactical flaws; the same excerpts

from interviews or tales often appear a number of times to illustrate different points. Often their length is unwarranted; here, for example, is the transcription of a conversation between Thomas and storyteller Emile Benoit:

G.T.: You would—you would have liked to be that—a doctor.

E.B.: Oh yes! That's what I'd have liked to be!

G.T. Yes yes.

E.B. Oh that's what I'd have liked to be. Yes yes yes. I would have liked, it was my heart, that.

G.T. Yes yes yes, yes yes yes.

Emile Benoit, best known as a fiddler, was a major figure in French Newfoundland culture; he appears in this book as Thomas's prime representative of the public tradition of storytelling. The representatives of the private or family storytelling are two "ladies" whose biographies are provided in a couple of skimpy paragraphs. It is then not clear why Thomas devotes an entire chapter to Benoit's biography, since it repeats material and is in any case largely irrelevant to the thesis of the book.

One reason so many passages like the one cited above are included is that Thomas follows a contextualist theoretical framework: the oral narrative must be examined in its full and unexpurgated context, which includes a description of the kitchen, the exclamations of the folklorist, quotidian interruptions, incidental noises, and so on. It is easy enough to understand the desire to reproduce a story in its authentic context; the difficulty remains that this contextualized version, as a typed and printed version of a story or conversation, will not come close to reproducing the original, unrepeatable speech acts. Given the impossibility of authenticity, then, a generous sampling of ellipses would make the transcripts more readable.

The Two Traditions is an important book; it is a shame it was not more carefully constructed.

Trouble on Wheels

Ann Aveling

Trouble on Wheels. Scholastic \$4.50.

Martin Godfrey

Just Call Me BOOM BOOM. Scholastic \$4.50.

Carol Matas

Lisa. Scholastic \$4.95.

The Lost Locket. Scholastic \$3.95.

Sworn Enemies. HarperCollins \$4.95.

Caroline Parry

Eleanora's Diary. Scholastic \$7.95.

Reviewed by J.R. Wytenbroek

Historical novels for young adults seem to be rising in popularity once again. Or, at least, they are being written a lot these days, which suggests a reading (and buying) public.

Carol Matas's novel, *Lisa*, is a case in point. About a teenaged Jewish girl living in Denmark at the time of the second World War, *Lisa* combines personal emotion with historical fact in just the right proportions to produce a first hand look into what it must have been like to be a Jew in occupied Europe during those dark years. The normal hopes of the adolescent girl are constantly overshadowed by the fear of marching soldiers on the streets and heavy boot-tread on the stairs. The need to come to terms with her incipient womanhood is matched by the need to help save her own people and her country from the destruction planned by the Nazis. As Lisa learns truly to love for the first time, so she learns to kill. There is nothing sentimental about this novel, and yet the heroine is very human, and thus engaging. We live both the fear and the hope with her, the love and the death. This novel is both realistic and believable. The book is also heartwarming

because it recounts the bravery of the Danish people, both Jews and Gentiles, whose concerted efforts to save the Danish Jews largely succeeded, with only about 500 of the 7000 Danish Jews taken by the Nazis. This positive book, with enough facts about Jewish life and ceremonies to give non-Jews an understanding about the Jewish culture, has something worthwhile to say, while also being thoroughly entertaining.

Lisa is a very different book from Matas's unbelievable and almost unrelievedly ugly later attempt at historical fiction with *Sworn Enemies*. In this novel, set in Czarist Russia, a poor Jewish boy kidnaps a wealthy one for service in the Czar's army. The book is gruesome, and neither the hero nor the antagonist are realistic enough to carry the reader past the other negative aspects of the novel. Aaron is too "good" and Zev too "bad" to be convincing, and thus the book loses its power, remaining an interesting treatise on a brutal period of Russian history, but nothing more.

Eleanora's Diary is a different kind of historical book for young people than Matas's books. Parry has taken an actual diary written by a young English girl chronicling first her family's life in England, then their move to the United States and finally to Canada. The book is put together in an interesting manner, with snippets of historical facts, ads from the period and general information scattered throughout the book in a visually appealing way. The book does contain most of Eleanora's writing for thirteen years of her short life. However, Parry's first chapter, where she introduces us to Eleanora, her family and their life in England, is written in an irritating manner. The tone and often the language are condescending, perhaps the most serious fault any writer for young people can commit. Parry has also aimed her comments at a much younger age group than the one to which the material will appeal, and thus is

likely to lose her readership early on. Unfortunately her editorializing continues throughout the book. Handled correctly, this material would be very interesting to any young person even mildly interested in Canada's history. As it stands, the book is more likely to alienate readers than attract them.

Amongst the books currently available for young people, of course not all are historical. Most are simply adventures, usually with a bit of mystery thrown in. Carol Matas shows another side to her skills with *The Lost Locket*, a chapter book about the traumas experienced by an awkward eight-year old who loses an heirloom locket and has to find out first who stole it, and then how to get it back. Although the underlying theme is serious, and Roz's predicament certainly is, Roz is a typical eight-year old, suffering all the emotional extremities available to that age group and yet surviving them and growing as she does so. Serious in tone, *The Lost Locket* is none-the-less a delightful and suspenseful book, which should keep young readers thoroughly engaged.

Like *The Lost Locket*, both Ann Aveling's *Trouble on Wheels* and Martyn Godfrey's *Just Call Me BOOM BOOM* are suspenseful stories. *Trouble on Wheels* is for a slightly older group than *The Lost Locket* and presents a wonderful array of quirky characters.

Hunter Watson, the hero and detective of the book, is a likeable boy whose eye for detail sometimes brings great results, and sometimes hilarious ones, as he searches for a bicycle slasher amongst his classmates. This is a first novel, and that shows a little in the predictability of the plot and the rather too obvious home troubles of some of the characters. The reader feels that Aveling has slipped the "problems" in, to add depth to her novel.

Just Call Me BOOM BOOM features Godfrey's unbeatable, oversized hero, Boom Boom Bortorowski, who, in this novel, meets his match in his equally large and violence-prone girlfriend Gusty. However, the violence in these novels is amusing rather than appalling, and both Boom Boom and Gusty prove to have good hearts hidden underneath their tough exteriors. As usual, Godfrey's characters have interesting quirks, such a Boom Boom's love of art and frequent, clandestine visits to the art gallery. Perhaps meant as cleverly disguised encouragements to young people to take more interest in cultural matters, these elements add a delightful side to the characters, which make them unusual and yet do not interfere with their wild adventures and high spirits. Like *Trouble on Wheels*, *Just Call Me BOOM BOOM* is a lot of fun, but generally less predictable.



Norman Levine's *Canada Made Me*

Randall Martin

Canada Made Me is Norman Levine's account of a journey he took across Canada in 1956, at a time when he was living as an expatriate poet, novelist, and short-story writer in Cornwall. As he travels in late winter from Halifax to Ucluelet staying in dollar-a-night hotels, Levine fixes upon everything that is vapid, dull, and jumped-up in the towns he visits and people he meets. Only in B.C. does the forward spring cheer his gloom—that and the occasional boost provided by a friend's loan or a dinner invitation. As he re-embarks in Montreal on a grotty emigrant ship similar to the one that brought him over, Levine concludes that as a social experiment Canada is a failure which more than justifies his continuing exile.

Given the diametrically opposed mood in much of post-war Canada it is not surprising that McClelland and Stewart refused to accept Levine's manuscript after initially entering into a joint agreement with Putnam's in England. Only the latter published his book, reserving 500 of 3,000 copies for Canadian distribution. Despite the underground notoriety that subsequently attached to Levine, he was unable to find a publisher in this country until Deneau & Greenberg agreed to issue *Canada Made Me* in 1979. It was reprinted

by Deneau Publishers in 1982, and just recently John Metcalf and John Newlove have re-edited the text for their Sherbrooke Street series of "important Canadian reprints."¹ This edition contains a new Foreword in which Levine recounts the trouble he had getting his book printed in Canada and takes some satisfaction in its belated recognition (after previously achieving greater success in Britain and Europe [e.g. the distinction of a German translation by Heinrich Böll]). More curious is Levine's claim that "in arranging the first Canadian publication I resisted a temptation to rewrite" (9). What "rewriting" means is open to question, since all Canadian editions make minor changes to the 1958 text² and exclude two significant passages.

The first of these occurs near the beginning of the book after Levine's boat departs from Southampton and stops briefly in Dublin. There it collects four hundred passengers for a "Luxury Cruise of the Irish" bound for the St Patrick's Day parade in New York City. It soon becomes obvious that the "Cruise" is a scam, and life on board becomes miserable as the overcrowded and poorly equipped ship runs into a ferocious storm which lasts for most of the crossing. In the section titled "EUROPEAN TIME," after making observations about several of his table companions, Levine focuses his attention on one passenger in particular:

At the bar one evening I met an Irish woman journalist. She had been sent to

cover this cruise and St. Patrick's Day in New York for the Press. She was not much concerned with any kind of truth. When she realized that the boat might not arrive in New York in time for the parade, she ferreted out an American who had seen the parade and who told her all about it. And from his talk she had done her piece as if she was an eye-witness. What mattered now was knowing the right people, taking somebody else's ideas, out of books, articles, conversation, or wherever you could get them, changing them slightly, then selling them as your own. And it was better to write gossip. And why not. She had a state-room in the first class and invited me up for a drink. Once away from the tourist side she spoke with an affected toughness and brogue, like a fishwife. It was the mask that went easiest with the short dumpy body, the pink fat legs, the moon-round face. She was in her forties, unmarried. Her room was large. Curtains, carpets, a wide double bed, a large bath flush to the wall; and brassières, crumpled silk stockings, white panties, dresses, a slip, and paper were thrown haphazardly about. She asked me what I thought of her cabin. I told her it was luxury compared to where I slept. 'Ye God,' [sic] she roared. 'It's the way a paid-up nineteenth-century courtesan would be sent home.' (1958: 20)

Nothing else is said about this person, but the vivid and disapproving portrait arouses our curiosity for the very reason that it was later dropped. Does this journalist represent a living person? a lover? one of the potential "kickabouts" who end up in the new world? a good reason for leaving the old? I do not know, and without further factual or biographical information one can only speculate.

One possibility may be that she represents a kind of alter ego, since her practice of creating reportage from hearsay bears an indirect resemblance to Levine's known habit of fictionalizing real-life encounters. Ira Bruce Nadel observes that several of the

episodes in *Canada Made Me* were later reworked as short stories, while Frederick Sweet notes that Levine was quite open about basing his writing on his own family.³ In the semi-autobiographical *From a Seaside Town* (1970), for example, the wife of the first-person narrator complains about his depiction of their family's poverty in some of his stories. This leads Sweet to observe further that Levine's writing betrays a certain degree of guilt about "the necessity he feels, given the compulsion of his particular talent, to thus use the people he knows and cares about."⁴ Again in *From a Seaside Town* one such painful acknowledgement occurs when the narrator and his wife are having sex and the latter covers her face with the explanation, "'It's the light,' she said. 'I can see your face. I think this is just something else that you come with your notebook to look at'" (155). The same idea forms the subject of "The Man with the Notebook," in which the main character is an old man who lives by writing "naturalistic" stories "directly from life," until he begins to observe that each of his living subjects dies soon afterwards. The old man concludes that he has been writing "obituary notices," and the complacent assumption that his writing confers immortality on the people he uses yields to the shocked recognition that he has been mortally violating their individual integrity (rather like the idea that photography steals the subject's soul). At the end of the story, however, a first-person narrator intervenes to divert potential feelings of pity for the old man, who dies cold and hungry, by observing that he ought to have been "made of sterner stuff" because "it is hard to write—or live for that matter—without hurting someone."⁵ Such impassivity accords with statements Levine makes elsewhere that although "life and death are very much interlocked, and I'm aware just how vulnerable we are as human beings, I try not to lie when I write. I'd be quite eva-

sive in my daily life with different people, but not in my writing." Yet at the same time he appears defensive when claiming that, however much being fictionalized may disturb his family and friends, "I don't want to hurt anyone's feelings" and "I only write about people I like."⁶ Was the portrait of the Irish journalist in *Canada Made Me* a displacement object for the ambivalence Levine feels towards his own habits of literary scavenging? a portrait that after the 1958 edition—a work he declared was "very far behind" him in 1976⁷—he felt betrayed too much?

The second passage omitted is in fact the book's final paragraph, in a section titled "WHEN THERE'S NOTHING AT STAKE." In the often-quoted "last" (i.e. penultimate) lines of *Canada Made Me*, Levine sums up his feelings upon returning to London:

I left the pub and went out into the light rain and walked along the High Street towards Kensington Gardens. I wondered why I felt so bitter about Canada. After all, it was all part of a dream, an experiment that could not come off. It was foolish to believe that you can take the throwouts, the rejects, the human kickabouts from Europe and tell them: Here you have a second chance. Here you can start a new life. But no one ever mentioned the price one had to pay; how much of oneself you had to betray. (1958: 277)

The first edition then continues:

Meanwhile the emigrant ship keeps coming over ... [sic] and the tourist ship keeps going back. (1958: 277)

The ending as it appears in Canadian editions conveys a strong sense of closure owing to Levine's uncompromising indictment, which brings to a head his accumulation of local evidence attesting to ubiquitous squalor and human failure. In this version Levine's mind seems made up as he virtually prophesies the nation's

doom. The implications of the 1958 ending, on the other hand, are more contingent. As it shifts from past to present tense the final paragraph re-situates Levine's personal experiences within the wider sweep of historical and transnational forces. From this perspective Canada is a non-discrete and unfinished social project participating in a global exchange of human and cultural capital. Levine's verdict about the country's inability to fulfil its people's aspirations for renewal and redemption is more transparently subjective, and possibly premature.

The final paragraph of the 1958 text also reminds us for the last time of Levine's characteristic "preoccupation ... with divided directions."⁸ The 1993 Foreword informs us that the "original title of the book was *The Double Crossing*" (8), and indeed the opening and closing chapters remain titled "*The Emigrant Ship*" and "*The Tourist Ship*."⁹ Upon revisiting Canada Levine's mind continually moves both ways: he is the "prodigal" son of Polish immigrants rediscovering his roots in Ottawa's Lower Town, and he is the expatriate observing Canada with a visitor's sense of detachment (while steadfastly resisting the tourist's willing surrender to the strange and new). Levine actively cultivated this divided identity by moving to Britain in order to sharpen his artistic sensibility,¹⁰ and here it becomes the lens through which he portrays the supposedly centrifugal nature of Canadian society. For although Levine calls *Canada Made Me* "a personal sort of travel book" (1993: 8), it is equally concerned, as Nadel has observed, with autobiography, a self in the process of being refashioned and re-presented.¹¹ Accordingly the vision of national dysfunction Levine offers at the end of his work can be seen as the projection of his own displaced heritage: he is unable to embrace his native land since its dominant "Anglo-Scotch" culture marginalizes him on account of his immigrant Jewish roots,

family poverty, and professional ambitions, yet exile cannot erase the Canadian profile of his imaginative roots—nor would he wish it to do so owing to the beneficial tension it creates. The final image of criss-crossing emigrant and tourist ships appropriately signals Levine's conflicted longings for the twin homelands of a constructed personal mythology and his birth.

NOTES

- 1 Erin, Ontario: The Porcupine's Quill, 1993.
- 2 Besides typographical variants, Canadian editions make corrections such as "Montreal Canadiens sweater" for "Montreal Canadian sweater", and "Kellogg's" for "Kellog's" (as in Corn Flakes). Apart from these changes, the 1993 edition introduces scores of variants in punctuation, spelling, and wording, most of them evidently errors. It was the increasing obtrusiveness of these as I read Metcalf and Newlove's otherwise handsome volume that led me to compare it with the 1958 edition and which in turn revealed the omission of the two passages under discussion.
- 3 Ira Bruce Nadel, "Norman Levine," *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, 88, Canadian Writers 1920-59, Second Series (Detroit: Gale Research, 1989), 189-93; Frederick Sweet, "Norman Levine," *Profiles in Canadian Literature* 4, ed. Jeffrey M. Heath (Toronto and Charlottetown, 1982), 31-2.
- 4 Sweet, 32.
- 5 "The Man with the Notebook," *I Don't Want to Know Anyone Too Well* (Toronto: Macmillan), 131.
- 6 McDonald, 225, 226.
- 7 McDonald, 223. Before the 1979 edition was published, extracts from *Canada Made Me* had appeared in the journal *Northern Journey* (vol. 6 [1976], 5-34). These did not include the section containing the passage about the Irish journalist, but they did include the ending in which the 1958 final paragraph was dropped.
- 9 Michael Greenstein, "Between Ottawa and St. Ives: Norman Levine's Tight-Rope Walkers," *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 23 (1988), 61.
- 10 Both specifically italicised (in contrast to the other chapter-titles which appear in roman type) on the Contents pages of 1958, 1979, and 1982, but not 1993.
- 11 David McDonald, "A Conversation with Norman Levine," *Queen's Quarterly*, 83 (1976), 228.
- 12 "Canada Made Me and Canadian Autobiography," *Canadian Literature*, 101 (1984), 70.



Last Page

Now that Mozambique is in the Commonwealth, readers of "Commonwealth writing"—if they have not already done so—might wish to sample its writers; they could well start with the stories of Mia Couto, *Every Man is a Race* (Heinemann, \$9.95), a collection of narratives that reflect the impact of recent political events on contemporary life. Other recent Heinemann titles (all \$9.95) include the ethically motivated, realist work of the Ghanaian writer Amma Darko, *Beyond the Horizon*, which traces a girl's move from village childhood to a German brothel; the Australian-born Botswana writer Gaele Sobott-Mogwe's *Colour Me Blue* (a less arresting work); and 'Biyi Bandele-Thomas's *The Sympathetic Undertaker and Other Dreams*, a Nigerian novel that rehearses the life of the narrator's mad brother (from school bully to political authority), the result being an unusual combination of comedy, satire, and fantasy. Other recent fictions include two reprints, Ismith Khan's *The Obeah Man* (TSAR, \$13.95), a 1964 Trinidadian novel with a useful historical introduction, and an ostensibly autobiographical work by a friend of E.M. Forster (who from 1935 to 1959 was also the editor of the BBC *Listener*), J.R. Ackerley's *Hindoo Holiday: An Indian Journal*, with an introduction by Saros Cowasjee (Arnold-Heinemann, n.p.); first published in 1923 (unexpurgated in 1952), the work records Ackerley's experiences with a Maharajah. More recent novels include a tale by Nicholas Jose, *The Rose Crossing* (Penguin, A\$14.95), which tells of (pro)creation, the Pope, and the Indian Ocean; Alex Miller's earnest account of the relation between an artist and his model (Who sees? and Who is seen?), *The Sitters* (Penguin, A\$16.95); and Thomas Keneally's *A River Town* (General, \$31.95), a lively

historical narrative about the Shea family, as Australia turns from a colony into a Commonwealth and "barbarities" are being loosed upon the world.

Anthologies, too, glimpse versions of life. Recent Australian titles include *No Place for a Nervous Lady*, ed. Lucy Frost (a revision of a 1984 book; Penguin/UQP, A\$16.95), a collection of excerpts from women's writings; Robin Gerster's ed., *Hotel Asia* (Penguin, A\$16.95), a collection of Australian travel writings, from Orientalism to contemporary rediscoveries, the emphasis still falling on tourism; and Gail Reekie's ed., *On the Edge: Women's Experiences of Queensland* (Penguin/UQP, A\$19.95), which offers accounts of region, colonial economy, rape, and war, but oddly never mentions Queensland's most famous female writer, Thea Astley. In Canada, Suwanda Sugunasiri's *The Whistling Thorn* (Mosaic, n.p.) brings together several works of "South Asian Canadian Fiction"—by Itwaru, Lakshmi Gill, Parameswaran, Vassanji, Kalsey, Mistry, and Bissoondath—works that emphasize a sense of family and a sense of exile; the book contains a very useful bibliography. An anthology of a different kind is *Garden Voices: Two Centuries of Canadian Garden Writing*, ed. Edwinna von Baeyer and Pleasance Crawford (Random House, \$28.95), which brings together English-language comments on Canadian gardens and gardening from Elizabeth Simcoe in 1792 to Brian Fawcett in 1992 and more. I wanted to like this book more than I do—for while it was a delight to discover the enthusiasms and the biases of gardeners and would-be gardeners over the decades (I enjoyed the ironies of H.F. Herbert and was fascinated by the dutiful diary entries—on the planning of the Kingsmere ruins—by Mackenzie King), too many of the entries in this book do not earn their presence: they lack substance, or style, or both. But the book does provide evidence of a wide-

spread fascination with gardens, and evidence, too, of a particular kind of snobbery that sometimes still distinguishes formal European garden design from “wilderness” on the basis of cultural sophistication.

The Golden Age of Australian Radio Drama 1923-1960, by Richard Lane (Penguin/U Melbourne P, \$49.95), takes the unusual form of compiling a historical account of the times through a set of illustrated biographical entries (on actors, producers, writers, etc.); a substantial amount of data is collected here. Another reference work is James C. Docherty’s *Historical Dictionary of Australia* (Scarecrow, n.p.), which seems adequate on statistics, with entries on labour organizations and horseracing, among other phenomena; but it is lamentably weak on literary subjects. Graeme Turner (who is not listed in Docherty) has produced a second edition to his admirable *National Fictions* (Allen & Unwin, \$22.95); the new afterward probes further his contention that people “construct Australian experience through stories,” especially those in print and on film.

Several studies of individual writers have appeared, including *Reading Rushdie*, ed. M.D. Fletcher (Rodopi, n.p.), which may possibly be the best current introduction to Rushdie’s work; the book collects several essays on each of the fictions (excluding the new novel), with commentaries by Suleri, Merivale, Brennan, and others on such subjects as intertextuality, word play, postcoloniality, Bakhtin, fantasy, and the politics of language. Adewala Maja-Pearce’s *Wole Soyinka: An Appraisal* (Heinemann, \$17.50) is a tribute to the Nobel laureate on his 60th birthday, reprinting his Nobel lecture, an interview, and assembling essays by such eloquent novelists as Gordimer, Harris, and Gurnah, among others. Mary Beatina’s *Narayan: A Study in Transcendence* (Peter Lang, \$41.95) tells us that the spiritual coexists with the practical, but somehow oddly removes Narayan from his Hindu context

in the process. Mary Burgan’s *Illness, Gender & Writing: The Case of Katherine Mansfield* (Johns Hopkins UP, n.p.) argues—with a battery of theoretical support: Sontag, Foucault, Sacks, Cixous, Kristeva, and Lacan—that Mansfield’s writing is all lyricism with a clinical edge of sensation; yet the conclusions seem more restrictive than enfranchising (by arguing that the stories are to be read for their revelation of anorexia, bulimia, therapeutic strategies, regression, pathology, and a circle of sisterhood, the stories themselves are transformed from narratives into case studies). More interesting is Susan R. Horton’s *Difficult Women, Artful Lives* (Johns Hopkins UP, \$45; pa. \$15.95), which draws on the theories of Benjamin and Mudimbe to examine the lives and works of Olive Schreiner and Isak Dinesen; Horton is determined to explain the workings of memory in these texts—that is, to treat images not simply as language but also as revelations of the self.

Among books that range more generally across post-colonial subjects, several are conference proceedings, and (characteristic of such works) appear to be more useful for an essay or two than for the whole. “Return” in *Post-Colonial Writing: A Cultural Labyrinth*, ed. Vera Mihailovich-Dickman (Rodopi, n.p.), for example, contains a new version of “The Drover’s Wife” by Frank Moorhouse, for those who might be following the multiple transformations of this cultural icon. More instructive in its entirety is *Major Minorities: English Literatures in Transit*, ed. Raoul Granqvist (Rodopi, n.p.), which contains Claire Harris’ “Ole Talk,” together with comments on Pakistan, Scotland & the Caribbean, Reggae, and Hyphenated Tongues, by such critics as Alamgir Hashmi, Alan Riach, Kwame Dawes, and Barbara Godard.

With differing degrees of effectiveness, three further books examine general propositions: Elleke Boehmer’s *Colonial &*

Poscolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors (Oxford, \$22.95), Michael Harris' *Outsiders & Insiders: Perspectives of Third World Cultures in British and Post-Colonial Fiction* (Peter Lang, \$45.95), and J.M. Blaut's *The Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History* (Guilford Press, \$26.95). Blaut's work critiques notions of European superiority, in part by demonstrating that the paradigms of adult-child, sanity-madness, mind-body, and progress-stagnation all inform the "diffusionist" model of Eurocentrism; by relying so relentlessly on the models of dualism and "foundation" theory, however, these paradigms seem to oversimplify history more than to explain it. Boehmer's ambitious work, too, runs aground on selectivity; demonstrating a daunting amount of reading (though the book draws little on poetry or drama), Boehmer proposes to survey all of her title subject, from Macaulay and *Lord Jim* to Amritav Ghosh, with short forays into Atwood and Frye, but for all its categories, it's missing on detail. One Mansfield story stands for all; Alice Munro isn't mentioned; the Canada Council turns into the "Canadian Council"; and so on. Harris, more focussed, pairs a series of writers in order to distinguish observation from experience: Kipling & Rushdie, Haggard & Abrahams, Cary & Achebe, Elizabeth Huxley and Ngugi, Alec Waugh and Lamming. The modern post-colonial novel of national independence is created *in the context of* anglo portraits of place and tradition, Harris argues (his expressed aim being "greater understanding"). The same might be said of settler traditions, and it would have been interesting to see how this argument might impinge on the one Harris constructs; it would have been instructive, too, had Harris examined the domestic world as well as the worlds of adventure and the public politics of nationhood and empire.

Finally, *Mapping the Subject: Geographies of Cultural Transformation*, ed. Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift (Routledge, n.p.), is an anthology, one that focusses on recent geographical theories of space and place, but that indirectly also demonstrates how these theories might impinge on literary studies. Theories of self, boundary, region, sexuality, otherness, the body, migrancy, and ethnicity: all are examined here in relation to the way societies "map" them, or understand them as spatial relationships. What concerns the authors of the essays in this book, then, are the relations of power that spatial relations enact and words imply. The simplest representations of such power, the book takes more or less as a given, are imperial claims to territorial expansion, claims that it identifies as masculinist and hierarchical. By extension the writers takes up such words as *body*, *person*, and *subject*, probing ways in which these, too, are "mapped" by the functions associated with them and the conditions assigned them. The body-*in-space*, that is, has also to be perceived *as space*: as a surface, as artwork, as a site of consumption—but not necessarily in Cartesian terms. Gillian Rose, writing "Making Space for the Female Subject of Feminism," for example, argues that the geography of the female subject is not a question of naming a "specific kind of spatiality" (to name one would simply construct a territorial category in the form of the terms that are being resisted), but rather one of being "vigilant about the consequences of different kinds of spatiality" and of dreaming into being a relation between space and subjectivity that cannot yet be consciously imagined. Location, movement, agency, the partiality of encounter and evaluation: each of these issues comes in for theoretical analysis and practical examination. David Matless writes on the relation between the rise of the Youth Hostel Association, 1-inch ordnance maps, and interwar constructions of

British social values. Julia Cream writes on women, the pill, and social constructions of victimization. Marcus Doel writes about the reality of schizophrenia and the spatial metaphors that shape conventional representations of it. Still other issues are raised in this dense but readable book, including

the editors' concluding critique of the limitations of academic self-referentiality and their consideration of how cartographic practice is interpreted. The book is well-indexed, and it contains a substantial bibliography. W.N.

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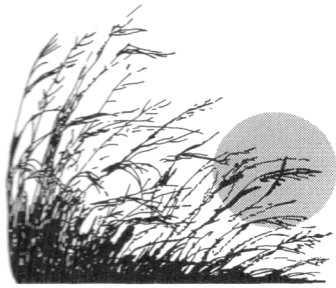
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