

# *Canadian* Literature

A Quarterly of Criticism and Review

Summer 1996

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Postcolonial  
Identities

Postcolonial

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by Rosemary Sullivan  
published by HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.

and

*Rogue Tory: The Life and Legend of John G. Diefenbaker*  
by Dennis Smith  
published by Macfarlane Walter and Ross

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**A Quarterly of Criticism and Review**

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# Inhabiting the Interstices

## II.

Poetry is dead, one said.

Not true, answered another, just different, centrifugal, inscribing itself within more and smaller discursive communities than has been the case until recently.

But *où sont, où sont les grands noms?*

Gone perhaps, like the monocular and monological notion of tradition that once sustained them, or perhaps their poetic powers have been disseminated into a prodigious plurality, while they themselves have been troped out of Phallologo Central by its dismantlers, who have assumed the maker's mantle by unthreading it into numberless new texts, intertexts, and Can-contexts—you see how slippery is this slope of temporizing words on which we camp, campaign, and champion our choices.

Mere rum-ram-ruffing by letter.

An apt allusion, for the alternative poetics dismissed by Chaucer's Parson gave English-speaking readers *Sir Gawain, Pearl*, and *Piers Plowman*: three powerful poems as different from each other as from the *Canterbury Tales*, and all four texts were produced by poets contemporary with each other and ostensibly sharing the same nationality, yet committed to fundamentally variant conceptions of their task and unaware of, possibly even uninterested in, each other's regionally-defined work, although their writings all reveal an absorbing openness to both local and international influences.

Yes, but only Chaucer's *comédie humaine* left us a living legacy by informing a national tradition, since even Langland's aleatory serial poem, as you might call it, his Zukofskian life's work, lost its ideologically-defined readership not long after the Reformation, and is now the specialized preserve of the Professors—like so many of the dead letters junkmailed by *our* would-be poetic contemporaries.

One man's junkmail is another woman's artifactual outpost. Even the oft-that-was-thought-but-ne'er-so-well-expressed was brought into rhyming line by logologues who addressed themselves to specialized textual communities—communities which they helped produce, define, and maintain, and whose ideologically-underpinned values were then represented as natural, national, and normative by the Professors, to use your word.

Perhaps, but common ground is still common ground, as common sense will tell you.

What was it Coleridge once said? That current common sense largely represents the advanced theory of the past? Common ground is also contested ground.

It seems we've reached an impasse, then—erred into an aporia.

Perhaps we have, although we could call it a point of departure as well, and take advantage of a common mode of closure in the premodern genre of the poetic *débat*: to turn the undecided contest over to the audience. . . . In any case, we need to cede this space, to cease our interloping on editorial territory that was meant for remarks on a narrower subject than the rumoured afterlives of Poetry: the place of poems in the pages of this journal itself.

### **External Interlude**

"Critics and anthologists may continue to pronounce on the state of the art [in U.S. poetry], but no one has any idea what's going on, except in one's own valley and the immediate neighboring hostile or friendly valleys."

(Eliot Weinberger, "Travels in the Federated Cantons of Poetry," *Outside Stories 1987-1991* [New York: New Directions, 1992] 118.)

The current preoccupation with difference within Canadian poetry, among writers, publishers and readers, makes it extremely difficult to construct tourist guides to it, or even to construct a knowledge of it that could be construed as 'Canadian poetry'.

(Frank Davey, "The Collapse of the Canadian Poetry Canon," *Canadian Literary Power*, [Edmonton: NeWest, 1994] 101 n. 4.)

## I.

Since its first issue in 1959, *Canadian Literature* has defined itself as "a quarterly of criticism and review" and distributed its pages accordingly. Since 1975, though, when Number 63 appeared with three poems by P.K. Page and another by Al Purdy, each issue has also included a selection of previously unpublished poems (in English) by Canadian writers, and in recent years these poems have been placed so that they inhabit the interstices between the critical articles, dividing and conjoining the larger tracts of expository prose as if in imitation of one of lyric poetry's traditional functions: to draw together the very same communities that its individualizing tendencies threaten or desire to dissolve.

Prior to 1975, the journal stuck more closely to its official definition, and only eighteen issues made space for poems. The first poem ever to appear (Wilfred Watson's "A Manifesto for Beast-Poetry" in No. 3) was offered to readers as an article, while the next ("New-Year's Verses of the Printer's Lad who carries about the Quebec Gazette to the Customers. January 1, 1785" in No. 5) was presented as a facsimile specimen of early Canadian printing. When poems did begin to be offered *as* poems, they were usually published as documents in literary history or in homage to a particular poet, the documents beginning with several of Malcolm Lowry's poems edited by Earle Birney (No. 8), the homages with two poems by A.J.M. Smith in a special "Salute" to their author (No. 15). Translations from the French figured prominently among the documentary printings (for example, Louis Riel's "To Sir John A. Macdonald" translated by John Glassco in No. 37), although one issue (No. 42) included "Poems of the Unofficial Cultures" in twelve languages from Estonian to Yiddish. Supplementing these documents and homages, the journal also ran more than a dozen advertisements between 1968 and 1972, mostly on the inside backcover, in which the Hudson's Bay Company presented a single short poem "as one of a new series written by Canadian poets" from Atwood through Gustafson and Ondaatje to Waddington—a remarkable form of publication for the lucreless art of poetry.



*Canadian Literature* has no plans to reinstall the poetry display window, but it does intend to continue publishing some forty new poems a year, reaffirming the necessity of interstitial as well as other sites and modes of discourse. In maintaining what now has the status of a tradition, the journal also reaffirms its own in-between place in a national gallery of literary periodicals that extends from *Brick* through *Canadian Poetry* and *Tessera* to *West Coast Line*.

Ideally, given its defining commitment to the nation-state's writers and their writing, *Canadian Literature* ought to be able to claim that its regular sampling of poems by writers both known and yet to be known is representative of current poetic practice in all its (Anglophone) diversity. In reality, though, it can do no more than offer something like a random sample of poems from a mailbag constantly restocked with submissions that include, among other things, pornographic songs "penned" by budding rock stars (and sent through their agents), short stories, handwritten notes from prison (usually without SASE), ambitious lyric sequences from poets looking for their first publication, and the latest work of established writers. Also, apart from being affected by the interstitial space allotted to it, the nature of the published sample is shaped by the fact that, once sifted, the mailbag's contents usually prove to occupy quite a narrow band on the poetic spectrum, or to vary the metaphor, to have been generated by the default setting of contemporary poetic wordprocessors: that of the vernacular anecdote in free verse.

There is no denying the power of the best of such poems, but one has to admit that most of them are the present-day equivalent of those Renaissance sonnets that now lie unread by the thousands. There is more to Canadian writing—to what Robert Kroetsch has wittily called "a literature of dangerous middles"—than one poetic mode, however fine its best instances, as any partial ABC of the country's Anglophone poets will suggest: Jeanette Armstrong, Robert Bringhurst, Anne Carson, Jeff Derksen, Christopher Dewdney, Claire Harris, Wayne Keon, Daphne Marlatt, Steve McCaffery, Erin Mouré, Michael Ondaatje, Stephen Scobie, Gerry Shikatani, Lola Lemire Tostevin, Phyllis Webb, Bruce Whiteman, and Jan Zwicky.

This is a call, therefore, for the widest possible range of submissions, which might even include longer texts (or parts of them), provided that the contributors would be willing to see the texts excerpted from by the editors, as well as unpublished translations (with the originals) from poems origi-

nally written in French or any other language by Canadian writers. *Canadian Literature* cannot become Frank Davey's impossible tourist guide, much less a Borgesian map so accurate that it literally overlays the territory, but it can try to publish postcards that reveal something of the vitality and variety that exist down in our many poetic valleys, those variously-defined in-between spaces in which the poems get made that inhabit the journal's own interstices. I.H.



## the zebra mask

it is from ghana this mask  
made in ghana and sold to  
a kenyan  
now it sits on a table between  
the stereo and the loudspeakers  
black and white lines running around  
two large golden eyes and a  
wide gaping mouth  
an inscrutable mute no hint of  
inner feelings like my little brother gary  
always hiding his feelings deep  
words carefully stacked not a chance at  
penetration  
not even his baggy clothes give him away  
then two days ago the mask  
fell and revealed the real gary  
vulnerable sensitive capable of tears  
the kid has been bad his mother said  
yes he had been bad the kid agreed  
he has stolen money  
credit cards and cut the seats on the school bus  
and been arrested for extortion  
all the bad stuff  
he has been real bad his mother said  
yes he had been real bad the kid admitted  
But that's because his mother did not love him he said  
the same mother now accusing him  
she wished she had never had him said the kid  
yes she said those words the mother agreed  
the kid was very mad said the kid because his  
mother did not want him said the kid  
what do you know about love said the mother  
listen love is my mother said the mother  
she was a young beautiful woman until

she fought with my father said the mother  
and he stabbed her on the neck  
above the chin  
there was blood said the mother  
i saw blood come from my mother and she ran  
away for a couple of days then  
she came back and stayed with my father  
that's love said the mother  
yes that's love the kid agreed  
yes that's love a woman's love for her children  
that's why you can't judge your mother by what she says  
said the mother  
you should judge her by her action said the mother  
her actions not her words said the kid  
i am behind you one hundred percent when you are bad  
said the mother  
that's love said the mother  
that's love said the kid  
love is my mother her  
blood ran on the ground and she  
stayed because she loved her children said the mother  
yes blood said the kid  
then he sat down and wept  
wept because his mother stayed

# The Trick of Divining a Postcolonial Canadian Identity

Margaret Laurence Between Race  
and Nation

The postcolonial stance in Canadian literature and literary theory is inspired by contradictory impulses.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, postcolonialism validates what has been denigrated by empire and thus serves nationalism. The literatures of ex-colonies have had to struggle to dislodge the imperial centre and to overcome a perception of themselves as peripheral. Their anti-imperialism creates new centres where once there had been only margins. On the other hand, the postcolonialism associated with Homi Bhabha, closely allied with poststructuralism, implies a questioning of centres wherever they are located. The poststructuralist face of postcolonialism challenges nationalisms because they inevitably rely on founding narratives and notions of autonomy similar to those deployed by imperialism. These two streams of postcolonialism do not represent options that a critic of Canadian literature can choose between: mutually contradictory though they are, both are inevitably present in any discussion of a postcolonial *national* identity.

No matter how radically poststructuralist, postcolonial Canadian criticism finds itself coloured by nationalism. The postcolonial critic Gary Boire decries the nationalism that imagines a blank, unpeopled landscape on which a future history will be written and that ignores both the names given to that landscape by the indigenous peoples and the fate of those peoples. Boire calls for the “destruction” of coherent historical narrative and of historical lines of continuity which ignore conflict and so perpetuate injustice (14). Only by acknowledging discontinuity and struggle, Boire argues, can

“Canadian criticism” fulfil a truly “substantive social function” and overcome its colonization by American New Criticism. But it is precisely the existence of Canadian criticism that is in question. What is it that makes the influence of New Criticism “foreign” and “colonial” but the existence of arbitrary imperialist-inspired boundaries? If we move, as Boire argues we should, “beyond boundaries, to deconstruct priorities, origins, teleologies” (2), why should we work within the framework of Canada? It is not its foreign origin that makes New Criticism objectionable, for Boire’s own use of Derrida would be open to a similar objection. And yet, the ideological critique of New Criticism is easily, even inevitably, conflated with the nationalist objection to New Criticism’s foreignness.

No matter how aware of the constructedness of identities, no matter how concerned with rupture, discontinuity, and transgression, postcolonial criticism of Canadian literature remains nationalist in inspiration. The post-structuralist rejection of nationalist constructs is always in favour of a renewed nation, the nation as it should be. To argue that *Canadian* criticism should question the nation and its historiography is still to presume that the field of inquiry is the nation. Even when the subject of inquiry is regionalism or ethnicity or gender, the field of inquiry remains the nation and determines what will be found. Postcolonial studies that consider Canadian attitudes to indigenous peoples presume the frame of the nation even as they denounce the imperialist framing of the New World. Studies that make irony *the* dominant mode of English-Canadian discourse presume that at some level beyond irony there is a Canada and that there is something that Canadians have in common that makes them different from other people.<sup>2</sup>

The national borders that trip up postcolonial writing make for a contradiction. That contradiction is present in reversed form in nationalist writing that deploys postcolonial rhetorical strategies to reject a foreign imperialist discourse. Attempts to rewrite the empire in order to validate the nation inevitably reinstate the same formulas that they reject. This contradiction is displayed by Margaret Laurence’s novel *The Diviners*.

*The Diviners* may not appear the most appropriate focus for my study because it is not stylistically postmodern, but rather straightforwardly realist. The narrative of the past in Laurence’s novel unfolds in a linear, chronological fashion: time is imagined as a river leading from the past to the present. That river, however, is said to flow in two directions, and the novel

emphasizes the way that history and identity are self-consciously fashioned to suit the purposes of the present. In that sense Laurence's novel may be considered a postcolonial prototype. Laurence's self-identity as a Canadian novelist was directly shaped by her awareness of African writers. She even considered herself a "Third World novelist" ("Ivory Tower or Grassroots" 17), and *The Diviners* has many of the key ingredients of the postcolonial novel: it is what Fredric Jameson would call a national allegory in which personal relations mirror larger public relations; it is a rewriting of Shakespeare's *Tempest* that has Miranda become Caliban's lover (Godard 55-62); it is a rejection of England and English literature in favour of a native tradition based on orality; and it is a celebration of creolization, the blending of different cultures in an indigenous mix. As a postcolonial novel, *The Diviners* advocates the shedding of a colonial mentality and itself marks the shedding of that mentality. Indeed, a plausible case has been made for Laurence's novel being *the* primary Canadian text because of its concern with "the readjustment of roots in the New World" (Bader 43). Laurence's postcolonial nationalism also, I hope to show, establishes the nation on the same foundations as the empire she rejects.

**A** doubleness in *The Diviners* arises from its status as fictional autobiography. Morag Gunn, the protagonist and the focus of the narration, is herself a novelist and her life has many parallels with Laurence's own. Morag the mythmaker-novelist does what Laurence does: she invents an identity for herself using the cultural materials provided by "diviners" such as her foster father Christie Logan. Insofar as Morag's life diverges from Laurence's, it fulfils the author's own myth of national identity. Morag, who rejects an identification with the imperialist and identifies with the indigenous, the dispossessed, and the land of her birth, embodies the national identity that Laurence herself advocates. Morag the mythmaker writes a novel called *Prospero's Daughter* that is a postcolonial revision of *The Tempest*; Morag the embodiment of Laurence's own myth has herself lived a revised version of Miranda's story.

Morag Gunn embodies a myth of romance, and romance, as Doris Sommer shows, is the mode best suited to fictions that would found a nation. Morag is an orphan, ashamed of her foster father, the town garbage collector, and feels constrained by the small-town prison that is Manawaka. Away from home, at university, she falls in love with her English professor.

His Britishness attracts Morag: Brooke Skelton represents the culture and the tradition of the imperial metropole. However, Brooke is an imperialist. His heart has been twisted and unnaturally hardened by his childhood in that most imperial of colonies, India.

Brooke loves Morag's lack of a past—she is virgin territory—and Morag's acceptance, under his spell, that she has nothing to put alongside his cultural tradition. This is the imperialist view of an empty New World that Boire denounces. Brooke patronizes Morag and makes her feel like a child. He also refuses to entertain her desire for a child: their relationship is barren. However, it is not true that Morag is without a past. She carries Manawaka with her in spite of herself. She has been given a Scottish identity through the stories told by Christie Logan her foster father. And she even has a sexual history: an early experience with Jules Tonnerre, a Métis with whom she went to school.

Eventually Morag succeeds in publishing a novel, which gives her the strength to leave Brooke and to go to Jules, with whom she conceives a child. This decision marks the collapse of the internal barriers imposed by the marriage to Brooke and the restoration of the authentic self: "In her present state of mind, she doesn't expect to be aroused, and does not even care if she isn't, as though this joining is being done for other reasons, some debt or answer to the past, some severing of inner chains which have kept her bound and separated from part of herself" (292).

**T**he national romance establishes two nations: the real nation and the ideal. The real nation is the bigoted, class-ridden, and provincial town of Manawaka. The contrast between this colonial reality and the glorious world of literature is intolerable. Morag marries Brooke to deny the real nation and emigrate to the world of books. She discovers that only alienation lies in foreign books. The solution is to write a counterdiscourse that would redeem an ideal nation by turning toward the authentic and valuable in Manawaka: the oral traditions of all those defined as other, the scavenger, the Métis, the working class, women.

Morag does what the nation is called upon to do as well: she recognizes the falseness and the psychological harm resulting from her dependence on the representative of English imperialism, breaks with him, and forms a union with the representative of the indigenous population. The result of the union of Morag and Jules is a child who carries in her veins the blood of



both settlers and indigenes. Pique Tonnerre Gunn's inheritance is cultural as well as genetic. Her mother passes on to her the stories of both sides of the racial divide. From Christie Logan Morag heard tales of Piper Gunn who led Scottish Highlanders to the Red River colony in 1814 and who later fought against Louis Riel in 1870. Jules has been told by his father, Lazarus, of an ancestor, Rider Tonnerre, who fought against the Scottish settlers in 1816 and later again alongside Riel.

Morag recognizes these stories, in which history is given a heroic cast, as myths. The heroes of Christie's and Lazarus's tales are of Biblical longevity, and they display more than human fortitude. As Morag understands, we need myths to live by. If myths do not tell what happened, they tell what should have happened and provide the present with the past it needs. Both sets of stories are passed on to Pique, who will have to fashion a personal myth out of them. The nation itself must also create its myth: Laurence, writing in her own voice in an article entitled "Man of Our People", has argued that Canada needs to invent national heroes, and she suggests Gabriel Dumont, the model for Rider Tonnerre, as a suitable candidate.

*The Diviners* shows that the Scots and Métis have something in common apart from their enmity: a history of dispossession by the English empire-makers. The Scottish Highlanders came to the New World because they had lost their land in the Clearances. If they recognize that they share a history of suffering and a common imperialist enemy, the descendants of settlers and indigenes can establish a new community based on a respect for the land they share.

The national myth in *The Diviners* has a second half: Morag outgrows the Scottish identity given her as a child and recognizes her true identity as a function of the land where she was born. Although she lives in London, takes a Scottish lover, and goes to visit Scotland, Morag rejects Christie's injunction to go on a "pilgrimage" to Sutherland, the home of the Gunn clan, "where her people came from" (393). Her sojourn in the British Isles has taught her that her home is "Christie's real country" and that Christie's real country was the land where he lived and told his tales (415).

Morag decides she must return to Christie's country, but she returns to Ontario not Manawaka. (In Christie's version of the Red River Rebellion, Central Canadians had been identified as "goddamn English, them bloody Sassenachs" [144]). If Morag can "return" to Ontario, it is because she identifies not with a particular landscape but with a map. "Christie's real coun-

try,” it turns out, has less to do with the landscape he lived in (the Nuisance Grounds and Hill Street) than with the nation-state that Morag first learned about in school.

**B**oth halves of the national myth that Morag embodies—the marriage to and separation from Brooke and the aborted pilgrimage to Sutherland—involve the same double movement of departure and return. In the one case she returns to Jules; in the other she returns to Christie. Canada is not where Morag is from but where she goes back to. One is not born Canadian; one becomes Canadian. We may doubt whether, if Morag had stayed in Manawaka, she would have achieved the same sense of roots. As many, including Benedict Anderson, have argued, “exile is the nursery of nationality” (“Exodus” 315). Thus, Christie Logan, exiled in Canada, is so much more “Scottish” than Dan McRaith in Scotland. Morag must go to Scotland to become Canadian. Abroad Morag becomes aware of her difference and learns to identify with the state that issued her passport.

The corollary of this awakening is that Morag’s Scottishness is not merely an illusion that she sheds, but an essential part of Morag’s Canadian identity. Scottishness must be present (in order to be superseded) for Morag to become Canadian. If it is not present, then Scottishness has to be invented. Young Morag is that typical New World figure, the orphan without a past or a guarantee of meaning. Not only is Morag without parents, but her name itself is without content. When she looks up Gunn in a volume entitled *The Clans and Tartans of Scotland*, she discovers that the Gunns are without arms or motto (58). Perhaps elsewhere in the Americas the orphan can be imagined as self-engendering: an American or Caribbean Adam. Such anti-historic conception is not possible for Morag, who vehemently rejects the possibility that her name carries no implicit identity. At Christie’s invitation she imagines a Scottish identity and a family history that will give her meaning.

Christie invites Morag to think of herself not as parentless, but as the last surviving bearer of the name Gunn. Christie himself was born in Scotland and came to Canada as a small boy (74). There is no suggestion that the accent and patterns of speech he retains from the old country (“och aye” [56]) are in any way self-chosen.<sup>3</sup> To give his adopted daughter some of his own sense of ethnic identity, however, Christie must invent an ancestor, Piper Gunn, who bears her name and who came with the first Scottish set-

tlers to Manitoba. The daughter came before the ancestor; Piper Gunn did not exist until Morag became Christie's daughter. Morag did not receive her name from Piper Gunn; he received his name from her. Morag's Scottish identity is a cisatlantic fiction, and Morag is no more Scottish than she is Siamese (as Laurence said of herself {"Road from the Isles" 147}).

Morag's Scottish identity is based on the slight link with the past offered by her surname. It is an attempt to motivate the arbitrary sign, to interpret signs as if they were mimetic and thus naturally tied to the object for which they stand. In a letter to her Scottish lover Dan McRaith, the adult Morag reflects, "I don't know why names seem so important to me. Yes, I guess I do know. My own name, and feeling I'd come from nowhere" (311). To complement Christie's stories and give herself someone she can identify with, Morag invents stories about "Piper Gunn's woman," also called Morag. However, Piper Gunn is not displaced by the woman in Morag's versions, and the reason is clear: she needs an ancestor bearing her name who was present at the founding of the West *and* who is male. Only a male ancestor can make possible an imagined line of Gunns descending to Morag. Elsewhere Margaret Laurence herself has recognized and objected to the tyranny of the patrilineal proper name:

In our culture, our genealogical descent is always in the male line. Where the mothers come from, what their names are, is always where their fathers came from and what names they carried. (*Dance on the Earth* 9)

Laurence's own memoir resists that tyranny by tracing a genealogy through the mothers she has known. But Morag Gunn's ethnic identity is based on people she has not known and must therefore imagine. Since all she has with which to imagine them is her own family name, she inevitably imagines a patrilineal family.

The arbitrariness of an ethnic identity based solely on a name becomes obvious if one imagines a Franco-Manitoban or for that matter a Cree with the name Gunn, something very much within the realms of possibility. The first man to carry the name Gunn to what is now Manitoba might have come from the United States. Would Morag then still have thought of herself as having Scottish roots? Language, place, physical differences, and immediate parentage are usually more important than family name in the constitution of an ethnic identity. Family name is an unsatisfactory metonym for genetic inheritance. Morag Gunn has inherited the genes of more than one ancestor and is almost certainly the product of generations

of creole unions. Even if Morag had an ancestor who came over with the Selkirk settlers (and the novel insists there is *no* reason to think so) and that such an ancestor was her great-great-great-grandfather (she was born in 1926; Piper Gunn was adult in 1814), she would have very little genetically in common with him. She would still have 32 ancestors at the same remove as Piper Gunn. Few of these are likely to have been from Scotland: the population of Manitoba doubled in 1875-6 alone, and has multiplied many times since, and the bulk of that immigration was from Ontario (Morton 176).<sup>4</sup>

Readers of the novel have all, without exception, assumed that Morag really is a descendant of Scottish settlers to Manitoba. The lapse may be forgiven, for Margaret Laurence makes the same mistake: she writes that she gave Morag Gunn “ancestors who came from Sutherland and who were turned out during the Highland Clearances” (*Heart of a Stranger* 145), forgetting that it is Christie Logan who gave Morag those ancestors. An older Morag, who has learned that Scotland is nothing to her, remembers Colin Gunn, the father she scarcely knew, as someone

whose people came to this country so long ago, from Sutherland, during the Highland Clearances, *maybe*, and who had in them a sadness and a stern quality. Can it ever be eradicated? (18; my emphasis)

With that *maybe* Morag casts doubt on the identification of her father’s “people” (meaning the man who carried the name Gunn to Canada). However, in the same sentence she asserts that she has inherited a certain personality from this ancestor she cannot positively identify. The moroseness that elsewhere Morag calls “the Black Celt” is imagined as a genetic legacy linked directly to the name Gunn; that is, it is inherited by children of both sexes, but passed on only by males.<sup>5</sup> This genetic impossibility is a seemingly ineradicable myth.<sup>6</sup>

Christie Logan, who remembers a childhood in Scotland, “remembers” a lot else besides: Highland Clearances, tartans, and clan mottos. His claims to ancestry compensate for his lowly status in Manawaka:

Let the Connors and the McVities and the Camerons and Simon Pearl and all them in their houses up there—let them look down on the likes of Christie Logan. . . . They don’t touch me, Morag. For my kin and clan are as good as theirs any day of the week, any week of the month, any month of the year, any year of the century, and any century of all time.(56)

Strangely, Morag also feels the need for Scottish ancestry, partially because of her social status as the daughter of the Scavenger. Ironically, Christie’s

stories inspire her with pride although he remains the source of deep shame. The ostracism Morag suffers because she is related to Christie the Scavenger is related metonymically to the dispossession of the Highland Clearances, and so becomes meaningful.

Jules Tonnerre has a similarly confused relationship with his father. Deeply ashamed of his father and his alcoholism, Jules counters that shame with the stories Lazarus has told him of heroic ancestors and with a pride in his father's suffering. Jules, however, has no way of avoiding his racial identity; it is inscribed on his skin in a way that Morag's is not. In her rush to deny Christie and Manawaka's part in her, Morag might well have shed the ethnicity invented for her. She does not do that.

I do not insist on the arbitrariness of Morag's Scottishness because I want to show that she was Canadian all along. On the contrary, as I have said, Morag's Canadianness requires that she be Scottish first. I want to ask why Canadians should feel the need for what Clara Thomas calls the "Scottish mythology" (10), and why this Scottishness is so hard to shake even when its fictional nature is manifest. If Morag must first be Scottish in order to become Canadian, it is because the novel wants to assert that Canadianness is homologous with Scottishness. Political sovereignty is not in question (Canada has that); it is the strongly delineated Scottish national character that the novel envies. The novel wants to depict a Canadian identity that, like the Scottish, is based on a clearly defined and circumscribed territory, on an inspiring, even romantic history, and on a particular relation to the English language.

Liisa Malkki describes a recent internationalist board game called "Friends around the World, A Game of World Peace," intended to teach cooperation. Players race to get international friends, dressed in "'distinctive' clothes approximating national costume," to the World Peace Centre ahead of Grey Blob (52). Grey Blob is "a formless lump with no cultural patterns of markers," "no gender, no humanity—clearly a categorical abomination" (52). In the world of "international friends," humanity is imagined as a patchwork where everyone must be different, but everyone must also be representative. "[H]aving an identity amounts to being a *representative* or ambassador of one's national or cultural type" (58). Differences are stable and measurable: everyone is different in the same way. No room for Grey Blobs here.

Apparently Grey Blob is intended to represent anything from nuclear war

to personal insults that might threaten world peace. At the same time, one imagines that for a child playing the game, Grey Blob would also represent a fearful homogeneity, a homelessness, a being without a place in the world system of nations. *The Diviners* is haunted by just such a fear of not belonging to the community of nations where difference is fixed and recognizable and already fitted into a series. The novel is concerned with making a Canadian nationality that will be as stable and as inspiring as national identities in Europe are presumed to be.

What would greyness mean in Morag's case? What would the young Morag be if she were not Scottish? The answer is that she would be white. Indeed there are readers who insist on reading her as white. Barbara Godard writes that "Pique is three-quarters white, and as such more Morag's daughter than Jules's" (68). This statement appears ludicrous on a first reading (how does Godard know that Jules is 50% white and 50% Indian? what can it mean to say that part of Jules is closer to Morag than to himself?), but it reveals an important tension in the experience of reading the novel. If half of Jules is somehow closer to Morag than it is to himself, it is not because he is Scottish; it is because she is white. Godard harkens back to the common North American notion of race as a kind of stain on whiteness. If, as Godard suggests, Jules is defined by his Indian blood and his white blood is not truly his, it must be that there is an Indian blood different from and stronger than white blood. Any amount of Indian blood makes one Indian. White blood is imagined as like water: it can dilute but it cannot alter the fundamental nature of the stain. It is precisely this kind of aqueous whiteness that Morag tries to avoid by being Scottish.

If Godard were consistent, she would see that Pique's Indian blood works the same way as Jules's does. It is more diluted than Jules's, but still overrides whatever white blood she has: Pique is Métisse. Indeed Frank Davey assumes that race puts an insuperable barrier between mother and daughter. Davey accuses Morag the "white novelist" of appropriating Jules and Pique's songs when she appends them to her novel, thereby unfairly appropriating the "signs of connection to the land, aboriginality, inheritance, and 'naturalness'" of the indigenes (41). Davey here assumes the reverse of Godard: that Pique is more closely related to her father than to her mother; that Morag has no part in her, in spite of the claim of blood that mother and daughter both recognize; in short, that Pique is of a different race than her mother.<sup>7</sup>

Godard and Davey's readings illustrate how much the question of race shadows the text. It is within this framework of racial assumptions that the novel seeks to locate the national identity it is fashioning. We can now qualify the point we made earlier: if Morag must first be Scottish in order to become Canadian, it is because the novel wants to assert that Canadianness is homologous to Scottishness and because it fears that it is not. National identities like Scottishness are marked by difference, but they all belong to a single order of classification. The differences between them can be compared because they can be plotted along a single continuum. Nations exist within a system of nations wherein their sovereignty and their difference are recognized. They are all theoretically equal and all entitled to representation in the General Assembly of the United Nations and at the Olympics.<sup>8</sup> Races, however, are not imagined as different, but as absolutely other. They cannot be compared because they are not of the same order.<sup>9</sup> Races are by definition not homologous and not equal.

Race was the marker of the old imperial world divisions, when the world was divided into Europe and the Rest. In that world Morag in Manitoba would be condemned to greyness: she would never be any more than off-white, a displaced European. *The Diviners* rejects race as a basis of identity in favour of nationality; it seeks to replace the old imperialist divisions of humanity by a new understanding of the world, now formally organized into homologous and theoretically equal nation states. *The Diviners* celebrates a creolization in the future that will be the union of the settlers and the indigenes: a union, not a dilution. For Morag's and Jules's blood to mingle rather than merely have her blood dilute his, they must both represent national cultures rather than races. You cannot have a union of white and Indian (two races), but you can of Scottish and Métis (two nations).

The creole union, in order to serve the national myth, requires that Morag be the descendant of the original Scottish settlers and that Jules be in a direct line of descent from the Métis who fought against the Scots. As a descendant of Piper Gunn, who fought against the Métis, Morag can now make peace with their descendant. As we have seen, her claim to Scottish blood also allows Morag to imagine an atavistic primitive side to herself that she refers to as the Black Celt. The Black Celt, as the reference to colour suggests, enables her to identify with Jules the Métis more easily than with the well-to-do folk of Manawaka (in spite of their "Scottish" names). This tendency Terry Goldie calls the theme of the Celtic savage (26), the notion that

Celtic settlers in the new land had more in common with the indigenous peoples than either did with the English colonizers. This idea opposes Godard's point that part of Jules is closer to Morag than to himself: part of Morag is closer to Jules than to herself. Moreover, if Morag is Scottish, she can claim to be of dispossessed stock just as the Métis are (in spite of the obvious fact that the Scots in Canada have not as a group suffered dispossession).

The creolization that the novel advocates requires a complementary notion of ancestral purity. The national myth offered in *The Diviners* cannot recognize creolization in the past. Archie McDonald, the historical figure on whom Christie based his tales of Piper Gunn, actually married the daughter of a Chinook chief and later a "mixed-blood woman," with whom he had twelve sons and a daughter (*DCB VIII*: 526-27). Piper Gunn, of course, cannot be imagined with an Indian or mixed-blood wife, for that would mean that Morag already had Indian blood and that creolization predates the problems of today and cannot be imagined as tomorrow's solution. Jules, of course, is marked by his skin and his name as having both Indian and French ancestry. But *métissage* does not mean, as one might think, that blood is unimportant. What defines the Métis, as Godard underlines, is his aboriginal blood. (Frenchness may actually point to aboriginality because on the Prairies French is a figure of difference.) It is even possible that Godard is wrong and Jules's aboriginality has not suffered a dilution at all. The original Tonnerre, the Chevalier or Rider Tonnerre that Jules has heard about from his father, is imagined as already Métis, not as Indian or French (160). Rider Tonnerre, like the first man to bear the name Gunn across the ocean, is the sole ancestor, the single source of a whole and complete inheritance. (No one asks who Jules's mother or grandmothers were.)

A creolized Canadian identity such as *The Diviners* posits has meaning where the field is a world entirely divided into different but homologous nation-states. Such an identity has no meaning where the field is European imperialism conquering a world of others, whose otherness is figured in terms of race. Canadianness also has no meaning if the field is figured in terms of grey capitalist modernity integrating the globe into a single system characterized by uneven development.

We (Canadians) may long for a world divided into nations, but the world continues to be bedeviled by race, about which we (academic writers) still have no way of talking sensibly. Racial divisions coincide roughly, though



not exactly, with other divisions in many ways more real than those that divide nations. Etienne Balibar writes that the new inter-national system continues to be

traversed by the constantly shifting frontier—irreducible to the frontiers between states—between two humanities which seem incommensurable, namely the humanity of destitution and that of ‘consumption’, the humanity of underdevelopment and that of overdevelopment. In appearance, humanity has been unified by the suppression of imperial hierarchies; in fact, however, it is only today that humanity exists as such, though split into tendentially incompatible masses. (44)

It can be argued that *The Diviners* is justified in seeking to replace race by nation as a basis of identity. Nations, unlike races, require the consent of citizens for their legitimacy. And nations are based on a shared history and culture, not on ineluctable genetic qualities. As part of its attempt to replace race by nation, *The Diviners* insists that identities are human constructs. My reading thus far, however much it has differed from other readings, has followed the novel: it is the text itself that underlines the fictiveness of Morag’s Scottishness.

Laurence finds in the very fictiveness of identities a reason for celebrating those responsible for their invention. These “diviners” forge an identity that others can share. National culture is held to be a question of artistic achievement as well as of shared behaviour patterns. The inventors of myth are thus heroes to rival the subjects of their tales. Morag passes on to Pique not just the stories about Piper Gunn and Rider Tonnerre, but also stories about Christie Logan and Lazarus Tonnerre: the story-tellers become the story.

*The Diviners* makes clear that the stories of the community do not predate the community but are its self-conscious inventions. Christie’s tales of Piper Gunn are explicitly said to be based on a book he has read (94). Christie, the first-generation immigrant, only knows about the Sutherlanders who came to Canada ninety or so years before he did because he has read Canadian history. The mythic qualities of his narrative are not the inevitable products of oral transmission, but deliberate distortions made to historical narrative. In the school that young Morag attends, children learn a national history that includes the Selkirk settlers and Louis Riel. They are thus given a frame of reference that they will share with all Canadians and only Canadians. School-taught history makes citizens. What Christie has done is to take that written narrative and restore its capacity for inspiration by patterning it on oral tales. Or rather, he patterns his heroic tales on literary models of oral

narrative: the tales of that great inventor and writer of “traditional oral” narrative, James Macpherson (73).

Christie Logan, who passes off history as if it were oral legend, does not appreciate how much he is Macpherson’s successor, but Laurence presumably does. Macpherson’s poems, which purported to be translations from the Gaelic of an ancient bard called Ossian, were loosely inspired by Gaelic sources but actually written in English. Macpherson altered the tales associated with Cuchulain in order to give the Irish hero Scottish origins (deGateño 60), just as Christie alters the history of Archie McDonald to make him a Gunn. Christie, who has two volumes of Ossian at home, stands in awe before the Gaelic version which he cannot read and in which he sees the sign of an unfathomable loss. He does not know that the Gaelic “original” is a translation of the English. In the same way, Morag plays Gaelic records to herself in order to arouse a sense of melancholy (263). Her Scottish lover Dan McRaith laughs at her and wonders why she does not take Gaelic lessons (264). Morag the ironic novelist, however, understands that it is not the language once spoken by many and still spoken by a few that matters, but the mournful feelings of loss that Gaelic conjures up in the Canadian speaker of English. Canadians invent the Scotland that they need.

Macpherson had a direct influence on Walter Scott (deGateño 111), who went on to invent Scotland even more thoroughly and persuasively than did the Ossianic poet. The relationship between the two resembles that between Christie Logan the story-teller and Morag Gunn the novelist. Like Scott, Morag (and Laurence) has invented a national myth that can be shared by all citizens. *The Diviners* is precisely the sort of novel that people want to see taught in schools (which, of course, is why there was controversy when a few people objected to it being taught).

■ If *The Diviners* is as well loved by Canadians as it seems to be, is it not successful on its own terms? If other Canadians recognize themselves in Morag’s story, is that not enough? There is, however, a contradiction in the novel’s construction of Canadianness. Even as it shows that identities are inventions whose validity lies precisely in their fictionality, the novel must make an identity based on the nation-state more valid (and less of an invention) than other identities. If the community exists before the stories do, what is it that makes the community? The national allegory implicitly and inevitably grounds the imagined nation in the family. It com-

mands the assent of readers to an imagined community by appropriating the forms of a “natural” community. The nation, however much of a cultural construct it may be, in the end relies on the same notion of inherited identity as race does.

The novel shows that people invent the narrative of their own past. These invented narratives then have validity precisely because they constitute identity. Morag Gunn imagines (at Christie’s bidding) a Scottish ancestor, and she is Scottish because she does so. Later she becomes Canadian when she recognizes Christie as her father (and defines his “real country” as Canada). However, it is not sufficient explanation of why we tell certain stories to say that these are the stories that we tell. Laurence insists that storytellers are like diviners: they tap into what is already there. At some underground level the narrative must already exist: the novelist can invent it because she has already been invented by it. We choose some stories and not others to define us because some stories are felt to be more appropriate than others. If they are felt to be more appropriate, it is because they are already ours in some way, before ever we tell them. The criterion for judging appropriateness is genetic inheritance.<sup>10</sup>

Morag credits Christie Logan’s stories of Piper Gunn with inspiring her with “the strength of conviction.” Christie’s tales are based on the historical figure of “Archie Macdonald,” as Morag herself tells us (443). If the significance of the piper who led the Scottish settlers were merely “cultural”—his example teaches certain values—why should Christie change the piper’s name to Gunn? If heroism were what mattered, then one might as well choose Jewish or British or Indian heroes. Clearly Christie believes that it is not enough to choose heroes from the past; Morag must recognize that those heroes are already a part of herself. And the way that heroes are a part of one’s self is through blood. Morag’s Scottishness is a function of rewriting Archie Macdonald as Piper Gunn. If Christie had retained the name Macdonald, there would be no reason even for thinking Morag Scottish and the story would lose its relevance. Pride in one’s heritage is less a question of values than of having a heritage.

Lazarus and Jules Tonnerre do not need the tales of Rider Tonnerre to make them Métis. Their identity is inscribed on their bodies in a way that Morag’s Scottishness is not. Yet Lazarus (or his father) also takes an historical figure, Gabriel Dumont, and makes him an eponymous ancestor, Rider Tonnerre. It is not immediately clear why Lazarus should do this: a shared

ethnicity is enough in most courts to justify pride in a hero, and Dumont can be claimed by all Métis. Presumably Laurence means to show that the Métis identity is just as invented, just as much a matter of culture and the stories one tells as Morag's Scottish identity. Rider Tonnerre bears a generic name, suggesting that he is no less fictional than Piper Gunn. We are not invited to think that the stories of Rider Tonnerre accrued around someone who actually lived and was able to pass on genes to descendants; Rider Tonnerre was invented to give an ancestor to people who felt the lack of one.

The novel also shows, however, that Lazarus's tales, like Christie's, are intended to answer the needs of the immediate family. Christie and Lazarus face their audience and that audience is intimately known to them. Their tales have meaning only for themselves and their audience, not for strangers. Christie takes Canadian history and changes the names so that it may speak to his adopted daughter; Lazarus does the same for his son. The nation is rewritten in terms of the family. The family, unlike the nation, is of unquestioned meaning: it provides the individual with a social position and a name already inscribed with meaning. The individual does not choose her family, but is born into it. Christie thus answers a need felt by Morag, who finds her own orphan status intolerable and longs for her family name to hold the secret of her identity in the way that names do in English novels.

In a class society such as Morag would have found in British literature, the name a child is born with exists before the child herself does and defines the child absolutely. In a society that believes in inherent class differences, the names that indicate inherited social position are also held to reveal character. A high-born name reveals an inner nobility. Therefore, names in many British novels reveal a character's identity in some absolute and ineluctable fashion. In the New World, however, populated by younger sons and bastards, and by non-English-speaking subject peoples, the connection between name and intimate self is broken."

Part of Dr. Brooke Skelton's attraction for Morag is that his name is already a promise of significance (it combines the names of two poets). The name Skelton, of course, also bears a sinister significance, and when she comes to publish her own novels Morag will take back her maiden name. Morag, who wants the inherent meaning of a character in a novel, learns how dangerous it is to be a Canadian character in a British novel or a woman in a man's narrative. One may be imprisoned by a name. Women,

in particular, risk being flattened into names that define them completely: Prin (short for Princess), Bridie, and Eva Winkler are all warnings how not to be a woman.

If she is not written by others, Morag will have to become a writer herself, writing herself as she writes her novels. Morag's career as a writer gives meaning to the name Gunn affixed to her books. However, Morag continues to long for the guarantee of meaning that comes from being already written. Christie Logan's Piper Gunn promised her that meaning, and Morag always harkens back to those stories.

Jules Tonnerre's name, unlike Morag's, does have an inherent meaning, a meaning that existed before he did: a grandfather who fought alongside Dumont in the North West Rebellion of 1885 was also called Jules Tonnerre. The meaning of Jules's name is hidden: at school he is known as Skinner, and when he tells Morag to call him Jules she has difficulty pronouncing it. The rebarbative nature of the name is its own guarantee of meaning; it is as though in telling Morag his name Jules were letting her in on a secret that she will never wholly master. The name of Pique's father is also withheld from readers for much of the first part of the book—one of the few ways in which the narrative does not offer itself to immediate comprehension. The strategy gives readers the sense of being let in on a secret when they discover that Pique is the daughter of Jules. The New World is neither nameless nor named by the British: the Métis possess a valid name.

If the story-teller is to do more than invent a national identity, if she is to *divine* stories that already exist at the truest level, then the nation must have the inevitability of an inherited family identity. Morag Gunn triumphs by giving her daughter what she herself did not have: a name that will define her completely. Morag Gunn existed before Christie's stories gave her meaning. The birth of her daughter, on the other hand, has been preceded by stories: Piquette Tonnerre Gunn's identity is already assured. Christie and Lazarus invented ancestors inspired by the needs of the living; Morag names her daughter after Jules's sister Piquette who died in a tragic fire.

Barbara Godard celebrates *The Diviners* as a "(m)othering text" whose triumph is that Pique is allowed to be free to write her own life history, to create her own life story. Morag releases her daughter just as "the author lets her character go, free to develop her different voice": "This is what it means to (m)other a text: to enter into a loving and reciprocal relationship with the other, to let the daughter tell her own story" (68). Laurence's dialogic,

feminine text abdicates final authority “and lets everyone tell or write their own story” (69). I believe the opposite is true: the novel insists so much on Pique’s breaking loose and finding her own way because at the deepest level she never will. Her mother worries about her, but she need not. Pique will never be tempted as Morag was when she married Brooke to declare herself without a past: she is defined more absolutely by her parents than Morag ever was. Morag, who had been fed on stories of Scotland by Christie, learned that her true home is not Scotland but the land where she was born. Pique, on the other hand, learns that her true home is where her parents were born. Although born in Vancouver and raised in London England and in rural Southern Ontario, Pique never imagines that those are her true country. Pique felt more at ease in London, where she went to school with “Pakistani and African and West Indian kids,” than she does in Ontario where she encounters prejudice (446), but she never imagines that London is her home. Pique is eleven when she returns from England to Canada, but she does not have Christie’s problems with accent (Christie was younger than fifteen when he came to Canada [74]). In the present of the narrative Pique travels to the places she has heard about in stories, to Manawaka and Galloping Mountain, in order to discover who she is. At the end of the novel she is off to Galloping Mountain to live with relatives on her father’s side whom she has only recently met. Morag learned that the highlands of her imaginary forbears are not hers; Pique learns precisely the opposite: that there’s a valley and a mountain that hold her name, and they hold her name because her “fathers, they lived there long ago” (464). Ghosts lead her “back to that home I never knowed” (465).<sup>12</sup>

The young Morag experiences a lack because what came before her is unknown and must be invented. Pique, however, has been preceded by a history that defines her. Moreover, she is able to “return” to what came before her. In a circular fashion she thereby underwrites her mother’s own identity: Pique’s inherited identity is a guarantee of the authenticity of Morag’s own invented Canadian identity. Morag invents the past and the fathers she needs, not just for herself but, more importantly, for the next generation. One might go so far as to say that the colonial’s search for a father to give her a name is really a search for a father for her child. Brooke was unsatisfactory: he made Morag feel like a child instead of giving her a child. Morag asserts her independence by rejecting him and returning to her childhood experience in Manawaka where she has known Christie and

Jules, a pair of social outsiders. She adopts Christie as a father for herself *and* she makes Jules the father of her child. By projecting paternity into the future, Morag can at last secure the paternity that stands behind her.

The site that defines identity changes subtly throughout the novel, in a process that mirrors the development of a national identity. It is first the ancestral legends that Christie invents for his family, then the nation-state to which Morag returns from Scotland, and finally Pique's land of sacred memory. Family romance gives way to novelistic realism, which in turn gives way to family romance. A twist in this circle makes it a Mobius strip (we do not return to where we started). Christie's legends made the nation serve the family; *The Diviners* makes the family serve the nation. Christie's tales were recognized as inventions serving the present; Pique's identity is no longer merely an invention.

Godard, who reads the novel differently than I do, believes the text is a "collective, 'unauthorized' work" (62). It is unauthorized because it includes so many different voices. I have no doubt that Godard is accurately describing Laurence's intentions: to create a text that abdicates final authority and thus can speak for the "collective". But, I would argue, the definition of the collective is precisely what is at stake. Laurence's text can bring together all these voices because she is concerned to depict them as part of one particular collective, the nation. Once the imperialist voice of Brooke Skelton has been excluded, all share in a single collective defined by the common possession of certain stories. What makes this collective suspect is that finally it must be underwritten by more than stories; it must also be imagined as having a basis in genetic inheritance.

**I**n "Man of Our People" Margaret Laurence wrote that Canadians who are not Indian or Métis must learn to call Gabriel Dumont their ancestor even though they may not have earned the right: "His life, his legend, and his times are a part of our past which we desperately need to understand and pay heed to" (212). If the question is "How should Canadian history be told?" then Laurence is surely right: Canadian history must include Gabriel Dumont and the defeat of the Métis. But if the question is "How should the defeat of the Métis be told?" then it is not certain whether the best context for understanding Gabriel Dumont is Canadian history, or some other context, more local and more continental.

Children are taught Canadian history at school and learn to think of

themselves as Canadian. It is claimed this classroom history makes Canadians what they are. No doubt telling a particular story of identity is necessary to establish that identity. However, history can be sliced in different ways: the history can be told of a gender, an ethnic group, a race, a diaspora, an empire, or a class. There may be histories of the English-speaking peoples and of the New World told “through Indian eyes,” histories of Western civilization and of the Black Atlantic. Why should the national identity be more valid than class, regional or racial identity? Why should the national narrative be accepted as the truest one? One obvious answer is that, since the nineteenth century, literature as taught in universities has been national literature. The nation defines the field and is therefore not itself called into question. My point is not that the nation should be rejected and that we should take contemporary literature written in English as a single field, a suggestion made by Christopher Clausen. One may wonder about the field of identity that Clausen assumes. What we must ask is why we identify with nations rather than other identities? what does such an identification provide? what does it compensate for? what does it occlude? Why has national identification been so powerful for the last two centuries? Why is an identification with the nation under threat now?

Postcolonial critics should, I am arguing, take as our field of inquiry the modern capitalist industrialized world. It is a world divided into seemingly homologous nation-states, but better understood in terms of other, intra-national and transnational frontiers. It is also a world that is intolerable, unjust, and ultimately unsustainable, and our task must also be to imagine a larger field that can contain it. Because, however, we cannot stand outside race, class, nation, and family in order to contemplate this larger field, and because the very notion of a single global system risks obliterating difference, postcolonial critics must concern themselves with the comparative study of identities. The grounds for comparison should not be homologous units (such as Canada and Australia), for that presumes a world divided into sovereign nation-states, the very state of affairs we want to question. The fields for comparison must belong to different orders: nations and empires; nationalisms and sexualities; genders and classes. Postcolonial criticism should be hybrid, but not in the way that the postcolonial nation is imagined as creolized, a creolization which assumes a heterogeneous content (settlers and indigenes) but a standard form (the nation). Postcolonial criticism should first question its own form.



## NOTES

- 1 I am indebted to Susan Knutson at the Université Sainte-Anne for her comments on this article. She is not, however, responsible for the opinions here expressed.
- 2 Linda Hutcheon is careful only to affirm that “irony is one mode of self-defining discourse used by English-speaking Canadians” (3) and not to say that Canadians are more partial to irony than, say, British or Americans, something that is empirically doubtful.
- 3 The novel draws our attention to the way that pronunciation may be a means of consciously asserting difference. Morag teaches her daughter that Canadians say “kiy-oot” and not “coy-oh-tee” the way Americans do (441).
- 4 Typical is Margaret Laurence’s own ancestry: Laurence liked to imagine herself as having Highland roots (“Road from the Isles” 146), although only one of four grandparents came from Scotland and he was a Lowlander (*Dance on the Earth* 26-9). Three of her grandparents came from Ontario. However, the Scot in her family was her paternal grandfather, which makes all the difference.
- 5 The original Gunn to come to Canada did pass on something to Morag that can be identified: the name. He had in common with Morag an identity based on that proper name; he, too, thought of himself as a Gunn. Conceivably a Canadian called Gunn may feel that she owes it to the name (and to her father) to be stern. In other words, sternness might be a function of Presbyterianism, and the Black Celt might be a cultural rather than a genetic trait. Morag, however, was not raised Presbyterian and her notions of what she owes to her name come to her not from her father but from Christie Logan. (Nor were the Scottish Highlanders who came to Canada before 1815 all Presbyterian; the majority were Roman Catholic.)
- 6 Laurence herself, who recognized that the Scotland she dreamed about as a child was a “fantasy” (“Road from the Isles” 147), continued to write about the Black Celt in herself without employing quotation marks (*Dance on the Earth* 26).
- 7 Davey’s complaint about the appropriation of Métis culture would make more sense if directed at Margaret Laurence rather than at Morag. Morag has not invented characters of another race; Laurence has.
- 8 Scotland, of course, is not fully sovereign, but nationalists do seek such sovereignty. Scotland does compete as a separate nation in the World Cup of Soccer.
- 9 For a discussion of the distinction between difference and otherness, see Castoriadis.
- 10 My argument here is based on Anthony Appiah and Walter Benn Michaels.
- 11 This account is inspired by Michael Ragussis, *Acts of Naming*. Ragussis’s analysis is much more nuanced than that offered here. In particular he shows how British and American novels resist the tyranny of the “family plot.”
- 12 Pique’s decision to move to Galloping Mountain can be explained in different ways. Galloping Mountain may be so attractive that anyone would want to go there if she had any chance of being accepted by the people already there. It could also be that the Métis community at Galloping Mountain provides Pique with a sense of completeness because it fulfils expectations raised in others and in herself by the colour of her skin. My point is that the novel does not have to address why Pique goes there: the “return” to Galloping

Mountain is imagined as already inscribed in Pique's deepest self.

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# The Comfort of Elders

You are my buffer between  
the whitened landscape beyond a window  
and now.

A few hours higher,  
you can see further  
out over ice where the shore disappears.

Snowlight calms in your faces.  
Blue drifts by, translucent  
as untroubled eyes.

I know, if I wait  
and crane on tiptoes,  
one day

I may see you melted through glass  
drifting away on the wind  
like a shudder.

## 2533 in the Buddhist Era

There's no need to rush  
when you're this far ahead.  
All the time in the world and as much  
of the world in the time I have.

In my journal I repeatedly write  
*eventually eventually* and *then*  
between paragraphs of water,  
of beaches, of palm trees;  
pages of staggering conversations.  
When you're this far ahead  
there's no need to hurry.

Elephant heads  
on the gate to the temple,  
dogs sleeping in the sun.  
Monks saunter away in robes saffron,  
the colour of the world's impermanence.

And looking at a calendar  
I thought how long ago did I leave?

# Writing Dislocation

## Transculturalism, Gender, Immigrant Families: A Conversation with Ven Begamudré

Ven Begamudré has published a novella, *Sacrifices* (The Porcupine's Quill, 1986); a short story collection, *A Planet of Eccentrics* (Oolichan, 1990); and a novel, *Van de Graaff Days* (Oolichan, 1993). He co-edited with Judith Krause *Out of Place: Stories and Poems* (Coteau, 1991) and edited *Lodestone: Stories by Regina Writers* (Fifth House, 1993). Daniel Coleman spoke with Ven Begamudré in Regina on May 13, 1994.

*You've become known in Canada for coining the term "transculturalism" which you've contrasted with multiculturalism. Do you want to elaborate on the differences between them?*

I'm more interested in transculturalism because I think the future of Canadian society certainly doesn't lie in segregating people into ghettos, the worst thing about multiculturalism, but it lies in transculturalism, which is a cross-over between these cultures. Now multiculturalism as it operates in society itself is different from the government policy. And we tend to forget that there are other things affecting it—class affects it, and economic power affects it. I've been turned down for apartments by white people, but I've also been turned down for apartments by Ukrainians who are now considered white but two generations back were not considered white. The worst landlords I ever had were a Black and a Jew.

Maybe multiculturalism as an official policy hasn't worked because people at the individual level have not become more tolerant. When you spit on a person or deny them an apartment because they are different from you, you have done society at large a fundamental injustice. No amount of government policy is going to correct that; these people have to change as people. Transculturalism assumes that there is a process of change and of evolution which is necessary among these different cultures, and that eventually we stop being Indo-Canadian or Ukrainian-Canadian; we simply

become human. And I'm much more comfortable with that idea than the idea that you're allowed to hang on to your own culture, because what worries me about multiculturalism is that it fosters divisions among cultures. People try to hang onto their heritage not because it helps them survive but because it's another dusty artifact in a museum that they trot out in order to justify what they do.

*How does writing about immigrants from India to Canada, or people who travel back and forth, play a part in the evolutionary transculturalism that you are talking about?*

The first idea for the collection *Out of Place* came in 1983. It was meant to be a book of stories, poems, and photographs by immigrants to the prairies. We wanted to juxtapose the obvious image of the Ukrainian babbas with a modern poem or story about Ukrainian-Canadians. By the time Judith and I started working on it, however, it had stopped being a multicultural anthology dealing with non-Anglo experiences, because I realized I didn't want it to be the kind of book that dealt with cultures that were ghettoized. And that's why you'll find a number of Anglo writers in *Out of Place*. I wanted to see how being where they were from affected their writing. I didn't want to buy into the anti-white-Anglo backlash that's going on among some immigrant communities. I wanted to see what it is these people had in common, and that's why you'll find a piece written in West Indian dialect in the same anthology as a piece written by, say, Anne Szumigalski whose background is Welsh but who has lived in Canada for a long time. There are some non-white writers who are in *Out of Place* and their work is not obviously from a particular culture. And this for me was an anthology to reflect the new Canada, a transcultural Canada as opposed to a multicultural Canada.

Oddly enough, the anthology was only supposed to deal with cultural dislocation. But then we started getting other forms of dislocation. Caroline Adderson sent a story which had nothing at all to do with culture, but it raised the anthology to a new level because it was a story about a single mother who was trying to raise a boy in a small town and he comes under the influence of a disturbed neighbour girl. So it raised the level of the anthology to psychological and other forms of dislocation. Cultural dislocation includes psychological dislocation, which is why it's such a powerful theme to deal with.

*Do you think that might be why stories about cultural dislocation have quite a wide appeal in Canada, since they might give expression to a sense of psychological dislocation that Canadians feel in other contexts?*

I think so. I think one of the things that has really affected this century has been the movement of people. In, let's take nineteenth-century Britain, the kind of psychological dislocation that was going on dealt more with class than with culture. Say, Dickens was writing about the plight of people in poor houses, or boys who were cleaning out boot-blackening bottles. But that work had an impact, even though he was writing about class dislocation or about people wanting to move between classes, because there was still this underlying element of psychological dislocation: What happens to people when they are either forced to remain where they are physically or economically? And what happens to people when they have the opportunity to move either physically or economically? It could be in the twenty-first century that we will not be so fascinated with cultural dislocation, but by something else. Maybe the sheer impact of information and the way information is used will cause psychological tensions in our society and that's what writers will deal with. Dislocation is not the only thing to write about. But it's certainly something that has affected a lot of writers now late in the twentieth century. You can have dislocation of ideas. Maybe all we're doing in writing is articulating conflicts of one kind or another.

*Many of your stories deal with tensions between genders as well as between cultures. I'm thinking here of Krishna and Rukmini and their strained marriage in Van de Graaff Days, or of a number of stories in A Planet of Eccentrics including "The Evil Eye," "A Promise We Shall Wake in the Pink City After Harvest," and "Samsara." In Krishna's case, to focus on one example, the processes of education, immigration, and delayed fatherhood influence the way he acts out his own masculinity. Given your upbringing, it seems inevitable that cultural tensions would be prominent in your work, but what makes gender—and this particular overlay of gender and culture—so productive for you?*

The cultural upbringing—that's obvious. What isn't so obvious is that I was, like a lot of people in my generation and in previous generations, surrounded by women during my childhood. This also happened to young boys in Britain, in the Empire, because their fathers were usually away and



they were surrounded by their mothers and sisters and governesses, and then, around the age of six or seven thrown into boy's schools where they had to deal with men after very little experience of dealing with men. And this is what happened to me.

All the important people in my life until I was six-and-a-half years old were women. My grandfather was there but he was peripheral; my uncle was there and he was peripheral. I lived in a house of women: my mother and our servants. When we visited my cousins' houses, my aunts would be home, my uncles would be working, or out somewhere. So it never occurred to me until I came to Canada that the world was run by men; I naturally assumed that the world was run by women. And it seemed a safe world to live in. Now in *Van de Graaff Days*, this is what happens to Hari. First of all he's thrown into a strange society when he comes to Canada, but because he's enrolled in that boy's school, he's also thrown into a masculine world which he doesn't know how to deal with.

*Have you ever thought consciously of writing about gender itself? Has it crossed your mind to address the absence of men in your youth?*

It would never occur to me to write simply about men, because the world for me is made up of men and women. In some of my more recent stories I've been writing much more about men, but this is because I've been coming to terms with my relationship with men, especially with older men, which was not a very happy relationship as I was growing up. I have done some things that were exclusively male, like being in a private school for a while, like being in army cadets and the army reserve, but it's not a life which appeals to me.

Ironically now, I've had to come to terms with my dislike of men, which is why I've been writing about them more. I'm reading a lot of poetry by men. There are three male poets especially who have been influencing my work in recent times: one is Don Coles in Toronto, one is Jay Meek in North Dakota, and the other has been Patrick Lane. It's been an attempt for me to come to terms with my father, I suppose. But more than that, it's an attempt on my part to ask myself what kind of a man I am going to be in middle age and in old age.

*Family conflicts and negotiations are a recurring theme in your writing from Sacrifices and A Planet of Eccentrics to Van de Graaff Days and your*

*forthcoming memoir, Extended Families. What is it that makes the family such a productive subject of attention for you?*

The first thing is that there's a lot of material. I never expected to be writing about my family so much, because I spent so much of my youth staying away from them. When I first started writing, I wrote completely fictional work, and it wasn't very authentic. I was writing about things I didn't really know about. Sitting around the dinner table at Fort San, the writing school, I would tell stories about my family—about visiting the family god and so on—and people would say, "You should write that down," and I used to think, Who's going to care? But the revelation came for me when one of the chapters from *Sacrifices* and then later *Van de Graaff Days*—the chapter in which Krishna goes back to visit Hari and Hari forgets about him—that was my first published piece as a short story. Then I realized that there were probably more universal connections than I had realized. Of course, I had always known that the more specifically you write the more universal your work is, but I had never thought of my own family as being of particular interest to anyone. [laughs]

I suppose writing about my family was a way of trying to come to terms with them and with what had happened to us. There's a danger because, while I do extract material from my family, people assume that all of my fiction is somehow based on real characters or real incidents, and that's not true. I think the trick is to blur the line enough so that the fictional stuff seems real. Sometimes you can't write about real characters in your family because they tend to be too stereotypical. Krishna, for instance, is a combination of at least two of the men in the previous generation. And Rukmini is a combination of two of the women on her side of the family. Now that I've come to terms with my family, it's just material to me.

*That makes me wonder about what happens when you add the experience of immigration to the family relationships; it brings in things like disjunction and distance between family members.*

I don't write so much about immigration as I do about families. Immigration complicates family relationships, but the relationships would probably have been not that different if the characters had remained where they were, in the same place. It's just that they tend to be strained and per-

haps exaggerated when people immigrate. Also, family is a good metaphor for society at large, because you can find fragments of society within any one family. I was telling you the story of the North Indian fellow who is getting his Ph.D. in English literature. His father ran a shop and a gas station, and the other three brothers basically followed in the father's footsteps. From there you can extrapolate to things that are happening in the wider society.

*So if immigration exaggerates or intensifies situations common in a broader society, how does it work in the example you've just given? The three sons follow in the father's footsteps, but the one son takes a Ph.D. at the University of Toronto.*

It tends to speed up the natural process in families in which there's inter-generational conflict. Somebody told me once that there are three main themes in immigrant literature: one is intergenerational conflict, the other one is cultural dislocation, obviously, and I don't remember what the third one is. But when people bring their children over to another country, they risk losing them because their children change. There's the natural process of rebellion that any generation goes through, but if this new generation is also being influenced by the new society which is trying to assimilate them, then the conflicts within the family become heightened.

I've noticed a certain pattern whereby the generation that comes to a new place is trying to hang on to its traditions and the next generation is turning its back on those traditions, but the generation after them starts looking back towards those traditions again. Or, you could flip that around: there are some first generation people who come to a new country and try to assimilate as quickly as possible and don't hold with their old traditions. And then their children do the reverse. They want to learn Czech, for instance. And they may say to their mother, "Talk to me in Czech." And the mother will say, "We're Canadians now and I don't want to speak in Czech anymore." So there's always this business in which any two generations right next to each other have this need to be opposites to each other.

*I think in Van de Graaff Days a lot of that shows up in the conflict between Krishna and Hari, and the different paths that they foresee themselves taking, and especially that Krishna foresees his son taking. And that makes me think of the comment you've quoted from Patrick Lane which is that all sons want to*

*kill their fathers, which sounds like the Oedipal story. But you refer to a different story in Van de Graaff Days, where you use the Ganesha legend from the Mahabharata and other ancient Indian epics. In some ways, they seem to be describing the same conflict, but I wonder if you would say they are telling the same general story, or do you think the Greek and Hindu mythologies address these conflicts in quite different ways?*

Patrick was dealing more with the Oedipal myth, and in that piece that you mentioned, called “Appa, My Father,” I was dealing with it too, to a certain extent. I think Patrick was saying that sons have to kill fathers so that sons are free to go their own way. In *Van de Graaff Days*, the Ganesha story is important because it foreshadows what happens. In the Ganesha story, the father accidentally decapitates his son without realizing it’s his son and then tries to save the boy, but they put an elephant head on the boy and the boy changes in a way that probably the father would never have expected or wanted. And that’s what Krishna does to Hari. By bringing him to North America, he makes Hari into two things: Indian and North American. By making that choice, Krishna is immediately in danger of losing his son, but it’s the price that he’s going to have to pay so that the boy can have a better life. All Krishna knows is he wants to come to North America so Hari will have a better life. But he can’t anticipate what’s going to happen between them: by doing this—by going away to study in the States and spending so much time away from Hari—Krishna is going to lose the connection with Hari. In retrospect, many years later Krishna might regret this. But he’s in his late twenties at the beginning of the novel, and he doesn’t have enough experience to realize what’s going to happen.

So Hari becomes like Ganesha in the sense that he’s half of one and half of another. But in Hari’s case it’s not just that he’s half Indian and half Canadian; the main difference between him and the previous generation of his family is that he’s more interested in music and the arts, while they’re more interested in the sciences.

*One thing that seems different about the Ganesha story compared to the Oedipal one is that the Ganesha story pays attention to the father’s anxieties: Shiva decapitates his son, he’s frustrated about access to his wife, and so on. Whereas in the Oedipal story Laius is more in the background: he’s killed early on and then the rest of the story—Freud’s version anyway—concentrates on Oedipus.*

Yes, we tend to forget the earlier part in which the father actually had the child cast out in order to prevent the child from killing the father. I suppose in that instance there's a parallel because the father does something which backfires, and in *Van de Graaff Days* the father also does something which backfires and he has to spend many, many years dealing with the problem, which is that he's irreconcilably separated from his son as a result of the decision he made.

*What role does Hari's being more artistically inclined play in his feeling less need to identify as strongly masculine, say, as compared to Krishna? Do you think there's anything about the role of the artist that either changes or crosses over gender definitions?*

Sometimes it does. Some of my male colleagues find it a bit threatening when I've suggested that in order for writers to write faithfully about society, they have to have a feminine sensibility. And some of my friends have objected to this because they don't want to have to do that. They write quite well about men and that's all very well. But it's not just a question of masculine and feminine. Some writers, for instance, need to keep complete control over their work. I don't have complete control over my work. I'm quite willing to have other forces come into it. So when I have suggested this, the writers who like to have complete control would rather not have to deal with the question about whether there are other powers at work when you are writing. [laughs]

I suppose, to go back to the original question, I would never write simply about men or simply about women. I think you write about what is important to you at a particular time. And as I've been writing *Van de Graaff Days* and *A Planet of Eccentrics* this question about male-female was very important to me. Now in my new work this question of . . . it's not a matter of rediscovering masculinity, but more a question of coming to terms with the masculine side of society.

*So that might be represented in the family context by father and son relationships. But how do you work with it in larger social contexts in your new work?*

In some of the new work I'm exploring the backlash that's occurring now against men. And I'm exploring it because I have always secretly felt that

men deserve the backlash that they're getting now—except that whenever any of these things happens, they tend to go to extremes. So one of the pieces I'm working on is about a fundamentally decent man, who is part of the problems society faces right now. But he never meant to stand in the way of any woman; he was just raised the way he was. So I want to see how a man who's basically decent is going to come to terms with the fact that the world that he wanted so badly to create is not the world that his grandchildren are inheriting. And the conflict becomes immediate, because he goes to Europe and his daughter-in-law accompanies him. She has just separated from his son, and she partly blames this old man for the breakdown of her marriage. So he's going to have to face the question of whether he had made sins of commission or omission while he was practicing his career, and was it really his fault that the son's marriage broke down?

The minute certain trends start occurring in society and become exaggerated, then I start questioning them. A very obvious example is that right now there is quite a serious backlash against what we call DWEeMS—"Dead White European Men." And when I started buying into it, I thought, But wait a minute, I'd better start reading some of these dead white European men and see if they really are as—not "bad" in the sense of bad writing—but whether they really have something to feel guilty about. So I read books like Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet* and a bit of Thomas Mann. And the stuff is wonderful! It's just too bad that society has used these people's work in order to perpetrate certain dominant political modes of thinking.

*Jack Hodgins suggested when you were starting out as a writer that you might do for Indian culture what Isaac Bashevis Singer has done for Yiddish culture in North America. At the time, you protested you didn't know enough about India, but your publications since then show you've become more confident about your Indian heritage. Still, one reviewer of *A Planet of Eccentrics* questioned the authenticity of your representations of India. How do you feel about this matter now?*

Well, she was right within fairly narrow parameters. It's the same criticism, for instance, that I have leveled against people who have written about India and made some obvious mistakes or perpetrated certain ideas which I think are insidious.

The question of authenticity applies to any writer. I have a certain obligation to be authentic about whoever I'm writing about. And if I make mistakes then it's up to reviewers to point that out and to give positive criticism which I can then apply. This particular review didn't give me anything that I could usefully apply. [laughs] Writers have an obligation to be authentic. At the same time, there's this thing called poetic license and there's a question of how far you can apply it. You start wandering into questions of ethics here. I would never say a fiction writer has less of an obligation to be authentic than a nonfiction writer. But you do the best you can, and sometimes you make quite obvious mistakes.

*This is a related question: At one point you claimed that although you didn't grow up in India, you've inherited a Hindu belief in genetic imprinting; you've also said that the old Indian stories work for you. How do they "work"? What is the work that they do?*

They give me a grounding; they give me a sense of connection. I grew up learning the Judeo-Christian stories and the Greek and Roman myths because when I was in school we were still heavily influenced by the British educational systems, and the British, if they did know about the Indian myths, tended to be confined to the Asiaologists or whatever they called themselves. So learning about the Indian myths and using them is my way of keeping a connection with my past. Part of my development as a person during the last fifteen years has been a recognition that I can't live in one world or the other; I have to live in both. Because I don't know enough about India, I spend a fair amount of time trying to learn about it.

On a personal level, we need things to fall back upon. And I'm much more comfortable with some of the Indian concepts, things like reincarnation, than with some of the Western concepts—that you have one life and at the end of it you either go to heaven or hell or purgatory. That's a very limited choice to give people. What I like about Hinduism is that it's like a smorgasbord: there are all these different gods, and you pick the stories that are important to you at a particular time in your life or during a particular event. I like it that before you build a house you would think about Ganesha. Or if you are writing poetry or music you would think about Saraswati.

One of the things I like about Hinduism is that it's much more accepting of different people—not with the revival of fundamentalist Hinduism,

certainly—but I feel more free to manoeuvre within Hinduism than within Christianity. I've found that the more I've been exposed to Christianity, the more I've been appalled by the obvious intolerance. The more I've seen of Hinduism, the more I have been appalled by the intolerance that it has engendered—especially in its treatment of women, outcastes and non-caste people. But I think the trick is to find the best in any of these cultures, religions, or mythologies, and try to create something new that is essentially good.

*That makes me think of your article, “Greetings from Bangalore, Saskatchewan,” where you indicate that your identity as a writer combines so many things: you talk about South India and a Canadian prairie city, your ancestry that mixes Aryan and Dravidian sources. How do mixed heritage and double location inform your choices from multiple traditions?*

I was trying to deal in that article with my fear that a certain amount of genetic purity was creeping into the appropriation debate which was starting at the time: the whole question of who is entitled to speak for which culture. And even in the twentieth century with all the mass migrations that are going on, people are becoming less pure than they were. And so I looked back in my own background. If you break South India into subcultures, my mother is from one, my father is from another. So even when I was born, it was a bit unusual that I should be born to parents of Andhra and Kanarese ancestry. Now it's much more common. Now even North Indians and South Indians form essentially mixed marriages, though we in the West may not think of them as such. So that's why I went back even farther to the question of the Dravidians and the Aryans intermarrying. It was a reaction to this underground current of purity that I detect right now.

I was just in Toronto last weekend at the Desh Pardesh festival, and I met Indians who are about ten years younger than me whose father is Irish, the mother is Indian, but the child is born in the Caribbean. Well, what does this make the person? What it makes the person, I think, is that this is the new human being. Within a couple of generations, people will be so mixed it won't matter what they really are. When I look at the new generation of South Asian writers in Canada, they are much more mixed than any of us are. I know of one video artist who's father is German and the mother is Indian, and when you look at this person you don't know what they are,



and at a certain point it doesn't matter what they are. It's good to be moving toward this stage.

Somebody said about my earlier work that what I was doing was syncretism—which has to do with taking one set of ideas and another set of ideas and combining them together to come up with a third set. This man was a Lutheran minister in Sweden. The question of hybridity came up at the Dosh Pardesh conference, because you have this generation of artists who are hybrids of white and South Asian background, and they resent being treated like hybrids because they feel that the hybrid is an unnatural combination.

*You've mentioned words like "syncretism" and "hybridity" and even "dislocation," but how would you locate your writing in a literary tradition, in relation to, say, Canadian or Indian or Immigrant or Postcolonial literature?*

There was an anthology called *The Geography of Voice* which was edited by Diane McGifford and she talked about each of the writers. When she got to me, she said with my writing South Asian writing in Canada had come full circle, because I was rediscovering India—so I was part of a new generation—whereas the other writers that she deals with before me know India, and are more Indian than Canadian. So her point, I think, was that if I was bringing the writing full circle in Canada, then what I was doing was setting the stage for the next generation of writers who are probably going to write more about Canada than about India. Or, in a strange sort of way, may end up writing a lot more about India and being more culturally specific.

I'm quite surprised when I go to readings by younger South Asian writers because their work is so specific to their culture. There are great in-jokes there. Most of which I get, but some of which I don't get. Part of the reason also is that the reading audience for this work is growing. Indians in Canada are wanting to read about themselves and so they laugh when you refer to their grandmother and stuff like that. I've tried to write so that Westerners can get a grasp of what I'm writing about, but the Indians will see the in-jokes. And if the Westerners don't see the in-jokes, it doesn't matter. This is where, of course, I run into my own limitations because I don't know as much about India as some other writers.

It could be that I am bringing the writing full circle and that other people will take it in another direction. I'm the inbetween generation: most of the

Indians in this country are either quite a bit older than I am or quite a bit younger. They may only be ten or fifteen years younger, but the point is that they were born in Western society and grew up with English in society whereas I didn't. When my family came here, we were among the first hundred families who were allowed into Canada once Indians were allowed to immigrate to Canada again—this is late fifties, early sixties. And many of those families didn't bring children with them. They had their children here. So some people treat me as a second-generation writer, and others treat me as a first-generation writer.

*Many of these issues are related to your own family's immigrant and colonial history, then?*

What I've heard is that Postcolonial or Commonwealth writers are quite fascinated with change, and this deals with that concept of transculturalism. It seems to me that in order to survive, in order to make any headway, you have to change. And that's why I'm more interested in transculturalism than multiculturalism: one of the failings of multiculturalism is that it told people, "You don't have to change. You can be the way you were over there, and you'll be quite happy." Now people have started to realize that there are certain pitfalls in staying the way you were over there when you are over here. I didn't realize that the concept of the necessity for change is an underlying theme in some Postcolonial writing. But certainly we have changed. People who have come from the British colonies are very Anglo, but also very Indian or Mauritian or whatever they were originally. You can either resist that change or you can keep going with it. In a sense that may be betraying your original culture, but the problem is that there's no point staying Indian in Canada if you're not living in India. But there's no point in assimilating and becoming completely Canadian, because you'll never become completely Canadian. And maybe that's where these Postcolonial writers are positioned right now.

*Your books have appeared along with publications by Canadians from what used to be the British Empire—I'm thinking of Bharati Mukherjee, Rohinton Mistry, M.G. Vassanji, Rachna Mara, Neil Bissoondath, among others—and I wonder what you make of the Canadian production and consumption of fiction by immigrants from "exotic" places. Why do you think Canadians are*

*interested? Where does that interest come from? Is there anything discomfoting about people's interest in the exotic?*

There's a tendency for the general Canadian reading public to read this work because it is exotic. This has put a lot of pressure on the writers, and some of them resent it. But the point is: you've got to get in wherever you can. And if people are going to read your work because they think it's exotic, fine, but it's up to you then to subvert their notions of exoticism. They may read your work because they like reading *National Geographic*, and they've always been fascinated with India—so they read it and as they're reading you start showing that these Indians are not exotic after all. It's not just a matter of their being ordinary, they might be downright banal. A white Canadian may be more interesting than this person from Sri Lanka or the Caribbean. And that's the way you change people's concepts. I'm a great believer in using stereotypes and dominant ideas in order to subvert those stereotypes and dominant ideas.

My favorite metaphor comes from photography. And this is relevant to the writing I do and to Postcolonial literature and the next generation of these writers. When the British introduced photography to India, the Indians would do a couple of things: First of all, there was no vanishing point or use of perspective in these photographs. And secondly, they would manipulate the photographs after they were printed by hand-colouring them—not just with water colour, which gives you a much more subtle effect, but with oil paint, which creates a three-dimensional effect. And as if that wasn't enough, they started pasting bits of coloured string and jewels onto these photographs. The Europeans, the British, looked at these things and said, "You people don't know what you're doing! You're taking a modern technological tool and you're using it in a primitive fashion." What they didn't realize is that, just as the British photographers had been trained to emulate Constables and Turners, so also the Indians were trying to emulate Indian painting. Indian painting is flat, there's no vanishing point generally, and Indian painting is manipulated by pasting things on sometimes. But this was primitive to the British because, of course, this is what they had done centuries before. It was fine for the monks in the Middle Ages to paint on manuscript pages with goldleaf, but not for a nineteenth-century Englishman. They had the printing press after all.

Now two things happened: These Indian photographs that were made at

the turn of the century—you can't buy them because they are worth so much. They're held by museums and galleries and private collectors. But the second thing is—going back to the late nineteenth century—the Indian photographers decided they didn't like being looked down upon by the British. And they needed to make a living as studio photographers, so they learned how to make European photographs with vanishing points and didn't manipulate the photographs after the fact. So for their European clients, they made European photographs; for their Indian clients, they made Indian photographs. Raja Rao in *Kanthapura* says "How do we describe the culture which is our own in a language which is not our own?" And then proceeds to do it. And so by sneaking in these elements from your own culture, you start subverting the dominant aesthetic theories.

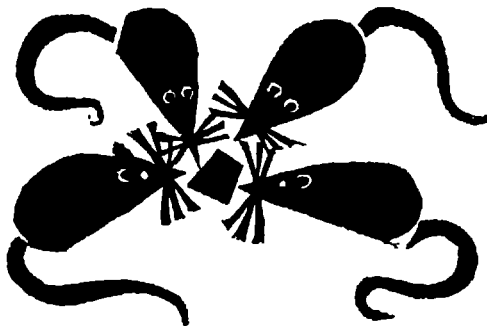
*Your photography analogy also suggests that certain cultural traditions produce certain genres and so when you're forced by your circumstances to think transculturally, it might also involve thinking and working across genres, across disciplines. I wonder, in the new memoir Extended Families or in the new material you're working on, what connections you might see between genre-crossing and the transcultural thinking you've been doing.*

Well, the new memoir is probably a good example because George Woodcock read a draft and said it was extremely Indian in its architecture. He said it was rather like a piece of Indian music played on a *veena*, because there's a certain droning aspect to it and then some melody comes in and when Western listeners are subjected to this kind of music they become impatient because it doesn't seem to be moving forward. The memoir is probably my most Indian work because it doesn't have any obvious throughlines. And I will have to make revisions and certain accommodations in order to keep the Western reader reading—as well as subverting their expectations of what's happening.

The memoir is structured by journals from my first trip back to India, memoirs about people in my family written through hearsay—sometimes questioning the, not the truth, but the accuracy of what they're saying—and it also includes fragments of fiction based on these memoirs of other people. Because I wanted to play with how, first of all, these stories get handed down: they're *real* stories, but they get changed by being handed down. And when you sit down to write something fictional, you're chang-

ing it even more. And there are also family photographs. What I'm doing is writing about an Indian extended family, and I felt that I couldn't do it in the normal Western way. I couldn't write a non-fiction version of *War and Peace* or *Gone With the Wind*, because the family was extended and fragmented, and so it seemed that the book itself should be extended and fragmented. But how do you keep your reader going through all of that? So even though I said I'm writing these books about India to discover things about myself and my connections with India, maybe this will be the last Indian book, because maybe I'll have discovered what I need to know.

As to whether the cross-genre is related to the transcultural, I'm not sure. It may go beyond cross-genre, because from what I've been seeing of the Indian artists practicing in Canada, they feel obliged to do cross-disciplinary or interdisciplinary work: performance pieces, dance with photographs projected onto screens, text, visual art, or they do a ritual— they might write a poem and then burn the poem in a religious ceremony. It's probably no coincidence. It may simply be that it is becoming increasingly difficult to deal with cultural and other ideas within one discipline alone or one genre alone. My ideal way of getting across this story of my family is to do an interdisciplinary photography work. I'm not ready to do that yet, so I'm still working in print, but the very fact that I'm adding photographs is changing the nature of the book. So maybe this is related to the fashion these days for deconstruction and metafiction—that life is getting so complicated that the old artforms are not serving us in isolation, that they have to be mixed.



## Post Modern

Night-winged birds  
crash into office towers,  
compasses made askew  
by false twilights —

poets gather these windfalls,  
prop them up  
and send them parading  
along the catwalk of fashion design,  
plumage rearranged as  
thin veils over a naked product.

It is accepted  
that common folk  
rarely wear such regalia,  
rarely attend  
readings,  
where momentum is collision's friend,  
where dead birds are displayed  
as gourmet table-fare.

Birds are living beings!  
embroidered on quality sweatshirts,  
in gentle daylight their colours sing.  
common folk prefer this prettier thing.

but darkness invites the wilder thought,  
and in the wild dead things happen,  
they just happen. It's natural  
to avoid stepping on the concrete image,  
yesterday's sentiment,  
the little fallen feathered poems  
that look so much like tiny chickens

# One Morning My Mother Awoke

One morning my mother awoke  
to find an ugly signature  
on her right breast

She went to the doctor  
who read the signature  
and said  
It is  
indelible. Well have to  
Cut  
it out

Could she say anything  
but Yes?

No.

This author  
has written to our family before

Later the doctor said  
The ink may have spread. We should  
Cut  
some more

So the next day  
my mother  
gave  
her  
breast  
to the doctor  
to put in the collection  
of all the other ugly volumes

of sickening reading  
by this cruel author

And now we wait  
to see if the author  
will write to my mother again . . . .

I touch my breast  
and wonder  
if the author  
has my address too



# Cyberwriting and the Borders of Identity

## “What’s in a Name” in Kroetsch’s *The Puppeteer* and Mistry’s *Such a Long Journey*?

**B**orders are fast disappearing in the new Europe, along the information highway, and in the mega-channel universe. Hong Kong’s Star Satellite, carrying five television channels to fifty-three countries, has already changed the face of Asia. In India, a new generation openly celebrates the country’s “Californication,” while ~~their elders debate~~ “The Challenge of the Open Skies” (Joseph) to a state broadcast monopoly. Given such a fundamental shift in the mode of information, we might ask whether the nation state, or local culture, or even the concept of a substantial self can survive the communications revolution?

Five hundred years ago, Gutenberg threatened speech communities in Europe with a similar loss of identity. With the benefit of hindsight, we can understand how the book redefined the human subject as being self-bounded and self-contained, much like the bound volume which came to occupy a reader’s inmost consciousness. “I think; therefore I am,” the philosopher established as the surest ground of metaphysics; but what made this idea thinkable was the very subjectivity engendered by the book. The new religion of the Book also brought about a revolution in church and state, undermining age-old hierarchies. Henceforth, the privileging of a sovereign consciousness, which demanded increasingly liberal values, would change all the old forms of social and state organization.

Now, in the midst of another communications revolution, the modern philosopher announces “The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing.” Though Jacques Derrida has had little to say about electronic writing per se,

several comments suggest that he would locate us between the epoch of the book and that of the electronic mark. In *Of Grammatology* he argues that the artificial intelligence of the “cybernetic program” has tended “to oust all metaphysical concepts—including the concepts of soul, of life, of value, of choice, of memory—which until recently served to separate the machine from man” (9). In consequence, the very “constitution of subjectivity” (113) in technological societies has been altered, as Mark Poster claims in his study of “Derrida and Electronic Writing,” by the immateriality of new forms of script: “The writer encounters his or her words in a form that is evanescent, [as] instantly transformable” as mental images, and so “the human being recognizes itself in the uncanny immateriality of the machine” (111-12).

This uncanny “mentality” of the machine underwrites the paradigm shift in recent theories of the humanities which have made language or culture, not nature, the final ground of interpretation. Forty years ago, Roland Barthes foresaw that, because “man in a bourgeois society is at every turn plunged into a false Nature” (156), the mythologist must decode the myth of a culture, to expose it as an alibi. Today, it remains the critic’s task to expose the stubborn alibi that linguistic determinations and other forms of social construction are really facts of nature; questions of race and gender have also brought to light transcultural systems of domination which at every turn oppress women and non-Europeans. Again, it is Derrida who, as Gayatri Spivak says, “has most overtly investigated the possibilities of ‘the name of woman’ as a corollary to the project of charging ‘the ends of man.’ In *Of Grammatology* he relates the privileging of the sovereign subject not only with phonocentrism (primacy of voice-consciousness) and logocentrism (primacy of the word as law), but also with phallogentrism (primacy of the phallus as arbiter of [legal] identity)” (Spivak 144).

This large-scale critique of the metaphysics of identity no longer privileges the subject as a sovereign consciousness, nor gender and race as facts of nature. Even the nature of our sensory perceptions—our entire positivist epistemology—is called into question by computer-generated virtual realities. For the first time, those who make it down the on-ramp onto the information highway sense how their nerve-endings no longer stop with their fingertips, but reach around the globe. And so the “uncanny immateriality” of the machine raises new questions about the space of our communities and even the integrity of our bodies. Where should we re-draw the borders of an identity once based on the book?

A longtime spokesman for the critical avant-garde, Robert Kroetsch has been gradually reworking French anti-humanist assumptions into a recognizably Canadian context. In an essay entitled “No Name is My Name,” he argues that a “willed namelessness” has always been the cultural norm in Canadian writing, a norm that he values since it holds out at least a hope of “plural identities” (*Lovely* 51-2)—an obvious social good in a society made up of so many races, languages, and ethnic groups. But Kroetsch also confesses his scepticism about the “very notion of self” (47), such scepticism being perhaps “the most significant consequence of structuralism: its rejection of the notion of the ‘subject’” (Culler 28).

By contrast, a writer of colour from a more traditional society, such as Rohinton Mistry, seems to take the old humanist assumptions as a given. *Such a Long Journey*, the first novel by an Indian immigrant to win the Governor General’s Award for Fiction (1991), sees the threat of ethnocentrism to personal identity, but takes refuge in a kind of universalism tied to English itself as the guarantor of identity. When a Parsi character bemoans the loss of his familiar world in the changed street names of Bombay, Mistry’s protagonist asks, “What’s in a name?” To which his friend Dinshawji replies:

No, Gustad. . . . You are wrong. Names are so important. I grew up on Lamington Road. But it has disappeared, in its place is Dadasaheb Bhadkhamkar Marg. My school was on Carnac Road. Now suddenly it’s on Lokmanya Tilak Marg. I live at Sleater Road. Soon that will also disappear. My whole life I have come to work at Flora Fountain. And one fine day the name changes. So what happens to the life I have lived? Was I living the wrong life, with all the wrong names? Will I get a second chance to live it all again, with these new names? Tell me what happens to my life. Rubbed out, just like that?(Mistry 74)

What Dinshawji laments in the loss of the old names is the loss of the old logocentric security, that metaphysical reassurance via language “of the meaning of being in general as presence” (Derrida 12). Though Dinshawji resists the loss of his social identity and even his personal history to the politics of “Maharashtra for Maharashtrians” (73), the erasure of the old names also eradicates his world, makes absent what should be “naturally” present. Ultimately, he experiences the rewriting of the map of his neighbourhood as an interruption in his self-presence. A life by any other name would not be the same life. But in terms of the old metaphysics of identity, his ultimate appeal is to the fixity of print.

Conversely, the characters in Kroetsch’s latest novel, *The Puppeteer* (1992),

are regularly “exchanged for each other, and again” (126); lovers engage in “Finding other names” (127); and the words of two narrators—one speaking and the other typing—blend on the page as their personal identities begin to merge. *The Puppeteer* marks something of a narratological departure, even for someone as experimental as Kroetsch. It should come as no surprise that this is his first novel composed on the computer. It seems to me, the effect of the new technology on the writer’s process is decisive: “Writing at the border of subject and object” (Poster 111), the old Cartesian subject no longer stands “outside the world of objects in a position that enables certain knowledge of an opposing world of objects” (99). Instead, the experience of “computer writing resembles a borderline event, one where the two sides of the line lose their solidity and stability” (111).

The epochal difference between the typographic and the electronic mark may finally serve to determine “What’s in a name?” for both Mistry and Kroetsch. But we would first need to locate the differences in writing between an electronic society (Canada in the 1990s) and a traditional one (India in the 1970s). What are the consequences in either case for the character of the book? Can Mistry, who has lived in Canada since 1975, possibly resist the effects of his new milieu? Or can the country he recalls in his writing ever escape the logic of technology?

In Jacques Derrida’s critique of Western logocentrism, the breakdown of the classical logic of identity occurs in the shift from an epistemology based on speech and presence to one based on new forms of writing, belatedly exposing an absence at the heart of writing in general. But technological change only exposes what Derrida claims was repressed in the whole history of writing by a metaphysics of presence—that language itself is “always already a writing” (106). For alphabetic script reveals what was always intrinsic to the system of language, even as its phonetic character helped to maintain our illusion that what we read was “united to the voice and to breath,” and so was “not grammatological but pneumatological” (17).

A computer monitor more obviously takes our breath away, dispersing the mind and its mental images in a mirror outside itself, even as it “depersonalizes the text, removes all traces of individuality from writing, de-individualizes the graphic mark” (Poster 113). Yet alphabetic writing always had the same hidden power to open “a fissure between the author and the idea” (Poster 125), to disperse the identity of a speaking subject still conceived in the instant of “hearing (understanding)-oneself-speak” (Derrida 7). The

“electronic mark” only “radicalizes the anti-logocentric tendencies that deconstruction argues are inherent in all writing” (Poster 123), for it “puts into question the qualities of subjectivity . . . [vestigially] associated with writing and more generally with rationality” (112-13).

“The Battle of Proper Names” in *Of Grammatology* concludes that what’s in a name is more likely the whole coercive network of relations bounding the subject. Only the phonocentric illusion of hearing/understanding oneself speak hides this coercion and helps to naturalize the whole system of differences. But what the “concealment of writing and the effacement and obliteration of the so-called proper name” can no longer hide is “the originary violence of language which consists in inscribing within a difference, in classifying. . . . In effect, it reveals the first nomination which was already an expropriation” (*Grammatology* 112). To name is to mark off territory, to set social bounds or limits, to forcibly erect boundaries which seem natural, which are “perceived by the *social and moral consciousness* as the proper, the reassuring seal of self-identity.”

Mistry’s protagonist in *Such a Long Journey*, expressing an awareness that “the reassuring seal of self-identity” is a social and political fiction, says, “Why worry about it? I say, if it keeps the Marathas happy, give them a few roads to rename” (73). But the novel seems to foreclose on such political questions when Gustad’s friend protests the violence done to his own identity, meanwhile ignoring the violence done by the British name-giver to Maratha identity, much less the “originary violence” of naming itself.

Resisting loss at every turn, the narrative structure of *Such a Long Journey* thus enacts what Derrida saw in Lévi-Strauss as “a sort of ethic of presence, an ethic of nostalgia for origins” (*Writing* 292), which sends Gustad Noble on his own long journey toward a recuperation of lost beginnings. The “original” loss in Gustad’s life is the innocence of a happy childhood, when the Noble family could still afford a vacation with the luxury of mosquito nettings at a hill station: he likes to recall “That picture of my mother—locked away for ever in my mind: my mother through the white, diaphanous mosquito net, saying goodnight-Godblessyou, smiling, soft and evanescent, floating before my sleepy eyes, floating for ever with her eyes so gentle and kind” (242). Even a toy seen in the Chor Bazaar reminds Gustad of the thieving uncle who gambled away his father’s bookstore: “And what had become of the Meccano set? Lost with everything else, no doubt, during the bankruptcy. The word had the sound of a deadly virus, the way it had ravaged

the family” (101). Even the feel of a fountain pen between his fingers evokes a powerful nostalgia for the world of childhood: “This was the bloody problem with modern education. In the name of progress they discarded seemingly unimportant things, without knowing that what they were chucking out the window of modernity was tradition. And if tradition was lost, then the loss of respect for those who respected and loved tradition always followed” (61).

His son Sohrab’s lack of respect for paternal authority threatens Gustad’s traditional values with their inner contradiction: “He will have to come to me. When he learns respect. Till then, he is not my son. My son is dead” (52). Just as hard on his friends, Gustad will not forgive Major Jimmy Bilimoria for packing up and leaving their apartment building without a trace: “Without saying a word to us. That’s friendship. Worthless and meaningless” (49). The xenophobic force of tradition even shows up in a symbol of seeming inclusiveness, a sort of ecumenical wall separating the apartment compound from the street. A refuge from the Hindu majority, the concrete wall is a border marked by the odour of a counter-territoriality. Each day at dawn, Gustad suffers both the stench of urine and the sting of mosquitoes as he performs his kusti prayers, sheltered all the while from the stares of passersby. He hires a pavement artist to draw pictures of the gods and goddesses and saints and mosques of all the world’s religions. But the wall is neither as holy nor as ecumenical as it first appears, since its saintly face masks a more divisive purpose: to preserve the Parsi in his self-sameness and hierarchical privilege, and to protect him from the threat of difference, of Otherness itself.

Gustad also erects other walls to hedge him in from the world. To his wife’s dismay, he will not take down the blackout paper tacked to the windows nine years earlier, during a devastating war with China when even Nehru broke under the treachery of his Chinese brother Chou En-lai. Gustad has learned too well the truth of brotherhood, as revealed in the biblical story about “Cain and Abel. . . Fairy tales, I used to think. But from the distance of years, how true. My own father’s case. His drunken, gambling brother who destroyed him as surely as crushing his skull. And Jimmy, another kind of Cain. Killed trust, love, respect, everything” (178). All that saves Gustad from the fate of Abel is a few pieces of rescued “furniture from his childhood gathered com-  
fortingly about him. The pieces stood like parentheses around his entire life, the sentinels of his sanity” (6).

Neither is he alone in this novel in clinging to remnants of a happier past. Miss Kutpitia, a neighbour in Khodadad Building, appears to be an Indian

Miss Havisham, a Dickensian woman who has stopped the clock in her apartment at a point thirty-five years ago when her motherless nephew—her sole reason for living—was killed in an auto crash. Tenants who come to use her telephone are kept at bay in a little vestibule, and are never permitted to see beyond the closed door into the inner apartment where, “Like *tohruns* and garlands of gloom, the cobwebs had spread their clinging arms and embraced the relics of Miss Kutpitia’s grief-stricken past” (284).

Ultimately, so many images of loss remind us of the condition of the emigré author for whom Gustad’s sentiments are quite natural: “How much of all this does Sohrab remember, he wondered. Very little, I think. For now. But one day he will remember every bit. As I do, about my father. Always begins after the loss is complete, the remembering” (210). The childhood home is not so easily foregone, it would seem; its loss looms large within and without the text, as does the nostalgic yearning to reconstitute that absence in language, in a logocentric guarantee of presence. No wonder, then, that the names must not change, lest it should turn out, as Dinshawji says, that he was “living the wrong life, with all the wrong names” (74).

And yet, as Laurie Coutino tells Gustad in shame and terrible anguish, “Mr Dinshawji has ruined my own name for me” (176). For the incorrigible flirt and joker, playing on the Parsi word for the male member, has told her that he wants her “to meet his *lorri*. . . . ‘You can play with my little *lorri*,’ he said, ‘such fun two of you will have together.’” In his thoughtless way, Dinshawji has named her his thing, has committed precisely the kind of linguistic violence that Derrida describes in “the first nomination which was already an expropriation” (112). For Dinshawji has literally made the woman’s proper name improper, has turned “Laurie” into the metaphorical measure of his own narcissism by appropriating her identity to that of his “*lorri*.”

A third story of naming is just as violent, and ultimately quite as disruptive of self-presence. The local physician, Dr Paymaster, had some fifty years ago purchased the closed-down dispensary of Dr R. C. Lord, MBBS, MD Estd 1892. Revered for a sense of humour which could make his patients laugh their sickness away, Dr Paymaster one day committed the terrible blunder of removing the old doctor’s sign and putting up his own shingle. “The very next day, the dispensary was in turmoil. Patients were marching in and marching out, demanding to know who this Dr Paymaster was” (113). The only way the new doctor could recover his practice was to hang up the old sign with the former doctor’s name on it, “and the confusion

vanished overnight. And overnight, Dr Paymaster sorrowfully realized something they never taught in medical college: like any consumer product, a doctor's name was infinitely more important than his skills." But he has had to give up his proper name to practice those skills, has had to accept being renamed within the generalized writing of a community which resists real change. And so the loss of his proper name turns out to be no change at all; it is simply another means of conserving the past.

Even in its narrative form, there could be a parallel between the novel and what Mistry calls "a country stuck in the nineteenth century" (155). Technically, there are very few risks, and very few discoveries, in the use of a limited third-person narrator to present differing points of view at the level of alternating chapters, or scenes, or even paragraphs. Narrative omniscience, like the fixity of print in a sign that cannot be changed, becomes a larger mark of continuity with the past, of the reassuring sense of an author-God.

**K**roetsch's *The Puppeteer*, on the other hand, demands to be read in the new social context of "the borderline event" of electronic writing. The borderline between the writing and reading subject immediately begins to blur as the apparent narrator, Jack Deemer, reads the typescript of its protagonist-author Maggie Wilder in the very process of its production. In Deemer's words, "Maggie Wilder is writing this. Reading over her left shoulder, I become a loving supporter, the champion of her need to get the story of her wedding dress down on paper. Now and then I say a few words, joining myself into her train of thought. Sometimes, perhaps just to tease me, she scrambles a few of my words in amongst her own" (17).

The "borderline" identity of the narrator is further complicated by questions arising out of various forms of theatrical performance in the narrative. At the heart of the story is a puppet show put on by Dorf, the narrator of a previous Kroetsch novel, *Alibi*, who is now hiding out in Maggie's attic from his old boss Jack Deemer. Maggie, in the early stages of a separation from her husband, has walled herself in from the world quite as much as Mistry's Gustad Noble with his blackout paper on all the windows, much less Billy Dorf disguised as a monk and hiding in her attic, calling himself Papa B. Yet Dorf, alias Papa B, who has also spent three years in hiding in a Greek monastery, tries to reach Maggie through "Karaghiosi, the most popular of all the Greek shadow puppets" (115). Within the frame of a simple set, screened by a white bedsheet, the puppet comes knocking



with his long, hinged right arm. "Are you locked in there, Maggie Wilder? Do you want out?"

"I'm not at home to you," a voice answered. "Leave me alone."

There was no figure to be seen inside the house, only a voice to be heard. Papa B was speaking both voices, but neither was his. The voice of the second and invisible speaker, Maggie recognized, was an imitation of her own.(116)

Wishing to unmask the pretender, Maggie wilfully violates the theatrical frame by speaking in her own person to the puppet, the stage persona of Papa B: "Karaghiosi, you are always pretending to be someone you aren't. I know that much about you. You're pretending to be Papa B" (117). Papa B, who is pretending to be Karaghiosi, is accused of pretending to be Papa B, of playing himself. Yet he is also pretending to be Maggie, using her voice to ask her to give up her own identity, to play their mutual friend Inez: "Maggie was shocked and yet excited too, by the name she was given. She had become part of the play. She liked that" (117). And so the audience of one surrenders her proper name to the play of signification, crossing the line into the space of performance. Like the users of electronic message services, she appears to embrace the circumstance that "Identity is fictionalized in the structure of the communication" (Poster 117).

Later, however, when Maggie is seated once again at her desk, another puppet dressed up as a monkish Papa B addresses her in her own person: "Tell [Karaghiosi] that you don't want to be alone" (121). The breaking of the frame from the other side of the stage now strangely unsettles Maggie: "She could not, that second night, bear the directness of the puppets' approach. One of the puppets was asking her simply to play herself, and Maggie found the assignment impossible" (122). The borders of identity begin to blur as well for Papa B whom Maggie has forced to play himself: "The voice of the monk was almost but not quite that of Papa B. Papa B, trying to imitate his own voice, was hesitating" (121). The "real" voice of Papa B now belongs to Karaghiosi, as it were, while his imitation of himself sounds inauthentic—authenticity receding into infinity in all these deliberate confusions of identity. Now it is Jack Deemer, the narrator, who puts the problem most succinctly: "Who was the puppet, who the puppeteer?" (123).

Since it is Deemer who winds up with the girl at the end of the novel, his narrative substitution of himself for Papa B almost makes up for his impotence to change the past. Certainly, he would have us believe that the whole affair has been staged for his benefit: "Maggie, I suspect, felt that in telling

me the story of her love affair with puppets was telling me back into my own desire” (119). Ultimately, then, Deemer calls for another ending to the whole performance:

They were the puppets, Maggie and Dorf, not Karaghiosi. That ancient Greek shadow puppet became master. It was he who manipulated their desire. . . . Karaghiosi, that slave and fool, became master. . . . Maggie taking the pain of Karaghiosi’s heave. They were exchanged for each other, and again. They were orphaned into rhapsodies of desire. . . . “Karaghiosi,” she said, calling him back. She said the name, making a small experiment into the naming of a wish. The whispered name was a reassurance to her own wet tongue, and she wondered whose hair touched her small breasts. . . . They were a frenzy of silence. They laughed, then, after, finding shirts and socks, pyjama bottoms and the cold cups of brassieres, there in the rank dark. Finding other names. (126-7)

In the act of love, the lovers have been exchanged for one another, have for the moment become truly *Other*. Crossing borders of flesh, they have “traded places,” to cite the title of Maggie’s first published collection of short stories. And so have the puppets and puppeteer been exchanged for one another, even as the reader (Deemer) and the author (Maggie who types the text before our eyes) have also traded places.

The other site of borderline events in the novel is the elaborate wedding dress which Maggie wears to the typewriter because “she could hear the story she intended to tell” (2) whenever she puts it on. Maggie wants “to write the autobiography of a wedding dress” (15), partly out of the conceit, as she says, that “dresses could talk” (27), and partly out of a conviction, as another character says, that “Brides look alike—in the long run, it’s the dresses that differ” (28). Now, even the boundaries of genre begin to blur as the speaking subject is displaced from person to thing, and history (or perhaps biography if the dress has a “life”), dissolves into *auto*-biography, the dress “writing” its own story as told to Maggie, just as Maggie writes her own story as told to Jack Deemer.

The dress, however, is not unique to Maggie; it has been worn before by Deemer’s wife Julie Magnuson, and it seems, according to its maker, to have been “double digit bad luck” (52). As a signifier, it encodes a social practice whereby each bride who wears it is supposed to find a new name and a new social identity. Julie was supposed to become the wife of Fish, who had even “asked for one small detail to be included in the flow and drift of details on the dress” (58)—a rainbow trout. But the dress, which keeps its identity as a differential mark in a system of differences without positive terms, contains

a myriad of signs, just as a bride like Julie who marries and remarries carries the potential of many new names. The sign of the fish cannot even save Fish from being waylaid en route to the altar, where the bride is claimed instead by Jack Deemer: "In the tumult of the dress we were the story," Deemer says, "that Josie Pavich had only guessed; we were the lovers in animal form that she had so carefully pictured, the man with the body of a fish, the horse-headed man, the woman with octopus arms" (137). The dress, in other words, is a sign of the whole underlying system of *metamorphoses* encoded in weddings; it speaks of the bride and groom as shape-changers, and of their shifting identities in marriage.

Even Jack Deemer, who dons the dress in disguise at the end of the novel, becomes other than he is, and henceforth speaks differently: "I put it on. And then something precious happened. Wearing the dress, I was no longer simply myself" (251). At first, the dress merely puts him in mind of the woman he once married: "Waiting there, sitting, pacing, I came to understand how Julie Magnuson must have felt on the morning of her delayed wedding" (252). And yet he continues to wear the dress after an accident at the Greek chapel where the "monk" Dorf falls over a cliff to his death. The ruthless old collector who had once sought Dorf's life is apparently changed enough by the dress to persuade Maggie to live with him and to work "on—dare we say?—a saint's life" (264). "Papa B is seen as something of a saint by the monks and priests of Mount Athos" (264), not least because his cassock has turned him into "the monk he had so long pretended to be" (250), the true performer of his part. So, too, Deemer is transformed by his performance as "Maggie puts a beach towel over the shoulders of my wedding dress and tells me to close my eyes, which is hardly necessary, and she shaves me and does my hair. 'You must look the part,' she tells me, often, while she is doing this" (266). Feminised by the dress-as-sign, this most manipulative of men winds up in the role of a bride.

Of all the borders which are crossed in *The Puppeteer*, this one—the subversion of gender identity—is the least "natural" or, in narrative terms, the most forced. For Jack Deemer is a man who is not above murder, a wealthy thug, by his own admission, whom "people mention with curiosity and disgust. You don't put together a collection of collections without first putting together a little heap of the stuff that buys collections. Once in a while I had to make the rules fit the occasion" (71).

How, then, could such a macho man be so easily taken over by his own disguise? Or how could a dress—even if it is a linguistic sign—gain total control over its speaking subject? Why, in a word, should we be willing to see an incorrigibly male identity erased at the touch of another signifying system?

In a postmodern society already beginning to ask whether gender is determined by anatomy or by culture, the wedding dress evokes the “genderless anonymity” (Poster 121) of electronic communications. For individuals linked through computers now converse, “often on an enduring basis, without considerations that derive from the presence to the partner of their body, their voice, their sex, many of the markings of their personal history. Conversationalists are in the position of fiction writers who compose themselves as characters in the process of writing, inventing themselves” (117). In the immaterial medium of the new writing, material differences such as gender no longer have to determine the old borders of identity.

Though a wedding dress is not a computer, it is clearly a form of address, serving as a medium of communication. “If dresses could talk” (27), Maggie says, then dons it to write “her autobiography of a dress” (23). Much like the “mirror effect of the computer” which “doubles the subject of writing” (Poster 112), the dress doubles Maggie’s subjectivity. Her identity is thus dispersed as much as Deemer’s in wearing this dress, much as any writing subject in computer communications is “dispersed in a postmodern semantic field of time/space, inner/outer, mind/matter” (Poster 115). Through the fluid medium of the gown, the writer is made an amanuensis for the object itself which turns into a speaking subject. So inner/outer, mind/matter, are also reversible semantic fields in the dress.

The indelible mark, however, of the new context of communications to which the dress belongs is a figure of itself. Almost at the outset of the story, Maggie notices “for the first time, in the intricate embroidery and beadwork on her lap, the outline in miniature of the dress she was wearing. The dressmaker who had filled the dress with detail had, with the same care, left blank an outline of the dress no larger than a postage stamp” (3-4). This self-reflexive sign of the sign—the so-called *mise en abyme*—puts into an abyss, or subverts the authority of, the real, as does a television monitor on the desk of the television announcer, receding into infinity. We are reminded that the world we “see” is mediated, or constructed by, the medium which shapes our perception; it no longer has its “real” ground outside itself, and yet it has the power to change the way we see ourselves.

Take another look at *Such a Long Journey* and you will find, even in a supposedly traditional novel, the telltale mark of this same *mise en abyme*:

Gustad looked closely at what seemed a very familiar place. "Looks like our wall," he said tentatively.

"Absolutely correct. It's now a sacred place, is it not? So it rightfully deserves to be painted on a wall of holy men and holy places."

Gustad bent down to get a better look at the wall featuring a painting of the wall featuring a painting of the wall featuring a . . . (288)

The infinite regress of a picture on the wall of Gustad's compound shows how Mistry's traditional world is no more immune than Kroetsch's post-modern world to the effects of modern technology. Here, however, we might read the sign of Mistry's postcolonial resistance to a form of realism which would naturalize the status quo, or legitimate the existing social order. For the self-reflexive picture displays a figure founded only on itself, a sign which is wholly arbitrary and conventional, and yet which has been allowed to stand, in the name of Dada Ormuzd and *kusti* prayers, as the ground of social division. In this space of the wall-within-a-wall can be seen another space in which the *post-* of postcolonialism, "like that of postmodernism," emerges as "a *post-* that challenges earlier legitimating narratives" (Appiah 353). Suddenly, the painter's *mise en abyme*, like the postrealist mark of cyberspace, puts into an abyss the social reality of a wall which on its painted side displays the face of universal brotherhood, but on its blank side reveals the face of social partition.

Finally, in this space, we ought to observe how the postrealist ideology of postcolonial writing can have a very different motivation from that of post-modern writing. As Kwame Appiah remarks of a postrealist impulse in African writing of the past two decades:

Far from being a celebration of the nation, . . . the novels of the second, postcolonial, stage are novels of delegitimation: they reject not only the Western *imperium* but also the nationalist project of the postcolonial national bourgeoisie. And, so it seems to me, the basis for that project of delegitimation cannot be the postmodernist one: rather, it is grounded in an appeal to an ethical universal. Indeed it is based, as intellectual responses to oppression in Africa largely are based, in an appeal to a certain simple respect for human suffering, a fundamental revolt against the endless misery of the last thirty years. (353)

Mistry's delegitimation of the nationalist project of the postcolonial bourgeoisie is nowhere more apparent than in the suffering of Gustad's

long-lost “brother” at the hands of RAW and the Indian Congress Party. As Major Jimmy Bilimoria says on his deathbed, “Gustad, it is beyond the common man’s imagination, the things being done by those in power” (280). This same subplot of embezzlement and atonement nearly defies belief, using wild gossip and innuendo to offer a postrealist critique of the elected oppressor. But Mistry’s inclusion of pseudo-documents and digests from newspapers also delegitimizes the “realism” of journalism itself as a tool of the national bourgeoisie who equate Mother India with Mother Indira: “the line between the two was fast being blurred by the Prime Minister’s far-sighted propagandists who saw its value for future election campaigns” (298). In the concluding “*marcha*” of the people on their corrupt governors, the novel ultimately appeals to an ethical universal which Dr Paymaster, its reluctant leader, can only trope in terms of suffering human flesh: “You see, the municipal corruption is merely the bad smell, which will disappear as soon as the gangrenous government at the centre is removed. True, they said, but we cannot hold our breath for ever, we have to do something about the stink” (313).

In the final analysis, doing “something about the stink” in this novel requires more than direct political action. The political and the aesthetic meet again in the figure of that wall which speaks of universal brotherhood and social partition. Since both meanings are imaginary constructs, not facts of nature, the sign itself is bound to change. In the end, Gustad has to accept the idea that the social wall must come down. “The pavement artist, awaiting his turn to speak, said despondently, “Please, sir, they are telling me I have to give up my wall.” Gustad had gathered this from the new notice on the pillar, the cement-mixers, and the waiting lorries. For the briefest of moments he felt the impending loss cut deeply, through memory and time; the collapse of the wall would wreck the past and the future” (329). But in the battle of demonstrators to save the wall, it is the idiot Tehmul, the neighbourhood manchild who worships Gustad, who is killed. Tehmul, it seems, has been made a scapegoat by Gustad’s wife Dilnavaz, by a mother who is willing to sacrifice one of the “children of God” for the sake of her own estranged son. For Dilnavaz employs a witch in the person of Miss Kutpitia to cast a spell on Tehmul in hope of purging the evil from Sohrab; coincidentally or not, the idiot dies because his life means less to her than her own child’s life. Thus the wall of family continues to partition the world even behind the outer wall of Parsi identity.

Gustad, however, is surprised to find that the “wreck [of] the past and the future” which he had feared in the tumbling of the wall only makes him more open to past and future both. At the death of his mother thirty years before, he had been unable to shed a single tear: “Seeing his once invincible father behave in this broken manner” had made him swear silently “to himself, then and there, that he would never indulge in tears—not before anyone, nor in private, no matter what suffering or sorrow fell upon his shoulders; tears were useless, the weakness of women, and of men who allowed themselves to be broken” (101). But at the sight of the idiot child’s broken skull, something finally breaks in him as well: “His voice was soft and steady, and his hand steady and light upon Tehmul’s head, as the tears ran down his cheeks. He started another cycle [of prayers], and yet another, and he could not stop the tears . . . the salt water of his eyes as much for himself as for Tehmul. As much for Tehmul as for Jimmy. And for Dinshawji, for Pappa and Mamma, for Grandpa and Grandma, all who had had to wait for so long” (337). In weeping for his dead mother, Gustad cradles the head of the dead manchild in a way which makes him virtually a Parsi Pietà, as truly feminised as Kroetsch’s Jack Deemer.

What Gustad has not yet seen, of course, is that he has already assumed the role of a father to poor Tehmul; every “child of God” is become as one of his own sons. But accepting the loss of this child finally opens his eyes, quite literally: “Gustad turned around. He saw his son standing in the doorway, and each held the other’s eyes. Still he sat, gazing upon his son, and Sohrab waited motionless in the doorway, till at last Gustad got to his feet slowly. Then he went up and put his arms around him. “Yes,” said Gustad, running his bloodstained fingers once through Sohrab’s hair. “Yes,” he said, “yes,” and hugged him tightly once more” (337). The estranged son and the lost child Tehmul have also traded places.

Though the reader and narrator are not explicitly exchanged for one another in *Such a Long Journey*, the pavement artist is at least aware of such aesthetic economies: “In a world where roadside latrines become temples and shrines, and temples and shrines become dust and ruin, does it matter where [I go]?” (338). Not that he has entirely escaped the temptation himself of monumental art: “The agreeable neighbourhood and the solidity of the long, black wall were reawakening in him the usual sources of human sorrow: a yearning for permanence, for roots, for something he could call his own, something immutable” (184). He has even given up his coloured

chalks not long before this and has begun to paint in oils, giving way to the aesthetic temptation to construct a wall against time itself. But in the best Hindu fashion, he learns that nothing is eternal, not even art. And so the aesthetic wall is breached anew, if in a different sense from the way in which Kroetsch's puppeteer "had gone through the frame" (153). For here, too, the reader finds that art cannot erect a boundary against life, though Mistry more modestly concedes the superior power to nature and to social forces which exceed his own technology.

Finally, it is the entirely natural force of decay—a sign written indelibly in human flesh—which marks a significant difference between the postcolonial and the postmodern novel. As Deemer relates the story of Dorf's death in *The Puppeteer*, he tells how the latter "had fallen straight down [the cliff] and landed on his head, somehow causing some of the bones of his neck to force his tongue out of his mouth" (257). But in bringing the body back up the cliff, "the sling either slipped or broke and poor Dorf was in for a second crash" (260). This comic treatment of a corpse points to what has been left out of cyberspace or the world of virtual reality: the body which suffers. But it also opens to question that founding absence in the "science" of grammatology: the breath of the body. For, as Derrida notes with astounding equanimity, "What writing itself, in its nonphonetic moment, betrays, is life. It menaces at once the breath, the spirit, and history as the spirit's relationship with itself" (*Of Grammatology* 25). That indifference to the presence of the body (of writer or of reader) and its material conditions exposes the continuing idealism of the postmodernist or the poststructuralist—the material trace of writing somehow exceeding, or transcending, the material conditions of its own production.

By contrast, the scene of Dinshawji's funeral in *Such a Long Journey* conveys "a certain simple respect for human suffering" which is never far from view in the postcolonial novel; inevitably, it restores us to the terrible burden of human flesh and the limits of the mortal body. On the march up the hill to those hideous vultures waiting in the Tower of Silence, Gustad realizes how the solemn sound of feet on the gravel "was magnificent, awe-inspiring. Crunch, crunch, crunch. Grinding, grating, rasping. The millwheel of death. Grinding down the pieces of a life, to fit death's specifications" (253). Which is not to say that a Parsi can see no humour in death: in a repeated funeral scene the "vulture controversy" between orthodox and progressive Parsis turns as funny as any comic scene in Kroetsch.



But what lingers in this second funeral scene is the gratitude of the sole other mourner for Major Bilimoria, a Muslim comrade whose life he had saved on the battlefield in Kashmir in 1948: “Ghulam wiped his eyes with the back of his hand. He said, his voice steady now, ‘Your Parsi priests don’t allow outsiders like me to go inside’” (322). In the end Gustad’s story takes down the wall between Parsi and non-Parsi alike. Now Mistry can take us up the hill with Gustad where not even the women are allowed to go, but where we—women and other outsiders—are permitted vicariously to pay our last respects to the dead. To return to one of the book’s predominant visual figures, the blackout paper which the protagonist takes down in the end allows us to see in as much as it allows Gustad to see out. And what we find at last is that story does—has always done—what is not unique to the new technologies: it blurs the boundaries of subject-object division, does away with borders, displaces the binary of Self and Other. Finally, what the Anglo-Indian writer reminds us in the West is that Eastern identity has always been given to ceaseless change.

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# The Dreams of the Clown

She wanted white light  
showered over everyone  
  
even the evil, the hurtful  
revealed as seraphim  
  
but with their nasty-suits on  
She desired for herself  
  
a husband  
in awe of and love with  
  
how she danced, told  
stories in the dark  
  
their babies  
She dreamed children  
  
so perfect she blended  
their baby food  
  
canned berries  
sewed jumpers  
  
in a pink light  
She wanted  
  
auditoriums of friends  
laughing the palms of their hands  
  
thunderously together  
as she bowed from the stage  
  
her-  
self

# Fractal Landscapes

*If you like fractals it is because you are  
made of them. If you can't stand fractals,  
it's because you can't stand yourself. It happens.*  
— John Briggs, *The Patterns of Chaos*

Wrinkles all over my face. These faults  
in the earth, furrows in the field.  
Forks of lightening. Fractures in ice  
and pink marble. Bare branching trees when red leaves  
have shrivelled. Fingerprints of chaos  
that cannot be stripped down, cleaned off, studied  
under glass. I am a riverbed  
eroding into the sea. I am blades  
of bruised clouds after a storm. I am  
mountains folding and buckling and reborn.

# The Construction of Masculinity in Martin Allerdale Grainger's *Woodsmen of the West*

**M**artin Allerdale Grainger's *Woodsmen of the West* (1908) is often cited as a historically accurate account of the culture of early British Columbia and is a favourite text of local history enthusiasts who like to see British Columbia history as imbued with masculine virtues: physical daring and endurance, the explorer spirit, free enterprise and triumph over nature. This reading of *Woodsmen* is reiterated (albeit with the moral values reversed) in Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic*, in which Grainger's book serves as a "source" for the main character's research into gender oppression in early British Columbia history. Marlatt's novel reads *Woodsmen* as evidence of a destructive masculine culture at the base of British Columbia society, a culture characterised by an uncontrolled drive for domination over nature which identifies the raped landscape of the logged coastline with the violation of women's bodies.

In reading *Woodsmen* this way, Marlatt has chosen to represent patriarchy as if it were, as it claims to be, natural, single, and identical to itself. This approach is strategically useful to the political project of identifying the ways gender ideology functions in literature to subordinate women, and for that reason is always appropriate. However, treating masculinity as a monolithic "other" can have the effect of reinscribing gender ideology by naturalising the category of masculine in opposition to feminine. Analyses such as Marlatt's also focus on the ways that the dominant pattern of nineteenth-century narrative is fundamentally implicated in gender ideology'; the destructive or self-destructive energies of an immature male hero are even-

tually lodged in an appropriate female object and harnessed to work for the state through heterosexual marriage. This pattern presumes a society in which both sexes are represented—the difference of women becomes the dominant difference in such a society.<sup>2</sup> However, the B.C. logging culture of *Woodsmen* confines gender difference to the past and to the future—in the present it is a single gender society. In order to create a narrative of self-definition, *Woodsmen* must negotiate differences among men, the cracks in the seemingly monolithic masculine gender identity.

An alternative way of reading *Woodsmen of the West* focusses on the way the book exemplifies the narrator's ambivalence toward the masculine culture that interpellates him. This culture, while presented by the narrator as "natural" and part of "nature," exists by virtue of its project of subduing and civilizing the natural world; a supposed venue for craftsmanship and unalienated labour, the masculine culture of *Woodsmen* is created by a relationship between capital and workers which alienates labour and de-skills jobs. Finally, this masculine culture is not "natural" to the narrator himself, "Mart," who despite his attempts, falls short of the Western ideal of masculinity, violating its codes and behavioural norms. The split between the loggers who are the object of the narrative and "Mart," the autobiographical narrator who is its subject, suggests that the unified generic masculine implied by the text is fundamentally split and self-conscious. Mart retains a distanced ambivalence toward masculinity as the book defines it, and the instability of his own position in relation to the men he admires undermines the ideal the text sets forth.

The invitation to "you" with which the book begins indicates the book's intended audience. The narrator, "I," invites the reader, "you," to accompany him to the part of Vancouver populated by loggers, to join them in lounging along the street, looking in the shop windows, to "comeanavadrink" (14). The narrator assumes that "you" can indulge in all these activities without fear of harassment, assault, or loss of reputation. Clearly, "you" can only be a man. Thus, everything that follows in the book takes place in the world of men alone, with the various invitations to compare the logger's life with one's own offered only to men. Under the pretense of inviting readers to vicariously experience the vitality of a logger's life, the narrative works to exclude female readers by refusing to acknowledge that a founding premise of the world offered to our gaze is exclusion of women. This exclusion is underlined stylistically by Grainger's frequent use of the

words “a man” as substitute for the pronouns “you” and “one.” The use of “you” or “one” tends to generalise the applicability of specific statements to all possible readers—as in, “you need a rain suit to be comfortable in the bush”—while Grainger’s substitution of “a man” in such phrases as “oil-skins . . . are uncomfortable and hamper a man at any work” (78) or “that is the impression a man gets” (75) stands out as more than just the traditional generic masculine.

Such stylistic techniques serve to create the illusion of a universal masculine gender identity, a project demanded by the turn-of-the-century “crisis of masculinity” (MacDonald 16-17; Kimmel 137-154). A vision of a particular kind of romantic masculine life developed in response to the perception that British men were becoming “soft” and weak. English-speaking artists and writers of the “aesthetic” movement in the 1890s questioned the importance of masculine breast-beating and the imperial military; the celebrated trial of Oscar Wilde made homosexuality in private life visible, and provoked “homosexual panic” as a response in the public sphere.<sup>3</sup> During the Boer War and the invasion scares of the early twentieth century the British popular press reported that many lower-class men were found to be too physically weak and malformed to serve in the army. Increasing industrialization throughout the nineteenth century removed another of the traditional props of manhood, the skill of the independent craftsman, and replaced it with assembly line work, or even with female workers (Maynard 165-66). In addition, the women’s movement was becoming more militant and eventually violent in its agitation for the vote (Federico 19, 25; Schwenger 8). The antifeminist backlash to these challenges was characterised by, among other things, the idealization of manual labour performed in the colonies, a new interest in fostering the talents of the “backwoodsman” in boys and men through the Boy Scouts and various militia and paramilitary organizations, and a romanticising of the “frontier” of empire as the location of masculine endeavour. This interest was articulated in the works of Rudyard Kipling, Charles G.D. Roberts and Ernest Thompson Seton (among others), and in the mix of militarism and backwoods self-reliance that made men like Theodore Roosevelt and Robert Baden-Powell into popular heroes (Macdonald *passim*; Kimmel 146-148).

Yet Grainger’s need to articulate the essence of the masculine by assuming a male reader and specifying the reactions of “a man” indicates that a certain anxiety attended the project of articulating a universal masculine

gender identity. The problematizing of masculinity by turn-of-the-century British culture created the self-consciousness necessary for it to enter the realm of discourse, but at the same time that self-consciousness threatens masculinity by suggesting “the possibility that the natural man is an artifice” (Schwenger, *Phallic Critiques* 9). The entry of masculinity into discourse fragments it, as masculinity traditionally inheres in actions rather than words. Peter Schwenger writes: “To think about masculinity is to become less masculine oneself. For one of the most powerful archetypes of manhood is the idea that the real man is the one who acts, rather than the one who contemplates. . . . Like MacLeish’s perfect poem, the perfect male ‘must not mean but be.’ Self-consciousness is a crack in the wholeness of his nature” (Schwenger, “The Masculine Mode” 10). In *Woodsmen*, this self-consciousness is expressed in the distinction between western men (or woodsmen) and civilized men (who may be Easterners or Englishmen). Being a “man” is revealed as cultural, not natural; it is not single but double, and must be defined, articulated, and policed in order to retain its illusion of naturalness.

A community of loggers on Canada’s West coast is a typical venue for a turn-of-the-century narrative defining masculinity. The book is set in colonial space, associated in popular culture with the heroic encounter between civilization and barbarism (MacDonald *passim*); in addition, the action is located in “the West . . . with its limitless space and undefiled nature—a grand symbol of freedom” (Pugh 16). *Woodsmen* advises an outsider (who is both Mart and the reader) how to live the life of a logger in turn-of-the-century British Columbia by extolling the masculine virtues that inform the life of a “man” in “these uncivilized parts” (86)—independence, freedom, initiative, closeness to nature, manual competence, and emotional reserve.<sup>4</sup> The narrator engages in manual labour, which itself holds a privileged position in the culture of masculinity.<sup>5</sup> Mart comments on his reasons for preferring the life of a logger: “There is definite work to be done: Nature and natural obstacles to be struggled against (and not one’s fellow men); and there is, besides, the vanity of not being seen to be incompetent” (32). Mart values the sense of agency he gains from being able to see the results of his work, to display his physical competence in front of other men; he prefers this validation to the more socially destructive competition with other men for business or for employment. “The needs and sudden emergencies of the work, and the presence of other men’s standards of achievement right

before one's eyes, give one stimulus, and check self-indulgence" (33). In addition, he values the freedom from social convention which life in the woods grants him: "One does not have to submit to anything—not even from public opinion. There is a toleration that surpasseth all the understanding of the old-country English" (33). Above all, Mart values the freedom to choose his boss, and with his boss, his working conditions. He likes the freedom to "move on" if he is unsatisfied with either: "If one's work, or one's boss, or one's food, or one's surroundings displease one, one can move at once elsewhere, provided times are reasonably good—as they usually are" (33).

Physical and mental confidence are part of the masculine ideal of the text: "this . . . lack of self-distrust, this simple-minded willingness to face every problem by the light of Nature, is a thing that one is always meeting in the West. Men trust their own judgement; their minds are not honeycombed with doubts of it" (77). Physical competence and the independence of mind this fosters also creates the sense of professionalism in the "woodsmen" that Mart admires: "I like this better than the trained sense for instantaneous compromise that many decent, educated men develop. I like the artist's pride, the boyish craving for *efficient* performance, the feeling for sound, clean work, and the very moderate care for consequences" (26). He uses the term "woodsman" to designate his ideal western man—a logger marked by his skill with the axe, his pride in efficient and elegant manual processes, his independence and self-reliance.

Mart presents this utopian life of unalienated labour—in which men work as an expression of their masculine selves, expressing pride of workmanship and the integration of their personal desires with those of their employers—as a natural state, achievable because pursued in a natural setting. The logger's actions are governed by natural judgement, and his closeness to the natural world, constructed as the elemental "West" of eastern imagination, is part of what restores his wholeness and health (73). In contrast, Mart presents the "civilized" and un-natural life of the English-speaking city-dweller who is his reader, a life of insignificance, of "playing a small and most unimportant part in a gigantic scheme," (33) restricted by the social requirements of his position and feminised by his inability to govern the smallest aspects of his own life. In this, Mart reinscribes a common turn-of-the-century judgement (also argued by Charles G.D. Roberts in his essay, "The Animal Story"), that "civilization, its class system, social confor-



mity and moral obligations and constraints” (Pugh, 16) had distorted men’s lives, perhaps biologically as well as socially; a restorative return to “nature” through adventure stories or wilderness trips could revive the “natural” man.

Mart’s view of “nature” clearly owes much to the Romantics; here “nature” refers to the site of a pre-lapsarian ideal of innocence, wholeness and agency. The worker in a natural setting is described in terms of the idealised child (32) who regards work as play, and whose work is a natural expression of high spirits and an integrated self. The logger’s camp is an ideal democracy populated by “artists” in manual labour, a Pre-Raphaelite utopia in which authority is diffuse and individuals choose their own way of living. Yet, Mart’s idea of “nature” and of the naturalness of the masculine ideal is fractured at the base; he seems unaware of the contradiction posed by the fact that he never, himself, achieves his goal of a “natural” masculine life, nor do any of the other characters in the book. Mart and his fellow-loggers are at work destroying the natural setting to which he attributes the power of bestowing psychic and physical integration, “butcher[ing]” the woods, leaving the sea-front “in tangled wreckage” (55). He is engaged in the primal struggle of “man” with “nature” (32), the civilizing mission which intends to defeat “nature” in its objectified and human forms. And he is working, throughout the book, not for himself but for Carter, a man whose obsession with power over other men and over the natural world epitomizes the “raw spirit of free enterprise” (Gerson *Oxford Companion*, 315), the capitalist snake in the garden of nostalgic socialism.

Carter’s obsession with ownership and the power it gives him over other men provides both the necessary condition for the existence of Mart’s ideal, and the undermining other that proves masculinity’s difference from itself. Mart’s loggers could not exist without employers; as Mart points out, woodsmen are unreflective as a group, and do little planning for the future. In order to practice the craft which defines them, they must be employed by someone who owns timber leases, donkey engines, bunkhouses. Yet the sort of person likely to own such equipment, and so have need of loggers, is unlikely to respect their values of freedom and craftsmanship. Rather, as a powerful boss and a man of property, he depends upon his ability to deny freedom and agency to others.

Carter is a “self-made man” (Pugh 33) who believes that the mere force of his character —“expansive, self-reliant, aggressive” (Pugh 41)—has made

him financially successful and so proved his superiority to those in the social situation from which he has risen. "Men in the nineteenth century learned quickly to view and to use economic gain as a means of proving something both to themselves and to other men, namely, that money was the measure not only of the ability to endure risk and hardship but to defeat other men" (Pugh, 26). He fetishizes his money and possessions *as* power, and emphasizes with every breath the possessive pronouns he attaches to his achievements:

"All *MINE*," he croaked —" *my* donkey, *my* camps, *my* timber, *my* steamboat there. *Fifteen* square miles of timber leases belong to me. *Money* in the bank, and *money* in every boom for sixty miles, and hand-loggers *working* for me, and *ME* the boss of that there bunkhouse full of men . . . I done it all!" (70)

Rather than allowing his employees to maintain the fiction of wholeness and masculine agency, Carter exerts his authority boldly, "hustling the work" (56) and refusing to allow the "artistic" (55) methods of falling which differentiate loggers from mere labourers. Instead, Mart says, he "set out to sack the woods, as medieval towns were sacked, by Vandal methods" (55). Carter uses a special tone of voice, learned from his work as a railroad foreman, to express disdain for the workers, and manipulates them by bullying those older and weaker. In good times, Carter's methods and personality mean he has a high turnover among his workmen; however, in a time of recession in the logging industry Carter's obsessions have free rein among workmen who must stay in his camp if they want work. "For to exert power over men is whiskey to Carter's soul: it is the craving for crude power that drives him at his life's work" (58).

Mart's attempts to justify Carter's methods are double-voiced and ironic. He compares Carter to the biblical Pharaoh who tormented the Jews in Egypt: "I know now that my judgement of a certain Pharaoh was too hasty. The man who wanted bricks made without straw was a great man—a great hustler. He was of kin to Carter. He wanted *efficiency*; he wanted men not to depend on others, helplessly. He wanted to instill his own great spirit into them" (84). By this comparison, Mart seemingly reverses the usual judgement of the villain of the Bible story in order to condemn Carter as a tyrant, unjustly demanding impossible tasks from his workmen. The great attributes of the new "self-made man"—efficiency, speed (hustling) and independence—are mocked as the ancient goals of slave drivers. Mart displays an Arnoldian distaste for the "Hebraic" drive of Carter's capitalism, a distaste

shared by Canadian writers of the turn of the century such as Stephen Leacock and Sara Jeannette Duncan. His idealist stance is confirmed by his judgement that “among the clinkers and the base alloys that make up much of Carter’s soul there is a piece of purest metal, of true human greatness, an inspiration and a happiness to see” (60). While this metaphor represents the idealist vision of life as a “vale of soul-making,” it depicts Carter’s soul as a mound of mixed and discarded metal from a refinery, an ironic comment on the usual outcome of the refining processes of life, the “true as steel” or “pure as gold” which characterises the heroes of contemporary adventure stories.

Mart remains unaware of the ironic contradictions presented by the text which fracture the “naturalness” of the masculine ideal and the possibility of an unalienated masculine agency. But he is aware of his own inability to achieve the masculinity the text defines, and ironically attributes this failure to a comic and fallible self. On the one hand, Mart self-consciously recognizes that the life he led before he came to B.C. was insufficiently strenuous to model masculinity, and addresses the reader directly on the superiority of the life of a woodsman to the life of an easterner or educated Englishman. Mart learns the codes of Western masculine life, recommends them to the reader, and attempts to emulate them himself. On the other hand, he *is* an educated Englishman, and signals his awareness that he falls short of the Western ideal of masculinity through numerous reader addresses and ironic jokes at his own expense. The book’s ending underlines Mart’s inability to achieve the masculine ideal: he returns to a feminised “civilization” literally to scrub the kitchen floor, Punch and Judy style, under the direction of his new wife.

Mart presents his inability to feel the proper masculine self-confidence as a failure, but his ironic descriptions of his fellows make it clear that in Mart’s opinion, a man’s confidence in himself is often misplaced. Bill challenges the safety inspector’s doubts about the engines of the steam launch *Sonora*, and assures Mart that “As long as [a man] had ‘any savvy to him’ and did not lose his head ‘if anything happened,’” (94) the *Sonora* is perfectly safe. Mart’s comic tales of Bill’s actual ignorance of the engines, his attempts to fix the shims and valves and odd bits of pipe that fly off and release scalding jets of steam, and his inability to interpret the safety information posted on an ancient and fly-blown certificate in the pilot house undermine Bill’s reliability as a mechanic. Mart self-consciously addresses the reader, aware that his account of the vessel’s safety is hardly believable: “I hate to tell you all about the *Sonora*, because she was so humorous, and you will think I am

piling it on . . . [but in dangerous situations] I used to wish she had been less of a jest" (94). Far from discarding his "queer, limited ideas" on steam-ship safety for Bill's "wider view" (94), Mart confirms his fears by presenting himself as a gullible victim of Bill's masculine self-confidence.

Mart never voices his fears about the *Sonora* to Bill, for he learns that life among the loggers is regulated by an unarticulated code of behaviour: "a sort of tacit etiquette . . . punctilio that one never hears defined in words" (107). The injunction against revealing weakness is one of the most important rules regulating logger society, part of the masculine code of "cool" that proscribes emotions, especially those of fear or despair.<sup>6</sup> One of Mart's rare successes occurs as he manages to maintain his "cool" facade when the *Sonora* confronts a dangerous situation. As Bill moans a stream of curses, Mart triumphantly notes that Bill "*had voiced his despair first*": "Immediately my opinion of myself rose like a lark. I had not given myself away. I felt so superior to the man who had entertained despair; I felt I could show him how to keep cool and competent" (82). Mart revels in his superiority to Bill for the benefit of the reader who might miss the significance of his masculine success. He recounts that he found it difficult to refrain from patronising Bill by adding "Don't get excited" (82) and comments with self-conscious irony, "I liked myself immensely in my new role" (82). Mart can "keep his head when all about. . . are losing theirs and blaming it on [him]"; as in Kipling's poem, this experience makes him "a man" ("If" lines 1-2).

Another related code is the injunction against asking for help or information.<sup>7</sup> Information comes by indirection, Mart explains: "A man in this country does not walk right into a store or a hotel and ask point-blank questions about what he wants to know" (79). If you prove yourself the right sort of man, help comes to you. Mart chooses to spend his leisure time at the Hanson Island Hotel chopping firewood for the kitchen, "an altruistic-looking act born of cold calculation" (27) he admits. He is rewarded with precious advice and information about local working conditions from the hotel owner. Asking for help on a new job expresses doubt of one's own judgement and an unwillingness to work that marks a city man, or slacker. "Old Andy," a passenger on the *Sonora*, tells an anecdote about his first job "barking" logs. He spends three days on the job energetically barking the wrong side of the logs before he is politely told how to do it right; he has to prove himself ready and able to work before a fellow worker decides to let him in on the trick. Yet despite this advice, Mart often violates the code:

“and very disconcerted I become” he recounts. “That is because I am impatient and want to find out things at once” (79).

Mart also introduces complex ironies around the (seemingly) compulsory practice of alcohol consumption. Everyone in this novel drinks, at times heavily, and social codes around drunkenness and leisure, fighting, work, revenge and physical danger are detailed with a fine awareness of the fictitious distance between those who only get “good-and-drunk”(15) once in a while, for the sake of their health, and “drinking” men, signalled by the quotation marks around the second category. Mart appropriates the language of the “temperance tract” (23) to describe the hotel bar as a “whirlpool . . . a-booming and a boiling” (23) but ironically undercuts this stereotype by further comparing it to “boating suppers and undergraduates” (23) at Cambridge. Mart apologizes for the prevalence of alcohol in logger society, explaining that meals, lodging, socialising and recreation as well as negotiations for work all take place in licensed premises, and while he does not indulge to excess by logger standards, he clearly finds little to object to in the practice.

The very fact that Mart recognizes these codes of behaviour as codes, social rules specific to one society and not necessarily universal or natural, marks his distance from the ideal he sets up. Mart must learn these codes in order to survive as a logger; as his commentary demonstrates, much of his work and all of his safety on the job depends upon his fellow workers, and he must accept their ways as his. Yet he is also fully aware of how strange the rules of logger society seem to the “sophisticated eyes” (33) of his reader, and must account for, explain and justify them; they do not appear to him as “nature,” but as nature at one remove, learned nature, “second nature.”

Violence between men is a traditional gender marker, and one which Mart foregrounds in attempting to delineate the masculine ideal. Mart avers that violence is not the norm among loggers, and suggests that the violent fist fights of the stereotypical West are the inventions of novelists:

Of course, out West, as elsewhere in the world, men do not readily come to blows. You will not see a fight from one year's end to another—among sober men; except those conjured up in mind by the short-story writer and the West describing novelist. (45)

In contrast, Mart describes loggers as “easy-going; easy to get on with; men who have knocked about the Western world and have been taught, by experience, to be tolerant and passively considerate for others” (45). Yet

Mart can find few alternatives to violence when provoked by the actions of Jim, who shirks his share of the joint work of gathering fuel for the steam launch: “Short of violence I should figure undignified, weakly querulous, should I upbraid a fellow-worker with ‘not doing his share of the work’” (108). Mart responds by doing Jim’s share of the work, a procedure supposed to humiliate Jim and work “silently upon his vanity”: this, according to Mart, is to “act the perfect logger” (108).

Yet Mart’s self-conscious addresses to the reader on the topic of his refusal to fight inscribe an ambivalence about violence that contradicts his earlier statements. Jim brings a crowd of drunks aboard, contravening Mart’s express policy against transporting drunks, and these men cause anxiety and threaten the safety of the tug by interfering with Mart’s navigation of a dangerous passage at night. Mart clearly anticipates that his male reader will judge him a coward, and defensively challenges: “You note, perhaps, the limitations of my character displayed so artlessly before your reading eyes. You smile at what you see. And what would you have done yourself? Used the hard fist? Tipped someone overboard? Brought violence among that happy, rowdy crowd of drunks?” (110) Mart’s anxiety over the place of violence in the masculine identity and the reader’s judgement of his actions is even more pronounced when Carter insults him. Mart fantasises physical retaliation: “I would bash him in the face and put an arm lock on him. A gloating thrill ran through me to think how I would listen for the crack of Carter’s dislocated arm” (141). But this scene is resolved by one of the many physical gaps in the text; Mart reports that he hears Carter speak but “what words Carter spoke I did not know, nor even what happened then . . . [sic]” (141). Mart claims not to remember how this confrontation ended; it dissolves in an ellipsis and Mart reports: “I came to my prosaic self kneeling on the bunkhouse floor” (141). Mart fears to identify himself too strongly with the “peaceable” (45) loggers in case his readers judge him as unmanly.

Mart is quite aware that he falls short of the Western ideal of masculinity; he is “splendidly educated” (29) and speaks with an accent that betrays his English background (21); he is not patient enough and asks questions when he should be silent (79); he does not have the “proper Western confidence” in his abilities and mechanical competence (108); he is ashamed of his work as an axe-man. But Mart’s most damning self-revelation is that he has allowed himself to be manipulated, and feminised, by Carter. We discover Mart’s impending marriage only at the end of the book, and the reve-

lation breaks the static narrative pattern. Mart must assume the masculine role of subject, moving towards the full integration with society that the marriage as narrative closure symbolises. Yet Mart hesitates, staying on at the logging camp in order to oblige Carter. He is disgusted with himself for bending to Carter's will, for being weak: "I saw myself to be a fool. I belonged again to the weakly-obliging class of men, the facile type that lends its barroom friends small sums of dollars when wife and family are going hungry. For I had . . . done all this injury to serve the mere convenience of Bill and Carter" (136).

Mart finally becomes aware of Carter's contempt for his obliging disposition and returns to "civilization" and fiancée, seemingly rejecting the masculine ideal of power, independence and agency represented by the loggers. The concluding verse of the book associates the life of a logger with his youth and all that must be discarded in marriage and mature adulthood.<sup>8</sup> Yet the comical picture of the masculine logger bidding "Farewell" to his "youth" in order to "scrub the kitchen floor of/The cottage next to Mrs. Potts,/in (what will be) Lyall Avenue,/ (outside the city limits of) VICTORIA, B.C." (147) ironically reinscribes the hierarchy of "boss" and "worker" in a way more familiar to the reader. Mart feminises himself as the henpecked husband, who is paradoxically the representative of real power in a gender hierarchy which prescribes that his future wife be expunged from the text, nameless and passive throughout the book.

The distance between Mart's masculine ideal and his ability to achieve it, the ambivalence and irony with which he presents the masculine ideal, shows turn-of-the-century masculinity as constructed, fractured at the base by the concept of nature as both ally and enemy, and of work as the site of both self-expression and self-alienation. The codes of masculine interaction, including maintaining one's "cool," displaying competence and confidence, and drinking are undermined as elements of a 'natural' masculinity by Mart's ability to see these codes as artificial and specific to logger society. Mart's inability to stabilise his attitude toward violence as a masculine attribute further separates him from the masculine ideal the text sets forth. The book's ending, with the narrator returning to a feminised "civilization" further expresses the critical moment of self-awareness and an ironic perspective on the masculine culture of agency it purports to define.

## NOTES

- 1 Poovey, ch.4.
- 2 According to Adele Perry, in a paper delivered at the "B.C. and Beyond: Gender Histories" Conference at the University of Victoria on June 17, 1994, this paradigm is also a pervasive one in historiographic interpretations of the effect of the scarcity of white European women in early B.C. society. Such interpretations focus on nineteenth century calls for the recruitment of more white women immigrants to marry white men in B.C. and so "soften and civilize" B.C. culture. In addition to objectifying women, this paradigm makes invisible, of course, B.C. native women and their marriages to European men.
- 3 See Dellamora, ch.10.
- 4 Annette Federico includes "competitiveness, personal ambition, social responsibility and emotional restraint" along with "will power and self-reliance" among the characteristics of a British turn-of-the-century masculine identity (23).
- 5 "Male working class forms seem to symbolize masculinity . . . for men of other social classes as well." (Henley and Thorne, cited in Schwenger, *Phallic Critiques*, 9).
- 6 In his study of masculinity in twentieth-century fiction, Peter Schwenger sums up the theme of masculine emotional reserve: "[the man] is invulnerable to the assaults of the outside world and his manliness is measured by that invulnerability. He must always resist the temptation, under adversity or stress, to open up emotionally" (*Phallic Critiques* 43).
- 7 This code will of course be familiar to anyone who knows the joke: Why did NASA need a female astronaut? So that if the shuttle got lost, there'd be someone to ask for directions.
- 8 One might also argue that Mart's rejection of Carter reiterates the narrative pattern of many books set in Canada by Canadians of British descent, rejecting the values of unrestrained capitalism for those of community. See Mathews, 134-35.

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## From Hudson's Bay

Though in some parts of that Bay  
the cold be greater then in Norway,  
yet where the Ice was uniform,  
and made by congelation of quiet water,  
not by accumulation of Flakes of Ice  
sliding over or under one another,  
he never knew the thicknes of the Ice  
to exceed four foot; and usually when 'twas bored  
and measur'd,  
it was but three foot or a little more.

\*

The Coldest Winds and the most boisterous  
that blow in those parts come from the North West,  
the Easterly and North Easterly  
coming over a lesser Tract of Land,  
being also lesse cold, and the Southerly  
Wind, that blows over a great Tract of Sea  
to arrive at the Bay, being the least cold of all.

\*

The Summers are very hot,  
so as to be troublesome on that Score  
and during that Season they are much  
infested with Musketos;

but yet if at any time during those heats  
the North West Wind chances to blow,  
they feel within a few hours a cold  
almost like that of Winter, and are fain  
to betake themselves to their warm cloaths again.

\*

He had seen in those Seas  
several Fishes  
that bear such Horns  
as commonly pass  
for Unicorns

and remembers one Fish particularly  
that put his Head out of the Water  
so that his Horn which was of great length  
might be plainly seen

\*

He had met with white Bears  
40 Leagues out at Sea;  
and had seen one of that sort of Animals,  
which though by reason of its shape,  
it did not appear so much bigger than  
a large Smithfield Oxe, (for that was his Phrase)  
yet he judgd it to exceed it very much in weight:  
for having cut off one of its Paws,  
they found that (without the Leg)  
to weigh above 50 lb

But for the length of the Beast—  
having omitted to measure it  
he could not tell it me  
though my question was grounded  
upon the Relation of Hollanders  
that kill'd a white Bear so Gigantic  
they found him fourteen foot long.

# Underpin

Something is under  
pinning it all, a clock  
work fluid as sea, tide  
or love, moons us

clicks in, oiled to understand  
before the claws' grasp, mouth  
opens to kiss or bite or laugh

Under the some thing pin  
a fluid repeater rocks its pendulous  
arm, liquid as light or hate

blind but surefooted  
as the goat  
man dances woman, pins  
under the fluid  
breaks, mouth open  
the clock breath clicks  
in again  
and what pins  
fall to skill, fall  
under the clock clicked ball

rolling forever in the sky.

## Textile Tropes in *The Afterlife of George Cartwright*

John Steffler's *The Afterlife of George Cartwright* examines relations between the British Empire and its colonial holdings. Steffler recognizes the binarism that has traditionally defined such a relationship, which Abdul R. JanMohamed characterizes as the

manichean opposition between the putative superiority of the European and the supposed inferiority of the native. . . . a field of diverse yet interchangeable oppositions between white and black, good and evil, superiority and inferiority, civilization and savagery, intelligence and emotion, rationality and sensuality, self and Other, subject and object. (JanMohamed 82)<sup>1</sup>

To establish these binaries in his novel, Steffler chose textiles tropes as appropriate metaphors for and within intersecting cultures. The events described in *The Afterlife of George Cartwright* take place between 1770 and 1819, a time of expansion for the British Empire. This expansion was largely motivated by textiles—the processes which produced them, and their value as marketable commodities. The centrality of thread and cloth, wool and silk, to Imperial England is evident in the nomenclature of the era: the Industrial Revolution is also called the Textile Revolution and is usually cited as beginning with the invention of the spinning jenny in 1767. Though now an anachronism, every use of the term “Silk Road” for the main trading route across Asia reiterates the importance of the silk trade of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Thus textiles supply a system of images particularly apt for the period covered in Steffler's book

The complex adaptability of textile metaphors further recommends them

as signifiers for the often ambiguous intercultural situations that arise in Steffler's novel. His depiction of the colonized/colonizer relationship is not so strictly circumscribed as either that described by JanMohamed, or the extension of JanMohamed's premise posited by Terry Goldie. Like JanMohamed, Goldie recognizes basic oppositions in literary depictions of the colonizer/colonized relationship, but Goldie goes on to point out that in contemporary literature, "[s]uch an opposition is frequently between the 'putative superiority' of the indigenes and the 'supposed inferiority' of the white . . . . [T]he positive and negative sides of the image are but swings of one and the same pendulum . . ." (Goldie 10). But Steffler's textile tropes enable him to construct and then question binaristic representations through ambiguities inherent in the tropes themselves.

Unlike the oppositions listed at the end of the JanMohamed quotation (to which I would add "male" and "female"), textiles do not lend themselves to immediately recognizable binary relationships. Alignments can be constructed by the author, and then contradicted such that, instead of simply reversing polarity, the opposed meanings combine to exemplify a complicated and subtle interaction between attributes otherwise considered mutually exclusive. This complex interaction more closely resembles Homi Bhabha's articulation of the situation of the English text in a colonial setting, than it does the analysis offered by JanMohamed or Goldie.<sup>2</sup> According to Bhabha's article "Signs Taken For Wonders," the English book, epitomized by the Bible, is emblematic of the split in colonial presence: "the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference" (Bhabha 107). The colonial situation depicted by Steffler seems to have more in common with a Bhabha-ian ambivalence than the distinct binarism of JanMohamed and Goldie.

For example, textile-related imagery delineates and differentiates each of the cultures depicted in the text by providing a means of measuring their relative technological sophistication. Cartwright's brother Edward invents a power-loom for Britain's industry (188); Devika is a seamstress and weaver in the Indian village which uses traditional hand-powered tools and techniques to produce uniforms for the soldiers of the British Raj (45). Finally, the Inuit of Labrador trade for thread and needles, basic sewing implements which their culture cannot easily produce (161, 193). Instead of identifying the Inuit through an indigenous but artificially-produced crafting as in the

other cultures, Steffler opposes a “natural” textile—Caubvick’s hair—to the Empire’s manufactured cloth. However, long before the introduction of Caubvick as a character, readers encounter a mention of her hair which conflates the natural/artificial binary:

Black plumes pulled sideways in the wind. Cartwright has seen so many over the years, over the landscape, from chimneys and tall stacks. Coal mines, cloth mills, breweries. The cooling towers at Marnham, on top of his old house. These glimpsed pillows and skeins often seem to detach themselves from their settings and come after him. Shapes like faceless banshee women, black rags streaming, hovering over his head. Reminders of Caubvick’s hair. (20)

With this statement, Caubvick’s hair becomes a symbol not just of Labrador or the New World or any colonized land: it signifies the destruction of the landscape at the very heart of empire, in England itself. Thus, at the outset of the text, the differentiation between colony and empire, between natural and civilized, is questioned through a textile trope. The important distinction is not one of geographical or sociological boundaries but of exploitation for the sake of a capitalist, rather than political, hegemony. Just as the colonies are abused in order to provide resources for raw materials and markets for manufactured goods, so the original dominion suffers reprehensible damage in the name of industry.

Numerous episodes in *The Afterlife of George Cartwright* similarly delineate the trade in textiles as metonymic of the complex interactions between colonizing and colonized cultures. This article details a close examination of the two main textile tropes in the narrative—clothing and Caubvick’s hair—first showing how their depiction is paradigmatic of the oppositions outlined by JanMohamed, and then the ways in which Steffler’s novel questions those binaries to indicate the complex and often ambiguous interdependencies which resist reduction to opposing duality. By thus constructing and then problematizing binaries, Steffler appears to transform the manichean duality that JanMohamed isolated as defining the colonizer/colonized relationship.

**P**robably the most common use of textiles in Eurocentric literary tradition is to describe clothing in order to place characters in a social or cultural hierarchy. Steffler’s book offers no exception to this rule: the Englishmen wear complex uniforms while the Englishwomen are noted for their equally extravagant silk dresses (i.e. 40, 68, 269). These signifiers of the upper echelons of the Empire’s hierarchy are not without

inherent hybridity. Silk was produced only in the orient, so the very material of the imperial emblems comes from an Other state. The same is true of the men's clothing: in India, Devika weaves muslin (45) for the use of the English military. Thus, the only English part of the British uniforms is the tradition behind the design. Their physical construction places them not as products of the industrial heart of empire, but of craftspeople and cultures indigenous to the marginalized colonies. Steffler depicts Cartwright as having an intuitive understanding of this intercultural ambiguity: entranced by the interminable monotony of the ocean voyage to India, he "doubted his memories of the land. He closed his eyes and waves invaded every image that came to mind. The hills above Marnham had been merely painted on silk, a thin layer swaying over bottomless depths" (32). The interdependence of colonizer and colonized—implied by Cartwright's vision of the English countryside painted on imported cloth, and confirmed by the hybrid nature of the English citizen's clothing—indicates an ambivalence, an uncertainty as to the source of authority, precluded from the stark binaristic construction elucidated by JanMohamed.

However, this type of ambivalence interests Homi Bhabha. In the clothing which signifies empire—as in the book, which does the same according to Bhabha (107)—authority rests in difference, and originality is a function not of invention but of repetition in a context different from the origins (of the uniform, of the book), a context which therefore requires the presence of signifiers of the colonizer's authority. Steffler draws on the precept of authority-in-difference by carefully constructing a hierarchy of textile images associated with the colonies depicted in the novel. It is in those colonized lands technologically similar to England that the British citizens in *The Afterlife of George Cartwright* are most concerned with maintaining the symbolic difference/authority expressed by clothing, no matter how uncomfortable and inconvenient. In India, the English soldiers are

forbidden to go out of the fort in anything but their regulation uniforms. Many times Cartwright packed his long limbs into a small palanquin and had himself jogged through the dust to some fragrant garden party, sweating and cursing in his braid-loaded coat. (40-41)

Similarly, when Cartwright retires from the army and takes a woman to Scotland, she spends most of her time taking care of her silk dresses and underwear, and looks down upon the Scottish neighbours because they are dressed in "[w]ool shawls from head to toe" (87). Bhabha suggests that "the



representation of colonial authority depends less on a universal symbol of English identity than on its productivity as a sign of difference" (108). This statement is borne out in Steffler's text, in which the representatives of the Empire maintain the fashions of the "homeland" in India and Scotland. The English costumes, however inappropriate, unequivocally indicate a difference privileged by economic hegemony: for example, Scotland's domestically produced wool is considered far less prestigious than imported silk.

The dress codes of the Empire—not necessarily set in England but a product of the interaction between colonizer and colonized—maintain the authority of difference which keeps the English on the top of the textile-delineated social and economic hierarchy. George Cartwright contravenes these conventions: he does not bow easily to the rules of England when they do not apply to the climate or terrain of the colony, as the quotation cited above affirms. Thus the use of clothing to indicate social hierarchy is questioned. Though he conforms to the mandate to maintain difference when he must, Cartwright prefers his attire to be comfortable rather than symbolic, providing another example of an intermediate position which contradicts a strictly manichean construction of colonizers' relationship to colonies.

Steffler portrays British fashions occupying the highest point of the Empire's textile hierarchy, while the second tier is represented by cultures like those of Scotland and India, identified by untailed but woven or knitted cloth. Though the Cameron ladies' wool shawls (87) and the sari which Devika so frankly unwinds before Cartwright (45, 48, 52) denote a fairly complex textile technology, these signifying items are not tailored at all, which differentiates them from the English uniforms and dresses. Nor has Steffler entirely equated Scotland and India in his manipulation of textile tropes. The Indian woman is first introduced with a description of her hair: "Devika had long black hair in a braid" (45). The colour and length of this innate textile align her with the Inuit Caubvick, but the fact that it is braided—one braid, not an elaborate English coiffure—places her somewhere between the Inuit and the English. The Cameron ladies have no equivalent connection to the Inuit, which leads to the circumstantial conclusion that though Scots are below English, they are slightly above Asian on the textile-delineated pyramid.

At the bottom of this pyramid stand the Inuit of Labrador. They have no looms, dress in fur and skins, and Cartwright describes them as in need of civilizing (127). Steffler reiterates Cartwright's unquestioning faith in the

Empire when he tells Mrs. Selby that “. . . the thought of you clothed in a silk gown in the midst of this wilderness fills me with pride, and a sense of victory . . .” (158). But it is in the wilderness of the “New World” that the hybrid possibilities of cultural cross-dressing are first realized.

He [Attuiock] gave Cartwright caribou socks, sealskin boots and mitts. Mrs. Selby borrowed a parka from Ickconogoque and copied its design. Always inventive, Cartwright made modifications of his own, attaching various flaps of wool and fur to the garment Mrs. Selby made for him, so that he could cover or uncover parts of his face and neck as the weather and his exertions required. Because he would often walk twenty or more miles in a day on snowshoes, he found Inuit trousers too warm, and instead wore thick wool breeches and woolen wrappings below the knees. (133)

The intermediary garb of Cartwright and Mrs. Selby signifies their difference from both the Inuit and the Europeans. “Many stories about them and their odd appearance circulated among the people who sailed the Labrador coast in the late 1700s” (164). Cartwright’s inventiveness suggests an originality on his part which supersedes the condoned “originality” of empire, that of repetition within a new context. Thus, Cartwright’s clothing becomes truly hybrid, according to Bhabha’s definition: “[t]he hybrid object . . . retains the actual semblance of the authoritative symbol but revalues its presence by resiting it as the signifier of *Entstellung*—after the intervention of difference” (Bhabha 115, italics in original). Although practical in Labrador, Cartwright’s clothing is never more than an idiosyncratic costume in the eyes of both the Inuit and the Europeans, partly because of the “process of displacement, distortion, dislocation, repetition” (105, Bhabha’s definition of *Entstellung*), which produced it.

This cultural cross-dressing provides a literalization of Derridean double-inscription: “whenever any writing both marks and goes back over its mark with an undecidable stroke . . . [the] double mark escapes the pertinence or authority of truth” (cited in Bhabha 108). In this case, the items so treated are not texts but textiles: it is Inuit clothing which is “re-inscribed” by the imagination of Cartwright, who cannot help but infuse such a re-inscription with the values of the culture within which he was raised, because “one’s culture is what formed that [one’s] being” (JanMohamed 84). Cartwright’s production of, and delight in, his hybridized costume provides a further example of his unconscious ambivalence towards the Empire which he represents in Labrador.

Bhabha suggests that the inevitable result of double inscription is “a ‘transparency’ of reference. . .” (108), and Steffler’s textile imagery provides an almost comically literal translation of one of Bhabha’s premises. Before Cartwright leaves Labrador with his Inuit friends, “rags of fire” (Steffler 199), energy unharnessed for any industrial or cultural purpose, destroy the main lodge and its contents, including “all their clothes” (199). Transparency indeed!

Briefly the untamed nature of the wilderness has ascendancy over the representatives of Empire. In the end, though, the fire’s destruction changes nothing: Cartwright and his people contain the blaze, bring it under control, and even use the heat, grilling steaks over red-hot gun barrels pried from the destroyed building (200). Cartwright is briefly in the position of being virtually naked in the garden, but, just as he summarily rejects Mrs. Selby’s proposed plan to settle in Labrador (195), he fails to notice the opportunity to completely abandon the Empire which the fire affords him. Though textile hybridity has occurred, it does not indicate abrogation: difference—between England and Labrador, between English and Inuit—is maintained despite the fact that the representatives of the Empire compromise their signifying costumes. Such is also the case when the Inuit go to England, although the implications of textile hybridity for the Inuit in England are far more serious than those of the English in Labrador. One of the first events to occur in England is the ordering of two new sets of clothing:

Cartwright brought in a tailor and had them [the Inuit] measured for English attire so they could go out in public undisturbed. He also bought bolts of woolen and flannel cloth, beads and embroidery thread, and brought some furs from the warehouse where his own supplies were stored. Ickconogogue and Caubvick studied the cloth, considering colours and weights, then set about cutting and stitching new clothes for the family, garments they trimmed with beads and furs in exquisite style. Their old sealskin clothes, which they’d worn all through the crossing, they cut up and burned in the fireplace when there was a good draft. (208)

The Inuit have one set of clothing to allow them to become incognito, to fit in, in a manner that the English avoid in India and Scotland. The second set of clothing is designed by the Inuit to look like authentic Inuit clothing, though it is made largely out of English material, just as the most authentic English dresses are made out of Oriental silk. Thus the carefully constructed, textile-delineated hierarchy begins to unravel: the more technologically advanced colonies were placed above the Inuit because they had

weaving, but they do not tailor their clothing. However, evidence that the Inuit women are capable seamstresses, though they have not developed a loom, is mounting: the Inuit want to trade for needles and thread (161, 193); they make their own “authentic” costumes in England; and when Cartwright first wears his hybrid outfit to the Inuit camp in Labrador, the women “examined it closely, criticizing the stitches” (191). This realization leads to the suspicion that the distinction between colonies is imposed from one source: Scotland, India and Labrador are all “Others,” defined not by the variance amongst themselves but by their difference from England.

A comparison of the Inuit’s burning their old, non-hybrid clothing when new, hybrid English/Inuit costumes become complete, with the burning of Cartwright’s clothes in Labrador reveals both similarities and divergences. In both cases, the principals are largely unaware of the ramifications of their actions: just as Cartwright does not realize that the accidental loss of his clothing provides the possibility of more completely adopting the Inuit way of life, so the Inuit—especially Caubvick—do not realize the symbolic ramifications of deliberately destroying the clothing which pre-dates the colonial encounter. Aspirations for material success, symbolized by increasingly hybridized clothing, cause both Cartwright and Caubvick to serve the Empire: in this, the manichean construction outlined by JanMohamed seems inadequate to describe the subtle workings of imperial power. However, the material repercussions of this servitude are far more serious for the Inuit woman than for the Englishman. He simply fails to achieve his ambitions, but her entire society is devastated, literally changed beyond knowledge. In terms of the two instances of burnt clothing, the initial congruities indicate the veracity of the first part of Bhabha’s statement that “[t]he place of difference and otherness, or the space of the adversarial . . . is never entirely on the outside or implacably oppositional” (109), while the differing implications for the Inuit and the Englishman indicate that the space of difference is characterized by “a pressure, and a presence, that acts constantly, if unevenly, along the entire boundary of authorization. . .” (109). Steffler’s depiction of that “pressure and presence” provides the reader with constant reminders that, no matter how subtly represented, the authoritative difference between colonizer and colonized is maintained throughout the colonial relationship.

The dynamic of imperial authority remains in place despite friendship and goodwill between individuals from the different cultures. Though

Cartwright says of Attuiock “I never loved a man more than him” (236), when the Inuit is dying, the Englishman fails to notice the duplicity of his double-cross dressing while attending Attuiock. The doctor prescribes a red environment for those afflicted with smallpox, so

l]n Plymouth, for a shilling, Cartwright bought a scarlet foot-soldier’s coat, like the kind he used to wear. He wore it as he crouched and entered the red light of the tent where Attuiock lay. . . . Attuiock looked at Cartwright, then closed his eyes. “So,” he said, “you were a soldier all along.”

“This is just for the colour,” Cartwright said. (235-6)

The conclusion that Attuiock draws, based on his recognition of the colonizer’s uniform, is correct. Cartwright was, and still is, a soldier for the Empire, though even Cartwright does not realize the extent of his service. The ideology of ambition, of regaining his family’s traditional wealth and social position, drives Cartwright to trade, not to settle in Labrador. This choice makes him as much a scion of the Empire as the most fashionably dressed nobleman in London.

**T**hough the English can don hybrid apparel in Labrador without severe repercussions, such is not the case for the inverse situation—that of Inuit in England. Caubvick’s experiences in and after England illustrate the peril which marginalized Others face when they aspire to the trappings of Empire. In order to fully comprehend Steffler’s assessment of what is at stake when the Inuit woman trades her sealskins for silk, the pivotal significance assigned to an indigenous textile trope must first be explored. If the British have their dresses of European cut and Oriental cloth, the Inuit have Caubvick’s hair.

Initial analysis of Caubvick’s hair as trope seems to show that it simply acts as a symbol within the Eurocentric literary convention of identifying colonized peoples with nature:

[t]he indigene is often used to present the possibility of nature in a human form. In the same way, the indigene’s closeness to nature is used to justify an emphasis on the indigene as the land. In the one, nature becomes human, in the other human becomes nature. (Goldie 19)

Caubvick’s hair is described as “unusually coarse and glossy, almost like a horse’s mane . . . . It had seemed to spring not just from her skin but from her whole history and the lands that had made her” (20), placing it as a clear signifier for the wilderness, for a “savage” lack of constraint alien to

the Europeans due to their dependence on “civilization.” When Cartwright makes love with Caubvick in the Inuit camp, her hair is called “a denser darkness within the dark” (195), reiterating her placement as an Other, a standard marginalization for both women and colonial populations. Thus, at the outset, Caubvick’s hair is aligned with several aspects on the colonized side of JanMohamed’s manichean equation: black (dark), emotion, sensuality, and savagery.

However, when Cartwright takes the Inuit to England, Caubvick becomes enraptured by the very social sophistication which confounds Cartwright. Symbolically, Caubvick’s hair is tamed along with herself. She learns to prefer the artifice of “braids and ringlets” (211) to the dense mane of Labrador. At this point in the narrative a complex hybridity informs the otherwise conventionally binaristic presentation of the colonizer/colonized relationship, as revealed through the symbol of Caubvick’s hair. The ease and excitement of London society have converted Caubvick to the imperial point of view more completely than any force could: she wants to stay in England as much as Cartwright wants to return to Labrador. As do the two incidents of clothing being burned, Caubvick’s shift of allegiance to imperial society acts within the text as a photographic negative of Cartwright’s conversion to the liberation of the wilderness of Labrador. His authority is rooted in the philosophies and technologies which stemmed from the European enlightenment; hers is an authority of darkness, which cannot come to the light (i.e. be valued by the colonizers) as long as she continues to be assigned the role of Other by the self which is empire. And in order to justify colonization, according to JanMohamed, empire requires that indigenes such as Caubvick remain strictly Other (85).

But Steffler delineates a reciprocity between the characters of Cartwright and Caubvick which, once again, uses binary constructions even as it raises questions about their reductive ramifications. On one side of the Atlantic we encounter a landscape described by terms denoting disorder—“tangled” (Steffler 131) and “matted” (98, 131)—and a man who craves freedom from social constraints, while concurrently working to limit that freedom. Early in the text, Mrs. Selby tells Cartwright “[y]ou are more of a savage . . . than any of them” (10). However, as a representative of the Empire, Cartwright knows that his presence among the Inuit will change them. He accepts the “white man’s burden” without question, though Mrs. Selby has reservations about their civilizing agenda in the New World:

"They'll change, I think, slightly, with time." Cartwright said. "It's one of the things we have to offer them in exchange for their goods. Our knowledge, our habits, I mean."

"I wonder, though," Mrs. Selby said, "what use our habits will be to them, except to make the Eskimos more acceptable to us."

"To be civilized is worthy in itself." Cartwright spread his arms as though offering himself as an example. "It's the duty of the civilized man to elevate the savage." (127)

Cartwright's attitude toward the empire's dress codes has already shown that he is, at best, an ambivalent example of Western civilization, despite his aptness as a tool for furthering the exploitive imperial agenda in the colonies. However, his impulse towards a controlling domestication of the Other is evident in the application of textile terms to describe the Labrador landscape. For example, the untamed wilderness is juxtaposed to the weave of Cartwright's walking pants—" [e]very small leaf in the shadowless landscape shook with excessive clarity under his eyes. The weave in the cloth of his trousers was the same . . ." (181)—drawing attention to Cartwright's unconscious desire to order the "savage" landscape, even as he revels in the liberty he gains in its wildness.

On the other side of the Atlantic is a land which is "all made" (11), thoroughly domesticated, and a woman conceptualized as an avatar of the wilderness but who prefers to remain in the tamed space. Steffler's depiction of Caubvick includes a certain cultural naiveté: she does not realize that by privileging the material benefits offered by Empire, she continues the history of oppression, both of her gender and of non-white races. Though her situation is in many ways a negative image of that of Cartwright, her dark power supplies none of the authority which the technological and social trappings of "enlightenment" have given him. She begs to stay in England, but is compelled to return to Labrador. She repudiates all things from her former life, including her husband, but is not allowed to take on the role of wife to Cartwright (230). Mrs. Selby puts the final veto on Caubvick's desire to stay with them at the trading post in Labrador. When Cartwright wavers in his resolve to return her to her family, Mrs. Selby persuades him that she is "better off with *her people*" (240, italics in original), a logical extension of the Englishwoman's earlier argument that the Inuit should not be changed, but one which implicates the usually sympathetic woman with the patriarchal colonizing power. Even Mrs. Selby fails to deny the culture which formed her being, a transformation which JanMohamed deems necessary

for “genuine and thorough comprehension of Otherness” (84). Thus, Caubvick is thwarted from choosing her own path: the representatives of Empire dictate her future according to the precepts of that Empire and not those of the people indigenous to Labrador.

But both these discontented characters yearn for hybrid cultures. Caubvick’s repudiation of her husband (230) indicates that she expects to maintain the social mores of Inuit culture while availing herself of the material advantages offered in England. Cartwright values the freedom of Labrador’s wilderness even as he works to limit that freedom in order to improve his position in England’s social hierarchy. Some ramifications of these split and hybrid desires emerge in the ways that Steffler integrates textile tropes into the smallpox epidemic among the Inuit aboard ship.

At the beginning of the journey back to Labrador, Caubvick is the first of the Inuit to contract smallpox, and the only one to survive it. These details provide a microcosmic allegory of the relationship between colonizer and colonized as presented by Steffler. Caubvick renounces her connection to the place which made her strong, and so that strength deserts her, leaving a conceptual weak point among the “natives” for an alien illness to enter. But she becomes enough of a “white man” to endure the illness of the white people: the rest of her relatives do not have that capacity. If Caubvick’s attraction to British culture changed her so that she could not die with her relatives, that change did not result in her having the strength to survive Empire’s illness without being disfigured in a manner which provides a metonym for the dis/enfranchisement of the Inuit.

Thus the trope of Caubvick’s hair becomes a cautionary tale: she gave up her natural strength and found herself without any strength at all. Hair has long been considered a seat of power in an individual: the Biblical Samson was fatally weakened by a haircut (Judges 16:17), and medieval court records show that women accused of witchcraft were shaved in order to deny them access to the power inherent in their locks (Reed). In her study of the trope of hair in Victorian literature (based on three myths or fairy tales representing paradigmatic uses of hair in Western literature) Elisabeth Gitter points out the identifying function of hair for the Other:

The crimes against [the heroines of these tales] all involve obliteration of identity: their attackers attempt not simply to murder or injure them but literally or symbolically to drown them, to destroy the innocent purity that is at the center of their being . . . . And the girls, physically or emotionally silent, achieve a miracu-



lous self-assertion and self-expression. Their marvelous hair, like Philomela's weaving, talks for them, proclaiming who they essentially are. (939)

Caubvick's "mane" is a variation on this conventional use of hair imagery. The ordering of her hair into braids and curls chokes its wild power into mere decoration: her physical being becomes a hybrid of the indigenous Other and the imperial self, an ambiguous situation ultimately more perilous than the mere clothing hybridity adopted by Cartwright and Selby. After the illness, her hair, that emblem of her land and history, looks and smells "like a dead animal" (238). She is forced into having it shaved off (239), an act symbolic of both Caubvick's loss of self-definition, and the loss of political autonomy, of power over their own lives, which the Inuit suffer under colonization.

In her book, *Illness as Metaphor*, Susan Sontag delineates the evolution of the metaphor of disease, commonly used to analogize social problems. She shows why such metaphors are misleading and, indeed, destructive: "Only in the most limited sense is any historical event or problem like an illness. . . . It [the disease metaphor] is invariably an encouragement to simplify what is complex and an invitation to self-righteousness, if not to fanaticism" (85). Steffler has avoided the kind of over-simplification which Sontag disdains, by choosing a metonym encompassing but not limited to disease. The destruction of Caubvick's hair through smallpox is believable both literally, and allegorically as the destruction of the Labrador landscape and of the Inuit. Furthermore, as an example of a "natural" textile, it relates to the imagery in the rest of the text in a complex way. The "cure" prescribed for smallpox is redness: red foods, and red clothing and surroundings. Thus the ruin of the natural textile trope, Caubvick's hair, occurs in an increasingly artificial environment, defined by the layers of red-dyed flannel in which the dying Inuit are tightly swaddled (Steffler 231, 233).

The use of manufactured cloth to bind the dying Inuit contrasts with Cartwright's illness-inspired experience upon returning to the army and accepting a post in the pestilential island of Minorca:

[t]he sounds of the regiment's routines drifted into his room, distant and echoing, boiling up with meaningless volume at times, then stretching into feeble strands. The life outside seemed conjectural, unreal. He sank and floated, passed through layer after layer of matter, soft textures rolled like bolts of cloth underneath him, coarse ones he fell through for hours like a gravelly sea. (95)

In this case, textiles are chosen for conceptual malleability, not actual restrictive properties, demonstrating how textile imagery can illustrate both

sides of a binary. More interestingly, both Cartwright and the Inuit are delirious when they suffer these textile-delineated experiences. However, the delirium of the perceived Other results in their being tightly bound, while the delirium of the military avatar of imperial selfhood is couched in phrases that indicate a lack of boundaries. Just as Bhabha cites the book as that which “turns delirium into the discourse of civic address” (106), so the cloth that binds the Inuit (for their own good) ensures their manageability even as they die. And just as Steffler uses textile terms to describe Cartwright’s delirium, so Bhabha’s example—Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*—cites Marlowe’s story of the delirium of colonial Africa as a “yarn” (Conrad 65, 68; cited in Bhabha 107), the metaphorical name for a tall tale “spun” in the slow hours of mindless textile work like knitting or net-mending. In all of these examples, textiles are the metaphor deemed by the authors complex enough to delimit a non-logocentric experience.

Even before illness breaks out among the Inuit, Cartwright expresses regret for the attitudinal change in Caubvick, at the same time demonstrating his lack of understanding of the intricate intercultural alterations initiated by his presence among the Inuit. He explains that his “intention had been, after all, not to transform a few Eskimos into Englishmen, but to create a core of Eskimo allies and interpreters who could mediate on my behalf with their countrymen for the purpose of trade and exploration” (230). Cartwright’s attitude is reminiscent of the Church Missionary Society’s reasons for educating the “heathen” in India, elucidated in 1817. These Christians wanted to teach English to the Indians so that they “themselves might be made the instruments of pulling down their own religion” (correspondent of the Church Missionary Society, cited in Bhabha 106). Unlike this missionary, Cartwright never looks far enough beyond his immediate goals in order to speculate on the destructive implications that his presence as a representative of the empire will have on the Inuit. Ironically, the disease-ravaged, weakened, and discontented Caubvick is, in fact, an appropriate ambassador for empire, foreshadowing the effect that colonization will have on the indigenous populations of North America. In the book, her family is wiped out by disease. In the real world, those Inuit who survived the European illnesses found themselves in a veritable New World, one which rendered their traditional way of life impossible, through the enforcement of such abstracts as land ownership, fishing rights and other imperially-bestowed franchises. In this New World, laws developed for an

alien hierarchy assign the Inuit a position of perpetual servitude and resentful dissatisfaction.

**T**hus the cautionary tale of the destruction of the natural textile, Caubvick's hair, has ramifications far beyond the individual concern: not only is her identity abrogated in the hybridization of colonizer and colonized, but Caubvick herself becomes a sort of "Plague Mary" for the Inuit, bringing her pestilent locks back to the promised land, spreading the disease of the Empire in Labrador. Steffler characterizes the hair as lying "coiled in her trunk like a vicious animal" (257), bringing to mind the Western literary tradition of matching hair with snake imagery. The analysis of Medusa figures presented in Gitter's text further explains the ramifications of describing Caubvick's hair not only as coiled like a snake, but vicious as well: ". . . the snaky-haired alter egos of the silent, abused women function . . . as agents of vengeance" (Gitter 951). However, Caubvick's vengeance is not enacted on the colonizer but on the Inuit.

Cartwright refuses to allow Caubvick to move in with him and Mrs. Selby, the only trade that the Inuit woman will make for the severed hanks of her pestilent hair (239-40). His unwillingness to contravene the behavioural precepts of the Empire, neither "raising" the marginalized Caubvick to a social status equivalent to that of Mrs. Selby, nor killing her by throwing the hair into the ocean (21, 239), eventually results in the death of all of Caubvick's people of smallpox. Cartwright assumes that Caubvick's hair and not Caubvick herself caused the epidemic, and wonders "[d]id she take it out and put it on like a wig? Did she dance with it on? Wave it over their heads? He pictured it bobbing through the air like a torch trailing black fire and smoke" (257-8). This image from Cartwright's imagination has three important connotations: first, it provides a possible colonized parallel to the double-cross-dressing on the part of the colonizer. Just as Cartwright knows he was a soldier and chooses to lie to Attuiock, so Caubvick knows her hair is potentially dangerous to her people but, in Cartwright's imagined version of the scene, chooses to expose the Inuit to its influence. Neither fully understands the destructive implications of these facts: in both cases the victims are indigenes, not colonizers.

Secondly, the above passage confirms Gitter's observation that most retellings of the Medusa myth are not initiated by the victimized women but the men: ". . . the [female] revenger's tragedies . . . are enacted, from start to

finish, in the guilty men's imaginations" (Gitter 951). There is no "miraculous self-assertion and self-expression" (939) for Caubvick except through the doubly ephemeral imaginings of Cartwright's ghost:

It was a dream. It was only a dream that Caubvick confronted him, under water, in a blackish green light, her hair longer than ever, floating out from her colourless face, her grin already devouring him before they had touched. . . .

It was he who had condemned her to her watery jail. He had not just reduced her, made her pitiable, but had pushed her into another state, freed some monstrous power in her, that she now turned on him. (173)

This is the imaginary power that JanMohamed points out is consistently assigned by empire to the colonized Other in order to justify the oppression of a colonized population (84).

Thirdly, the description of Caubvick's hair as she dances with it—"trailing black fire and smoke" (258)—echoes its introduction as a metaphor for the industrial effluvia that Cartwright's ghost observes in the sky over England, the heart of the Empire (20). Caubvick's revenge is as complexly hybrid as her hair: her people die because they are shabby in comparison with London society; Cartwright is complicit in their deaths, because he did not force her to give up her hair; and the hair-like smoke in the sky over England indicates that even the imperial heartland is not immune to the devastating effects of colonial encroachment for the sake of trade and technology. Thus the trope of Caubvick's hair, far from representing only one half of a clearly defined, binary relationship, provides a metaphor complex enough to convey the interstitial ambiguities and ambivalences manifest in the power dynamic between colonizer and colonized.

However, that is not to say that the binaries thus problematized are thereby abrogated. Throughout the book, Steffler draws on literary conventions of metaphor in order to convey the story. These conventions do not question the cultural assumptions underlying many of JanMohamed's list of manichean oppositions: Caubvick's hair represents black (darkness), savagery (wilderness), emotions, sensuality, Other, object and female, while Cartwright stands for white (enlightenment), civilization (industrial technology), intelligence, rationality, self, subject, and male. As Bhabha does with the trope of the book, so Steffler uses the potentially non-binary character of textile metaphors to minutely explore the interface between oppositions. But the oppositions—though they may switch polarities, as Goldie suggests—remain intact throughout the exploration.

The last scene of *The Afterlife of George Cartwright* confirms this constructed polarity: when Cartwright's ghost is finally able to perceive Labrador, his spirit flies over the Eagle River, which is described as "passing beneath like a black silk scarf shot with white thread" (292). The image indicates that, despite being dead for almost two hundred years, Cartwright is still trying to perceive a technological order in the wilderness, trying to impose a logical revision on the imaginary. This impulse continues in the description of a bear which has "loose strings of water dangling from its fur" (293). But as he is eaten by the bear, giving up his organized identity to the avatar of wilderness, he notices an apparently inconsequential detail: "[s]mall ferns and mosses curly as hair . . ." (293). The simile has switched from the textiles of the Empire, produced by reason and technology, to the innate textile, hair. With this change Cartwright finally gives up the ghost, stops trying to fill the wilderness with reason. The bear's brush-like head is "painting him out, painting the river, the glittering trees in" (293).

**T**hroughout *The Afterlife of George Cartwright*, Steffler has used textile tropes, first paradigmatically, to set up a traditionally manichean pattern of usage, and then contravening the carefully constructed paradigms in a way that invests those binaries with the appearance of ambiguity. Clothing delineates difference in a rigid-seeming cultural hierarchy. But examples of cultural cross-dressing in the text indicate that the outward symbol, the clothing, serves multiple masters. The hybrid garb of Cartwright in Labrador signifies his difference from the point of view of both the Inuit and the Europeans. When Caubvick tries to make the same change in the other direction—from dominated to dominant—the consequences are dire. This is shown in the dressing and destruction of her hair, a metonym for the exploitation of the Labradorian wilderness. In a colonial world where authority recognizes only its logocentric self, imaginary power—which is all that the imperial self will allot to the wilderness—becomes imaginary, negated.

Though their desire to straddle cultural boundaries—metonymized in their hybrid attire—aligns Cartwright and Caubvick, the difference in depictions of the two remains the difference between cloth and hair, made and grown, Empire and colony, positive and negative, light and dark, logos and imaginary. Steffler takes advantage of the highly complex signifying potential of textile tropes, but in doing so invests them with binary

referentiality. Unraveling the interwoven functions of textile tropes in *The Afterlife of George Cartwright* reveals that Steffler's novel continues to project onto the perceived Other a positionality determined by the imperium long ago.

## NOTES

I would like to thank Dr. Gary Boire of Wilfrid Laurier University for his guidance in the development of this paper.

- 1 JanMohamed's theory of manichean opposition is itself rooted in the precepts of Edward Said's 1978 article "Orientalizing the Orient," in which Said explores the ramifications of the "us" and "them" mentality imbuing the relationship between the Occident and the Orient. "It is enough for 'us' to set up these boundaries in our own minds; 'they' become 'they' accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated as different from 'ours'" (Said 54).
- 2 Initially, *The Afterlife of George Cartwright* seems also to fall into the category of what Stephen Slemon calls Second World writing in his article "Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World," which he characterizes as "the space of dynamic *relation* between those 'apparently antagonistic, static, aggressive, [and] dis-junctive' binaries which colonialism 'settles' upon a landscape: binaries such as colonizer and colonized, foreign and native, settler and indigene, home and away (Slemon 38, italics in original). Certainly the character of Cartwright is placed in just such a "space of dynamic *relation*" in Labrador. However, the continual comparison of Cartwright and Caubvick abrogates the potential Second World reading of Cartwright by forcing him into an alignment with empire in opposition to the colonized.

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## Inner Romaine

Tomatoes prosper  
beneath bedroom window  
light dapples ivy and cedar  
nasturtiums crowd the small patio  
orange, sparkling blood,  
deep gold faces outdo the sun,  
a chorus of leering and leaves

Crows overhead survey busy roads  
seek breakfast between whooshing cars  
shout new finds to their buddies

Inside these walls we're tasting  
the inner romaine of our lives  
we make meals and love, wash  
dishes, our bodies, our clothing,  
savour book after book  
cringe in tv's glare  
doze under bruised light  
of the nineties—  
such flickering makes us  
feel ill, empty

Sharing songs, dreams,  
ourselves in low tones,  
this is no longer



Our brains struggle  
to travel the info highway  
but they're weary,  
our smiles tentative  
our vision cornered  
by junk mail, billboards  
we swallow pills to sleep,  
coffee to get going

There's music in our despair  
sad symphonies abound,  
like the crowding nasturtiums  
their bright little faces  
peep through a high tide  
of singing round leaves,  
at all levels  
we drown

## Coming of Age

**Shyam Selvadurai**

*Funny Boy: A Novel in Six Stories.* M&S \$17.99

Reviewed by Timothy Dow Adams

The major strength of Shyam Selvadurai's first novel is the parallel between Arjie Chelvaratnam's growing awareness of his homosexuality (an orientation that makes this central character seem "funny" to his family and schoolmates) and the political tension in Sri Lanka between the Tamils and the Sinhalese, culminating in the violent 1983 riots that led directly to both the protagonist's and the author's immigration to Canada. Selvadurai interweaves his narrator's growing isolation as he comes of age (his sensitivity to oppression, his love of literature, his flair for the dramatic, as well as his poignant love affair with a Sinhalese classmate) with his family's disturbingly complicated situation. Upper middle-class Tamils, they are neither at home among the revolutionary Tamil Tigers nor able to understand the counter attacks of the Sinhalese neighbors and employees, especially since these attacks are complicated by his mother's and his favorite aunt's love affairs with Sinhalese men.

Although the personal and the political are skillfully linked thematically, the book is nevertheless weakened by the author's choice of genre, the short story cycle. Unlike Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* or Isabel Huggan's *The Elizabeth Stories*, *Funny Boy's* individual stories,

except for "Pigs Can't Fly," are not capable of standing on their own, and yet the characters are not sufficiently developed, except for the protagonist, to justify the title of novel. Especially weak is the final story "Riot Journal: An Epilogue," which appears in the form of a fictional journal, written in the present tense in prose that reads like an actual diary rather than as a story intended for publication. Rather than using the diary format for dramatic introspection, the author has rendered the most dramatic political portion of the novel as a bland epilogue, while the sexual parallel almost completely disappears. Perhaps Selvadurai would have been better served by following the lead of fellow Sri Lankan-Canadian Michael Ondaatje (whose evocative photograph graces the cover of *Funny Boy*) and writing this story as an autobiography rather than as a novel. The author's own family situation (his father was Tamil, his mother Sinhalese) might have proven even more interesting than the fictional Chelvaratnam family's situation.

Part of the charm of the early stories, especially "Pigs Can't Fly" and "Radha Aunty," is the narrator's innocence. His description in the first story of the ritualistic game of "Bride-Bride," complete with an elaborate power struggle with a visiting cousin dubbed "Her Fatness," is fascinating and dramatic primarily because Arjie does not realize that the cousin's insults—pansy, faggot, sissy—refer to sexual orientation rather than an inability to win the game. This game is paralleled in "Radha Aunty"

with an actual bride who rebels against the family's arranged marriage by falling in love with a Sinhalese man she meets, ironically while practising for a community theater production of that classic of colonial literature *The King and I*. Unfortunately this charming naïveté becomes annoying in the later stories, such as "Small Choices" or "The Best School of All," where the narrator seems particularly slow in understanding either his growing homosexuality or the increasing political unrest that surrounds him.

By the end, the innocence that at first seems fresh has begun to cloy, resulting in a narrative style that lacks sophistication. While the early stories are filled with such specific detail that the reader appreciates the glossary of Sri Lankan terms supplied at the end, the later stories seem flat and without figurative language. A representative sentence from the first story—"Like a ship that leaves a port for the vast expanse of sea, those much looked forward to days took me away from the safe harbour of childhood towards the precarious waters of adult life"—might seem effective because it echoes the painful precociousness of a literary youth; however, similar sentences in the last stories do not suggest the protagonist's growing awareness of the complexities of life. Perhaps the promise of the earlier stories in *Funny Boy* will be equaled by the author's work-in-progress on an historical novel, also set in Sri Lanka.

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## Unfinished Business

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Linda Leith

*Birds of Passage*. Nuage Editions \$13.95

Reviewed by Rosalie Murphy Baum

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Nationalism, tribalism, feminism, environmentalism, racism, classism—a world fragmented by ideologies informs the background of *Birds of Passage*. Budapest—a city in transition—is the particular focus,

but with characters from Ireland and India, characters who have lived in Kenya, England, and Canada as well as Hungary, tribalism especially has many different looks to people craving significant contact but failing in their efforts to communicate with each other.

From October, 1990, when taxi drivers strike in Budapest, to July, 1991, when two Hungarian members of Parliament unofficially attempt to meet with Slovenians as the Yugoslavian federation is falling apart, the novel unveils (but is not confined by) the history of a turbulent period in which an interesting range of figures struggle to make sense of their days. The central figure, 48-year-old Gabor, is most articulate in expressing what they all seek: "Reassurance . . . a fixed point, a beacon." But for all of the characters—for very different reasons—any approximation of such a condition is in the past: "The present is intolerable and the future a blur of unnameable anxieties."

For the politically involved of Hungary, the difference between the past and the present is especially painful. Once united to undermine the Communist regime, during "years of defiance, excitement and sometimes fear," they now struggle in an amorphous world of ceaseless change. The romance of a noble cause has been displaced by a cornucopia of possibilities—and temptations.

Living in the Budapest of late 1990 and early 1991, an array of figures—most linked by interests in the theatre or in politics, some simply by marital status—experience psychological and physical afflictions common to the everyday lives of many people. Delving into the lives of these characters reminds us, if we have forgotten, that the probable and ordinary course of human experience remains universal—even during history-making epochs. In fact, as Gabor realizes, "The perils of the public life are nothing compared to the perils of the private."

Whatever the individual character's ideology, each is "first of all human." And ideology is but "cold comfort at night"—in a world in which each character is "lonely," "sad," "deeply flawed."

In this novel with no satisfying marriages—only affairs and "unfinished business" between spouses—all of the characters seek a home, though they may define the accidentals differently. Gabor, who flirts with images of domestic bliss, wonders "What is the best one can hope for? Convenience, certainly. A good evening, now and then." Veronika wishes "Gabor were kinder to her. She wishes Gabor were different." Alice dreams that she and Daniel could "live together happily ever after." But in a novel of change after change, both personal and national, change is described as a "foreign country," and Daniel speaks most clearly for the position the characters eventually take at the end: "you have to decide on your place and take your stand there. You can't just keep on running away." Thus, in *Birds of Passage* several of the master narratives of literature are reenacted against a backdrop of political chaos and possibility.

An especially effective touch is the reader's gradual realization that *Birds of Passage* is Gabor's, the novel he said he was working on in the opening pages. Linda Leith once said in an interview in *Paragraph* that she thinks of fiction "in terms of the enormous difficulty and challenge of saying something that is true." With Gabor the narrator-novelist we see much of that difficulty and challenge as he describes on one occasion his great gift for knowing others, on another his realization that his ignorance of people "seems boundless." The aerie is Gabor's "perfect perch." From there this "self absorbed man" views the lives of the people around him, "toying with people" (in Kalliope's words)—in the tradition of narrators from Nathaniel Hawthorne and Brian Moore.

But Leith's narrator is even more convoluted—like little wooden nesting dolls. A man so afraid of life that "danger is a god-send," Gabor does not simply adopt the role of narrator-novelist, casting himself in a small part—trying to be "the bird's eye view from the tree, the spire, the windowsill." He also merges with the perplexing Alice, declaring "Alice, *c'est moi*." Alice becomes his "disguise," a "filter" for the predicament that is his life.

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## Warming Up Bellies

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**Sky Lee**

*Bellydancer*. Press Gang \$16.95

**Hiromi Goto**

*Chorus of Mushrooms*. NeWest \$12.95

Reviewed by Guy Beauregard

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*Bellydancer* is a collection of stories from Sky Lee, and *Chorus of Mushrooms* is an impressive first novel from Hiromi Goto. Both are important additions to the growing body of East Asian Canadian writing, and both are notable as departures from the historical revisions of novels such as Lee's own *Disappearing Moon Cafe* and Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*.

Lee in particular leaves behind the historical Chinese melodrama she so brilliantly explored in *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, and moves, as one of her characters describes, "from chinatown to Commercial Drive, or 'from race to gender.'" The shift in Lee's political focus does not mean that gender was unimportant in her earlier work, because clearly her reconstruction of a Chinese female genealogy was feminist in nature; nor does it mean that complex intersections of race are absent in *Bellydancer*. Rather, with the exception of a few stories, Lee is no longer writing about specifically Chinese women. Black, white, indigenous, Mexican, Japanese and Chinese women, not to mention an alien and a dog,

all play roles in the collection's stories.

It is heartening to see Lee take chances, and not simply rework existing concerns and strategies into a formula for "Chinese Canadian fiction." Joy Kogawa, by contrast, spent a large part of *Itsuka* merely recapping episodes from *Obasan*, and her account of the redress movement ultimately suggested an inability to move beyond the characters and fictional settings she had established eleven years beforehand.

*Bellydancer* is in no such danger: its very eclecticism allows Lee to work out of fixed roles and not remain, as Seni the bellydancer does, "cocooned in the emptiness of those boxes [she] carve[s] so passionately."

While eclectic, Lee's stories are interconnected: the three "levels" of the "Bellydancer" stories are one obvious example; equally significant are the striking images and identically named characters which recur throughout the collection. Thus the paintings of Nancy Wong in the otherwise desultory story "Blooded in Brazil" have "viciously red" flowers which look like "splashes of vermilion blood on what must have been slit-mottled flesh," and they immediately recall a scene in "Nancy Drew Mysteries" in which another Nancy paints a flower with vaginal blood on her pregnant belly. Lee's images connect in original and memorable ways the acts of artistic and maternal creation which come together on the bellies of her female characters.

The "Bellydancer" stories, together with "Pompeii," show the promising strengths and eventual weaknesses in Lee's collection. In each of the three "levels," Lee shifts the point of view in order to map out complex relationships between a black dancer, her female lover, and her gay white manager. The stories are genuinely moving narratives in which characters refuse to stay in the boxes into which they were born, and endure difficulties and pain in order to create a community that can negotiate differences in race, gender, and sexuality.

The story which immediately follows, "Pompeii," ostensibly extends the tradition of bellydancing back to Roman times. Its flaky narrative, however, undercuts the sophistication of the stories which precede it. A single line such as "'Don't you call me Lulu,' I say fiercely. 'My name is Dance of the Eternal Spirit'" reduces the healing spirituality of dancing to an unfortunate, laughable petulance. Despite the care with which Lee invites her readers to make connections between her stories, *Bellydancer* remains an uneven collection lacking the focus and consistency which made *Disappearing Moon Cafe* a great novel.

Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*, on the other hand, is an unqualified gem, an engaging, original, and extremely funny account of the compromises and struggles of three generations of Japanese Canadian women on the prairies of Alberta. Goto presents the Japanese/ Canadian split in her characters through their multiple names: Naoe, the grandmother, renames herself Purple, escapes the confines of her house, and eventually becomes The Purple Mask, a celebrated mystery bullrider at the Calgary Stampede; Keiko, the emphatically Canadianized mother, refers to herself as Kay; while Muriel, the daughter and teller of the tale, is renamed Murasaki (Japanese for "purple") by her grandmother, simultaneously evoking *Tale of the Genji* and the Japanese tradition of female narratives, as well as emphasizing the doubling and coming together of grandmother and granddaughter.

Upon coming to Canada, Keiko and her husband forgot Japanese—including their own family name. "Tonkatsu," literally meaning "Deep fried breaded pork cutlets" (!), was the only word the husband could remember, so he chose it as a new name. The patriarchal implications of the *man's* agency are puzzling considering the care with which Goto deconstructs traditional, male-dominated folk tales elsewhere in the

novel. The name “Tonkatsu” is, however, hilarious and appropriate, for it locates the family’s identity outside culturally pure markers. As the father explains to Murasaki, “*tonkatsu* isn’t really a purely Japanese word” but is rather a culinary and linguistic hybrid of *ton* (pork) and *katsu*, the Japanese pronunciation of “cutlet.”

Equally significantly, the new name and cultural identity are a *food*, and thus resonate with the culinary episodes throughout the novel. If belly *dancing* is central to Sky Lee’s collection, belly *stuffing* is a crucial part of the cultural rehabilitation the Tonkatsus undergo. As Murasaki asks, “What can be more basic than food itself?” Thus Naoe laments her daughter Keiko’s “forsaken identity” in terms of being “Converted from rice and *daikon* to weiners and beans”; following Keiko’s nervous breakdown, it is up to Murasaki to dump the hotdogs and macaroni and cheese into the garbage and find more nourishing fare.

The novel thus narrates Murasaki’s search, both literally (her food shopping trip to Calgary is a particularly brilliant episode) and metaphorically, with storytelling acting as an increasingly essential source of nourishment. “Nothing like a good folk legend to warm up one’s belly and fill the emptiness inside you,” says Murasaki. The stories she tells, like the food she cooks, are not bogus attempts to reclaim an authentic identity from Japan. Rather, the numerous Japanese folk tales that make up *Chorus of Mushrooms* are modified and retold, generously, expertly, and end up providing much needed nourishment for those on the dry and windswept Canadian prairies.




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## Location, Location

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Paul Delany, ed.

*Vancouver: Representing the Postmodern City*,  
Arsenal Pulp \$19.95

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Reviewed by Julie Beddoes

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“*Vancouverism* is a technique of exploiting the city-(e)state of Vancouver as setting or backdrop for postmodern fiction,” says Paul Matthew St.-Pierre in “The Architectonics of Deconstructivism,” his contribution to this collection. Like postmodern fiction, the book is marked by its discontinuities, its lack of a controlling pattern. One imagines that its editor Paul Delany gave few instructions to his contributors; his introduction sees no need to justify the diversity of its contents. A reader, and especially a reviewer required to give an account of her reading, imposes such a pattern merely by choosing an order in which to read the essays; no order of reading, however, will be able to avoid surreal, or postmodern, juxtapositions of disparate styles and approaches. No clear notion of what it means to be Vancouver, or to be a postmodern city, emerges.

Since this is a review for *Canadian Literature*, I started my reading at the contributions by two poets, George Bowering and Jeff Derksen. Bowering’s essay “Vancouver as Postmodern Poetry” tells again the story of the poetry upheavals of the early sixties, looks at more recent poetry and concludes that nothing much happened in between. Derksen, in “Sites Taken as Signs: Place, the Open Text, and Enigma in New Vancouver Writing,” offers neither historical narrative nor definition of the postmodern but rather a theoretically sophisticated analysis of the construction of subjectivity in relation to place. This highly politicised notion of the situation of the poet in the poem, Derksen claims, motivates the very recent poetry written by members of the Kootenay School of

Writing (which is in Vancouver not the Kootenays). Since Derksen's account of the human subject is almost always one of the cluster of ideas that form around the word "postmodern," it is striking that no other contributor to the book endorses it. It claims that human identity is not inherent and independent of circumstance but always in process, produced by history and by context; the grammatical subject of the poem as it circulates in many contexts is not, therefore, identical with the subjectivity of its writer and the meaning of the poem is not reducible to the intended meaning of its writer. "The text," Derksen says, "is a contested zone of information, differences, lacks, excesses, and constraints that simultaneously mimics and produces a fluid subjectivity."

Bowering makes the individualism of early sixties the defining moment for postmodernism. "[Warren] Tallman had said that the Vancouver writing he was interested in differed from eastern (central) writing in this way—that it was writing not as literary activity but as life-living," Bowering says, and, "Subject is self, verb is writing, object is life." Derksen, however, sees the Charles Olson-influenced poetry of the sixties as a stage between modernism and postmodernism: in it the "central subject position is maintained amid the flux" and "While he [Olson] rejects the idea of a single heroic voice, Olson never rejects the heroic."

The artist is often a hero in this book. In Alberto Perez-Gomez's eulogy, the architect Richard Henriques is called "an authentic architect," "a real architect" with a "unique vision" which nonetheless has something to do with a "universal human brotherhood" in a "prosaic modern world devoid of an absolute sense of transcendence." While Paul Matthew St.Pierre resists such *demode* terminology, he nonetheless makes heroes of Malcolm Lowry and Brian Fawcett and bases his readings of their books on what he presumes to be their intentions. Many

will be surprised by his claim that Lowry was the first Vancouver postmodernist and it is a pity he does not elaborate this with a wider discussion of what he conceives postmodernism to be. Few, I think, will agree that deconstructivist architecture is what he says it is.

Trevor Boddy's "Plastic Lion's Gate: A short History of the Post Modern in Vancouver Architecture" not only spells postmodern differently but situates its arrival in 1984, with the erection of Terry Allen's monument to Terry Fox. Boddy's essay is a witty examination of how politics and cultural myths become embodied in built forms. It illustrates yet again the spuriousness of assigning dates or definitions to a phenomenon as slippery as postmodernism. While Boddy identifies the Vancouver postmodern with the "urban clear-cutting" and erasure of "legacy elements" which are usually seen as the result of modernist planning theory, his remark that "Vancouver's sense of its own history is largely borrowed, or invented in the most personalised manner imaginable" serves as an excellent justification for the highly personal "Vancouverisms" that make up the book.

All of the essays concern cultural or artistic activities in Vancouver with only an occasional acknowledgement (notably from Bruce Serafin in "Cultural Workers and Moslem Hats") of their relationship with the city as a whole. There is a straightforward journalistic account of movie-making; Rosa Ho's personal map of the city as she tours activities which "re-immers" her in her Chinese culture; articles on books, photography and video. What all these share is not so much a theory or an aesthetic of the postmodern as a location in history and geography: postmodernism is something one can take or leave; postmodernity is a shared condition.

An atavistic affection for master-narrative makes me wish that Delany had done more than mention this distinction in his intro-

duction; the issue is raised but soon forgotten in his own Vancouverism (see definition above), apart from a comment that "1973 is commonly seen as the beginning of a global transition to postmodernism." The city that is his backdrop has "a destiny," surely a most unpostmodernist attribute, despite having "become postmodern through its excessive openness to movements that originated elsewhere." It has no "proletariat," he claims, nor any longer much interest in belonging to a nation-state. He finds it useful, however, to claim to represent a mythical West in order to swipe at an imaginary East: "From a western perspective, 'national' institutions . . . are really the particular interests of Toronto, Ottawa, or Montreal—who have made sure that no such institutions will exist out here." Delany's map of the national scene is not quite congruent with Bowering's when the latter claims, "Quebec and the West are trying to show Ottawa and Toronto that it is all right to look for a postmodern federalism." Both cases universalise whatever interest they plead for into the idealised, victimised West, a rhetoric inconsistent with the postmodernist case against such ploys made so well by Derksen.

To someone living in Saskatoon, the claims of everyone from the editor of *Alberta Report* (not in this volume) to George Bowering to speak for some mythical West that does not include me can be somewhat annoying. I found, however, the most interesting section of Delany's essay to be his discussion of the conventional view that the postmodern is defined by its resistance to universals. "What is truly post-modern," he says, "is the *simultaneous* existence of universalism and particularism as systems in conflict." He points out the exclusionary tendencies of "true particularism" and the need for the "acceptance (even grudgingly) of universalist 'rules of the game'" to keep us civil with each other.

Much of this book will be of interest to

homesick Vancouverites in exile and to those who expect to visit the city soon; I found it fascinating as an example of the diverse ways in which a myth of polis (to evoke Charles Olson once again) can be constructed. This story, however, leaves a sad gap in my own narrative of the mythical nation state after which this journal is named.

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## Play with an Agenda

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**Tony Hamill, ed.**

*Wanna Play? Three Plays for High Schools.*  
Playwrights Canada n.p.

**Jacquie Johnston Lewis and Dianne Warren, eds.**

*Eureka! Seven One-Act Plays for Secondary Schools.* Coteau \$14.95

**Morris Panych**

*Other Schools of Thought.* Talonbooks \$14.95

Reviewed by Mark Blagrave

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The appearance, within months of one another, of three anthologies of Canadian plays calculated to be of particular use and interest for secondary school students indicates that a wealth of material is being written for young adults in this country, and that publishers believe that there is a market for it in the schools. Although the three anthologies clearly demonstrate regional diversity, as well as a range of writing circumstances and approaches, casting needs, and technical requirements, collectively they may suggest the role that drama is playing in the schools: a role that favours the *utile* over the *dulce* in the old formula.

The diversity of the respective rationales for the anthologies is striking. The managing editor of Playwright's Canada Press explains in his "Foreword" that the three plays in his collection came together when his editorial board placed one of the plays, *Carrying the Calf*, on its "short list of plays to be published," and then sought "other plays for a high-school collection." The



actual principal of selection was “sales figures for plays in the Playwrights Union of Canada copyscript format.” A less arbitrary kinship exists among the three plays in the Talonbooks collection, *Other Schools of Thought*: all are by Morris Panych, commissioned for Green Thumb Theatre for Young People between 1990 and 1993. Variety within unity is argued to be the organizing principal of *Eureka! Seven one-Act Plays for Secondary Schools*. The variety lies in the range of cast sizes, staging demands, kinds of authorship, and issues tackled. The unity is purely regional: all of the scripts are from Saskatchewan writers, apparently selected from forty submissions received. None of the anthologies presents a compelling aesthetic or pedagogical rationale articulated for the particular constellation of plays assembled in one volume.

No doubt, the publishers of these anthologies recognize the importance that their young adult market places on packaging. The cover of *Eureka!* shows a pensive blue-lit youth on its front, hand to forehead as he (presumably) ponders the issues involved in being teenaged. On the back, a deep-rose-lit young woman does her own thinking, while, in an inset, a pair, one of each gender (backlit by an obviously theatrical light-source), look up from their books to listen to an invisible director. The collection’s title, the editors tell us, is intended to capture the excitement of those moments of understanding (sometimes called epiphanies) “that one cannot necessarily put into words. A moment of connection between thoughts and feelings, between intellect and soul.” In contrast to these rather earnest intentions, the cover of *Other Schools of Thought* sports a colour photo from a production of one of the three plays, *The Cost of Living*, in which a young man, placed in front of a bank of video monitors, offers a condom to undressed Barbie and Ken dolls who are seated on his Chemistry textbook. The con-

tents of this collection are, correspondingly, glossier and more cynical than those of the Saskatchewan volume. A more sombre black and white photograph of a young man and a young woman from a production of the play *Thin Ice* provides the cover for *Wanna Play?* The unfortunate title of this anthology is as inappropriate to the photograph as it is to the plays inside: there is nothing childish or playful about their treatment of violence against women, fear of the future, and date rape.

The three volumes also differ in the inclusion of additional materials. *Eureka!* is unadorned by photographs, but provides a glossary of Cree, Ojibway, Dene, and Sauteaux words used in the play *Dreamkeeper*. There is also information regarding first productions and each of the authors/creators of the plays in the volume has been allowed a personal foreword to place the work in context. (In one of these, by playwright Bruce Sinclair, we learn that the editors asked him to remove profanities from his text, which he agreed to do in order to ensure it a larger audience through inclusion in the volume.) *Other Schools of Thought* includes several production photographs, as well as notes by the original designer. Given the high theatrical dependency of Panych’s plays, this apparatus is appropriate and helpful—although it does tend to reveal how little room is allowed by the texts of the plays for variance from the original performance model. *Wanna Play?* includes notes and advice on resources including studies on abusive behaviour, and a *Guide on Sexual Coercion for Educators*. Rather than incorporating photos of productions, this volume provides photographs of the writer(s) of each of the plays—a practice that reflects its provenance (from a “playwrights’ press”), but that seems to have little demonstrable use.

It is not always apparent how some of the plays in these collections would be of practical use for performance in many high

schools. Several are for very small casts. Some, like two of Panych's plays, are essentially monologues. One, *Carrying the Calf*, recommends that the production staff include "a good self-defence teacher/trainer"—a requirement that might place the play out of some schools' ranges. A few exert technological pressures that would discourage high school production. Many are collective creations, and, in their commitment to the process over the product, acknowledge that they might well be used to encourage students to make their own plays, which raises the question of whether it might be as useful simply to publish a list of suggestions and exercises to guide them through the process.

If these plays may not all be equally suited for production in schools by students, they are all unequivocally aimed at an audience of young adults. The editors of *Eureka!* express the hope that the plays collected there might "be appropriate both for production and for study in high school drama and English classes." *Other Schools of Thought's* inclusion of production photographs is intended to provide "a clear visual context for those readers who may not have seen the plays performed live." The inclusion of references to studies and resources dealing with the "issues" embodied in *Wanna Play?* suggests that these plays, too, are meant to be discussed in the classroom as well as performed. As a result, these collected plays have the potential to generate, for the high school students at which they are aimed, an aesthetic that would include the following features. A first feature would relate to the level of metaphor apparently appropriate to the drama: while there is some variation in styles, the overwhelming majority of these plays take a very literal approach to their themes; the average rock video probably requires more imaginative synthesis. A second feature would be that "relevance" and commonness of experience are substituted

for "universality." The puzzling claim on the jacket of *Other Schools of Thought* that "these plays are 'plays for young adults' . . . only in the sense that *Romeo and Juliet* is a play for young adults" notwithstanding, these plays are directly about specific issues faced daily by contemporary young people. They reflect experience in the way enamoured of *De Grassi* and its offshoots. In many cases, they are really guides to survival of adolescence and not challenges to explore, discover, or grow. A third feature of an aesthetic generated by these anthologies might be that theatre and drama are simply useful arts for conveying messages, even tools for social engineering. Panych's plays are the least overtly didactic; those of the other two anthologies are clearly plays with an agenda. Of course, no one would argue that the messages of these plays are not very important for young people to hear, and few would deny the potential of drama to transmit direct literal messages and recipes for living, but this reviewer hopes that that is not all that our high school students are coming to believe or expect of it.

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## Through a Gloss Darkly

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**James Reaney**

*Lewis Carroll's Alice Through the Looking-Glass.*  
Porcupine's Quill \$12.95

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**William J. Mitchell**

*The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era.* MIT n.p.

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Reviewed by Richard Cavell

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Reaney's stage adaptation of Carroll's work was commissioned for the Stratford Festival, opening there to acclaim in July of 1994. This text has a foreword by Reaney, production notes and sketches, and cut-out chess pieces, allowing readers to perform their own version of the *Alice* chess game.

Reaney adopts the conventional view of

this sequel to *Alice in Wonderland* as illustrating that life is a chess game, as well as the completely Canadian view that Alice has soul mates in Anne Shirley and Paul Dempster.

Alice is perhaps the least delightful character in Reaney's adaptation—there is too much thinking aloud of a pseudo-realistic “Oh, what fun it will be when they see me through the glass in here and can't get at me!” variety. Reaney appears to have felt the urge to give Alice a rudimentary psyche to support his thesis that Carroll's book is about “the growing up of a child into an independent young lady who has learned a great deal from surviving so many encounters with strange people and situations.” Reaney handles the psyches of flowers much better, the Tiger Lilies and Daisies being among the more convincing characterizations in the play.

From a dramatic point of view, it is interesting that Reaney decided not to stage the Walrus and Carpenter sequence, which, ever since I acted the part of the Carpenter in a grade six production, has always impressed me with its Sophoclean quality. Instead, Reaney simply has Tweedledum and Dee recite the sequence antiphonally, thus depriving his audience of the magnificent choral effect produced by the Oysters. The much shorter Jabberwocky sequence (which Reaney compares to *Jurassic Park*; this is a play influenced very much by classic and contemporary film) is given a rudimentary dramatization, however, with which the first act ends.

The second act opens with Humpty Dumpty, whose fall constitutes the play's “biggest production scene,” according to Reaney's notes, which would seem an odd place to put it dramatically. Much of this act is taken up with the red and white Knights and Queens, and while its last major scene is constituted as Alice's Dinner Party, there is not enough dramatic material in the scene to make it an effective conclusion.

I have often thought that the glass in Carroll's book was also the one through which the Reverend Charles Dodgson looked at little Alice Liddell when he took those now famous photographs. From virtually the inception of photography, Dodgson was aware of the photographic potential to alter conceptions of representational space—rather than seeing the camera as capable of capturing unmediated truth. William Mitchell, in *The Reconfigured Eye*, does not seem to share this insight. For him, there is clearly a before and after—a fall from photographic purity and truth into computerized digitation.

Significantly, the first plate in the book is an 1830 painting by Karl Friedrich Schinkel called *The Invention of Drawing*, which depicts a pastoral scene in which a man traces on a rock the shadow of a woman: photography likewise represents the golden age of visual representation in Mitchell's progressivist view. At stake is the concept of originality; photographs bear witness to their originals because each copy is less precise than the preceding one, whereas digitized images “*can* be replicated precisely.” (Yet it is also possible to place ineradicable ‘signatures’ in digitized images, a technique not possible with photographs.) Mitchell invokes Antonioni's *Blow-Up* to advance his argument that, whereas a digitized image “has precisely limited spatial and tonal resolution, and contains a fixed amount of information,” a photographic negative “may contain more information than immediately meets the eye,” which is the crux of Antonioni's film. But *Blow-Up* concerns interpretation more than information; by the end of the film it is not at all certain that the body by the tree was ever really there, and the visual truth of the negative remains in doubt. And there are contexts in which the fuzziness of “photographs of photographs” is precisely sought after as conveying the truth of a situation, as Brenda Longfellow achieved in her

documentary *Our Marilyn* through the use of an optical printer.

Mitchell's argument, then, would have been more convincing had he advanced the position that "classic" photography invokes interpretive closure, while digitized imaging is a more open genre, a position very much borne out by the many black-and-white and colour images in this beautifully produced book. Mitchell wishes, however, to make a moral, rather than ethical argument—that it is wrong to produce an image which does not conform to its original.

Neither Baudrillard nor Derrida is cited in this book; Mitchell's study would have been greatly enhanced had it taken into account the former's concept of the simulacral, and the latter's deconstruction of "originality." We live in a world where our sense of reality derives more from images than from what they depict, a world in which images are increasingly known digitally rather than through their originals. The critical urgency is not to reassert the "original" behind such images but to develop the skill to interpret these images effectively. If, as Mitchell writes, "[w]e have indeed learned to fix shadows, but not to secure their meanings or to stabilize their truth values," then perhaps we *have* truly learned the lesson of Plato's cave.

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## The Poetics of Hubris

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**Ken Norris, ed.**

*Vehicule Days: An Unorthodox History of Montreal's Vehicule Poets.* NuAge Editions \$14.95

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**Stephen Scobie**

*Gospel: A Poem.* Red Deer College P \$9.95

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Reviewed by Mark Cochrane

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As Gertrude Stein proves, and Sylvia Plath proves after her, self-aggrandizement is an art like everything else, and there are some writers who do it exceptionally well.

My feeling is that Ken Norris does not

belong among them. In an interview reprinted in *Vehicule Days*, for instance, Norris complains that "there's a lot going on in my work that no one has ever touched upon." Accurate or not, such griping lacks panache. Likewise, while confessing to the self-interested historiography of his editing project, Norris can only offer this flip remark: "So much for cool objectivity."

The Vehicule Poets were Endre Farkas, Artie Gold, Tom Konyves, Claudia Lapp, John McAuley, Stephen Morrissey, and Norris. In the early seventies, against the lingering dominion of Dudek, Layton and Cohen, these poets congregated in the Vehicule Art Gallery to discover themselves through concrete, Black Mountain and performance-based poetics. They are duly credited with importing the avant-garde into a conservative milieu. They collaborated on sound poetry and mixed-media projects, on music, dance and videopoetry installations. They put poetry on city buses, broadcast on cable, and performed Pound's "In a Station of the Metro" in a station of the metro. By Norris's say-so, they "revolutionized the Montreal cultural scene."

*Vehicule Days* is a collage of dated articles, poems, graphics, manifestos and other specular documents. Norris "interviews" three of the other members himself. Several essays assess, retrospectively, Anglo-Montreal verse of the seventies. John McAuley rehashes some interesting ideas about Open Field Poetry. George Bowring, as the avuncular, West Coast apologist, offers a generous memoir in lieu of praise. But my favourite piece here is "A Real Good Goosin': Talking Poetics," a group correspondence with Louis Dudek, whose playful suggestion that the work of these writers is "no better than any other transitory junk" provides a welcome reality-check.

Because what is least persuasive in Norris's self-mythologizing is his attempt to rank his group among bpNichol, billissett, David McFadden, and other *Tish* or

post-*Tish* writers who “published in the Coach House-Talonbooks nexus.” A survey of contemporary criticism fails to substantiate Vehicule’s claim as the third house in a poetry triumvirate. One is grateful for the past presence of Vehicule as a lobbying force in Montreal, but the print-media creations of these artists are neither widely read nor influential among younger poets.

Norris notes that “those ground-breaking” Vehicule Poets are “now all in their forties.” Herein lies an explanation. By their own admission, the Vehicules were united less by aesthetics or politics than by a conducive moment and creative space. Only Lapp emphasizes how fortunate these poets were just to come of age in the grant-rich seventies. Twenty years later, small presses are dying out from under a generation of new writers. From a certain demographic perspective, then, the very funding and publication of this “history,” in which a privileged cohort celebrates its modest successes, can only represent an obscenity.

Like *Vehicule Days*, but with better reason, Stephen Scobie’s book-length poem *Gospel* opens with the phrase, “In the beginning.” Like Norris, Scobie is a poet-critic whose scholarship explicates his practice. But if *Gospel* is a documentary long poem in the tradition that Scobie constructs, it also represents a test-case for the genre. Are the Gospels, as historical documents, intertextual in the same sense as, say, Marlatt’s Steveston interviews? And does not the identification of poet with persona smack of an uncommon hubris here?

Surprisingly, Scobie lives up to his conceit by eschewing irony and taking the risk of seriousness; his first-person speaker is faithfully engaged, a self-conscious but straight-faced writer of the body: “I who am The Word / agree to cage myself in words.” Immanent with paradox, Scobie’s hero celebrates the body’s text, knows its pleasures, and suffers a consciousness of its vulnerability. On the cross, this revelation:

“At last I know (King Fool) / what the body is made of. / The human body. It is made of pain.” He feels its breaking in the breaking of bread, “my words made flesh / become writing.” In Scobie’s retelling, Christ teaches Thomas “to doubt / and then to put your fingers on the truth / *inside* the body.”

The metaphoric of woodworking and the crafting of the cross echo across his life: “the sound the hammer made / driving in nails.” He relishes the smell of sap and the well-planed finish: elements in an aesthetic of “being alive in the world.” Wood is likewise the medium of his uncertain relations with his two “fathers.” Fittingly, the woodcut on the cover situates the crucifixion amid a scrollwork of shavings: Christ as a work-in-progress.

Oddly, Derridean formulae are made to contribute a cosmological vocabulary. “There is no / outside-the-text, for the text is / God.” Christ’s apostles are his “supplements,” links in the “chain” of his coming “absence.” He calls himself “the Gift, given” and “disseminated.” The moment of doubt is “always already / signed in your name: Thomas.” The Transfiguration is “the perfect sign / not shown to the world: / pure presence, the trance / figuring all, all, / with no remainder.”

As elsewhere, Scobie does a disservice here to Derrida, but the poem is not deeply damaged by false gestures of allegiance. Much as he admires technologists of language—Derrida, Stein, bpNichol—Scobie seems an inveterate humanist, micro-novelist and balladeer. *Gospel* plumbs the soul of a curious, sympathetic character in a candid and direct register. Is this deconstructive? Scobie’s Christ confesses to doubt and cynicism, but cannot work with these as critical tools. He frets that his sermons are “merely tactics,” every miracle “a kind of attention-getting device.” To Lucifer, his *hypocrite lecteur*, he apostrophizes: “Liar, / lovely deceiver. My surrogate twin.”

Scobie’s persona is a troubled storyteller

who both celebrates and disavows his parabolist's trade. There is reverence in this long poem, not for religious orthodoxies, but for dramatic monologue, narrative teleology, the fictive unities of voice. The techniques evinced are by no means apocryphal. Yet the care Scobie takes to tell simply, and to problematize the devices of simple telling, makes *Gospel*—whatever it lacks in virtuosity or subversiveness—a testament to words and the responsible forms they take.

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## Gender in Science

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**Evelyn Fox Keller**

*Secrets of Life, Secrets of Death: Essays on Language, Gender and Science.* Routledge  
\$62.50/19.95

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**Sandra Harding**

*Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives.* Cornell n.p.

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Reviewed by Dawn Currie

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Postmodern debates in the social sciences give urgency to what Harding calls the “science question” in feminism. Along these lines, feminist social scientists will find new and interesting questions raised by two books which explore the relationships between Science and the status quo, scientific inquiry and the development of a feminist epistemology: *Secrets of Life, Secrets of Death*; and *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* Both of these works question “objectivity” in scientific research; each points to differing, but useful, directions for empirical investigation of women's lives and the development of a feminist epistemology. In this brief review I shall compare these authors' assessments of the nature of the “science problem,” the status of women as agents of knowledge, and the potential for a feminist social science.

As author Evelyn Fox Keller notes, a “linguistic turn” during the past decade has raised questions about the constitutive role

of language in scientific thought and in the practice of working scientists. Followers of Keller's extensive contributions to gender and science debates will enjoy the way in which *Secrets* is, in part, an account of Keller's intellectual shift over the past two decades. As an early contributor to feminist critiques of science, Keller herself admits that the original terrain of “gender and science” has proven unduly restrictive.

According to Keller, part of her motivation for *Secrets* is “to distinguish the particular strand of ‘Gender and Science’ studies concerned with the role of gender ideologies in science, and to embed it in a more general and historiographic and philosophical pursuit.” *Secrets* begins with an overview of Keller's earlier thinking on gender and science, leading us through debates which attempt to address increasingly circumscribed questions: *Secrets* begins with the meaning of gender and ends with technical essays which explore how language works in specific research agendas of evolutionary and molecular genetics.

For me, the most compelling discussions are found in the author's more recent work on language and ideology in evolutionary theory. Here Keller identifies ways in which the principle of atomic individualism, which conveys an idealized conception of autonomy, is carried into evolutionary theory, not so much by explicit intent as through language: by tacit linguistic conventions that privilege the autonomy of the individual and obscure the logical distinction between autonomy and opposition. One result is the characterization of the biological individual as somehow “intrinsically” competitive; “as if autonomy and competition were semantically equivalent, collapsed into one by that fundamentally ambiguous concept, self-interest.” This analysis is carried into evolutionary theory as bequeathed from Darwin. The story of sexual reproduction illustrates a quite general mechanism by which the particular conventions of lan-

guage employed by the scientific community incorporate ideology into scientific theory while protecting participants from recognition of ideological influences and thus preventing critical interrogation. The net effect is to exclude from the domain of theory those phenomena that do not fit—or worse yet, threaten to undermine—the ideological commitments that are unspoken yet *in* language. Here Keller's principal point is not that scientists are making "mistakes," but that the very language on which they rely, even when appearing strictly technical, can subvert best intentions for "objective," value-free description.

In the final analysis, I think Keller accomplishes what she identifies as the primary goal of her book: to map, between language and science, the realm of embodied human actors without whom there would be neither language nor science. In her own words, Keller has studied scientists as language users. To be sure, this is an important contribution to the development of a more comprehensive feminist analysis of the science problem. However, readers looking for answers to the kinds of questions which open *Secrets* may be disappointed. While Keller may indeed direct feminists towards new understandings of just how a discipline claiming to be objective and value-free perpetuates ideologies of exclusion and domination, the gender question has all but disappeared by the conclusion of the book. From this perspective I am curious whether the next shift in Keller's thinking will move her away from Thomas Kuhn, who clearly inspired Keller's focus on ideology in language, toward developments in feminist semiotics. At present, Keller relies on the types of arguments which have been favoured by sociologists for sometime; that ideological frameworks cause scientists to see, hence speak about, the world in specific ways. While this approach draws attention to the language which scientists use, in my view the notion which pervades the book of lan-

guage as a tool leads us to the same position as feminists who viewed science, likewise, as a tool: the correction of "bad science [language]" through its proper application. As Harding notes, much more provocative questions arise when the problems of science are taken to reflect "science as usual." Along these lines more provocative questions concern the ways in which scientific language itself, as a system of signification rather than ideology, shapes the knower as a gendered subject and constructs a conventionally masculine worldview of opposition and competition.

While *Secrets* acts to sketch out the nature of bias in scientific knowledge-seeking, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* discusses whether it is "possible to use for liberatory ends sciences that are apparently so intimately involved in Western, bourgeois, and masculine projects." Sandra Harding begins by outlining why feminists want science. Taking the position that science embodies both progressive and regressive tendencies, the underlying argument of *Whose Science* is that the problem with science is that it has not followed its own mandate closely enough. Throughout *Whose Science* it is clear that Harding is convinced that current problems and debates can be resolved through the development of less distorted, less partial views of reality than those which science has produced to date. Like other feminists, Harding finds the scientific practice of objectivity problematic because it encodes the subjectivity of privileged males; unlike other writers, however, the problem for Harding is that conventional objectivity simply operates too narrowly. Hence Harding argues that traditional scientific practice demonstrates a weak commitment to objectivity: "the conception of value-free, impartial, dispassionate research is supposed to direct the identification of all social values and their elimination from the results of research, yet it has been operationalized to identify and eliminate *only*

those social values and interests that differ among the researchers and critics who are regarded by the scientific community as competent to make such judgment." If the community of "qualified" researchers and critics systematically excludes, for example, all African Americans and women of all races it is difficult to imagine that racist and sexist practices would be identified by those practitioners of science who benefit—intentionally or not—from that exclusion. As a consequence, Harding advocates a commitment to "strong objectivity": while it is not possible to entirely eliminate politics and values from inquiry, they must be included in investigation. Reflected in the subtitle, "Thinking from Women's Lives," Harding claims that women and others who have been excluded from science and who do not benefit from the status quo will be better practitioners of strong objectivity because they have less at stake than do dominant groups.

Those familiar with Harding's previous work will not be surprised to find that to this end she advocates feminist standpoint epistemology over two other contenders, feminist empiricism and feminist postmodernism. She constructs her case on two interrelated presentations: the first is a discussion of the benefits of beginning inquiry from the standpoint of groups historically excluded from the production of knowledge—"Third World" scientists and "First World" lesbians; the second is an argument that standpoint epistemology and postmodern feminism are, in the final analysis, not so different after all. I leave it to the reader to decide for herself whether she finds Harding's latter case convincing. For myself, Harding fails adequately to decentre the paradigm which she otherwise acknowledges as problematic. There is a clear sense that the knowledge generated from the standpoints she explores is a corrective supplement to feminist knowledge generated from the centre. Thus Harding's advocacy of

standpoint epistemology is both an exciting and disappointing aspect of *Whose Knowledge*. To me the problem arises from her failure to see standpoint epistemology as a relational method of inquiry rather than a vehicle for truth: relationships—not simply values and interests—are the context from which we construct, rather than discover, truth and are therefore what we need to place on a feminist research agenda. The problem I have with *Whose Knowledge* stems, in part, from its failure adequately to consider relations which underlie the construction of feminist knowledge.

In the final analysis, the works of Keller and Harding are exciting contributions to the development of feminist knowledge and thus a must read for feminist researchers. This review cannot do justice to the detailed and careful analyses which these two books present. Perhaps ironically, however, they led me to question whether these types of projects sufficiently challenge the "Western, bourgeois masculine" practices—to use Harding's terms—which they criticize. Given our (belated) awareness of the ways in which our projects as white academic feminists continue to marginalize many women, it seems to me that the most important characteristic of a feminist epistemology is its ability to interrogate the processes of its own production. Along these lines I appreciate Keller's more limited ambition; overall, I think that her shift away from larger to more self-contained questions is useful, if only for the moment. In part, this is because I believe that the development of a feminist epistemology worthy of its name must be a collaborative project: inclusivity is a practice as well as a way of thinking. What I would like to see is an epistemological project which does not reproduce traditional practices of exclusion through the tendency by white western feminists to claim "final answers" to the construction of inclusionary feminist knowledge.



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## Trickster Critics

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**Jeannette Armstrong, ed.**

*Looking at the Words of Our People: First Nations Analysis of Literature.* Theytus \$12.95

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**Arnold E. Davidson**

*Coyote Country: Fictions of the Canadian West.* Duke UP us \$32.95/\$12.95

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Reviewed by Margery Fee

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These two books will quickly find a place on the works cited lists of university students who are writing papers on literature by or about Indigenous peoples. Both Armstrong and Davidson are well-known names to Canadianists, Armstrong as novelist, poet, and Director of the En'owkin International School of Writing in Penticton, British Columbia, and Davidson, as critic and Research Professor of Canadian Studies at Duke University.

*Looking at the Words of Our People* is a collection of criticism by Native Canadian and American critics on North American writing by American Indian and First Nations writers. It is performing the crucial work necessary to delimit such writing as a field of literary-critical specialization. As Jeannette Armstrong writes in her introduction, it aims to demonstrate that "First Nations cultures, in their various contemporary forms, whether an urban-modern, pan-Indian experience or clearly a tribal specific (traditional or contemporary), whether . . . Eastern, Arctic, Plains, Southwest or West Coastal in region, have unique sensibilities which shape the voices coming forward into written English Literature." Kateri Damm, in "Says Who: Colonialism, Identity and Defining Indigenous Literature" stresses the need for this process of definition to be controlled by the Aboriginal Peoples, after a long colonial history that has imposed names and definitions on First Nations. She also notes that the condition of "mixed-bloodedness" generally provides a standpoint from which

to critique racism, a position from which, if you don't become a "crippled two-tongue" (Lee Maracle's expression), you can become a bilingual interpreter. Damm concludes by quoting Rayna Green, who says "For people out on the edge, out on the road, identity is a matter of will, a matter of choice, a face to be shaped in a ceremonial act." Janice Acoose, in "Post-Halfbreed: Indigenous Writers as Authors of their Own Realities" continues the discussion by stressing Indigenous connections to the land, to a matriarchal mythology, and to the Trickster, who unlike Christ, makes mistakes. Marilyn Dumont points out the dilemma of many urban Native writers who are expected to know every detail of tribal life: "do you reconstruct these elements of culture in your life so you can write about them in 'the authentic voice,' so you can be identified (read 'marketed') as a Native artist?" In "Native Literature: Seeking a Critical Centre" Kimberley M. Blaeser shows how most definitions of Indigenous writing fall into the trap of constructing themselves in opposition to an implicitly clearer and more important Euroamerican canon or aesthetic. Instead, she seeks "a critical voice and method which moves from the culturally-centred text outward toward the frontier of 'border' studies." The middle of the book consists of critical studies of American Indian poetry, of poetry by Luci Tapahonso (Navajo) and Adrian Louis (Paiute), and fiction, including Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*, Beatrice Culleton's *In Search of April Raintree*, Thomas King's *Medicine River*, Janet Campbell Hale's *The Jailing of Cecelia Capture* and Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*. At the end of the collection comes an account by Greg Young-Ing, Manager of Theytus Books, Penticton, BC, of the difficulties Indigenous writers face in mainstream publishing and the solution that Aboriginal-controlled publishing provides. The final piece is a detailed (sometimes too detailed) account of the

important writers' conference *Returning the Gift: A Festival of North American Native Writers*, held in Norman, Oklahoma in 1992. The collection contains both a great deal of useful information and a great many theoretical insights that will be welcomed by those who, having learned to mistrust the Eurocentric perspective, want to read theory and criticism written by Indigenous critics and writers, to get, as Damm puts it, an "alterNative" perspective.

*Coyote Country* is a study of the Canadian Western, a subgenre that tells "different stories about a different West" from the American Western. Davidson's major section headings are "Canadian Westerns: New Forms," "Feminist Revisions," "Native Affairs"; he devotes chapters to Howard O'Hagan's *Tay John*, Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook*, Robert Kroetsch's *Badlands*, Aritha Van Herk's *The Tent Peg* and *Judith*, Anne Cameron's *The Journey*, and W.O. Mitchell's *The Vanishing Point* as well as discussing more briefly a wide range of other novels, including Beatrice Culleton's *In Search of April Raintree* and Thomas King's *Medicine River*. Davidson's goal is to show how some of Canada's best writers have "inverted and subverted the basic tropes, metaphors, ideologies, gender contracts, and racial hegemonies" of "the classic U.S. Western." His use of a "Trickster" perspective derived from Native oral culture (and Native theorists) means that he establishes the analogy that Canadian is to American as polymorphous pan-sexual Native Trickster is to straight White God. This tactic (or trick?) of mapping relationships onto established ideological hierarchies is an old and often dangerous one. The danger is revealed most clearly in feminist studies of the way in which Western culture figures the relationship between "Man and Nature" as parallel to the dominant male-female gender relations (thus metaphors of patriarchal fertility, rape, and husbandry all figure in the rhetoric of

exploration, settlement, development and ecology). However, the benefits of generalizing from such a self-consciously tricky minority perspective have been reiterated over and over again by such critics as Lee Maracle, whose *Trickster* is the West Coast Raven, Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, whose *Trickster* is the Anishnabe Nanabush, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. whose *Trickster* is the West African-West Indian Signifying Monkey. Davidson is perfectly aware of the dangers (he devotes several pages to the Native feminist perspective on the issue of the relationship of the Native woman to Nature), but he is obviously convinced that the risks are overshadowed by the advantages of avowed trickiness as a critical and theoretical approach. In his epilogue, "The One about the One about Coyote Going West," he notes how Thomas King's story unleashes the power of story in a way that captures both orality and postmodern parody at once. Not surprisingly, then, the book ends with praise of the Canadian Western for being "an endlessly repeatable and endlessly repeated story of story." Obviously, the book is open to the criticism that it valorizes the tricky (aka post-modern) and the polished over the more straight-forwardly political (as Davidson's preference for King over Culleton also makes clear). I could recapitulate the post-colonial versus postmodern battles of recent years. But I won't, because Davidson is doing quite a lot of post-colonial political work in this book, despite its postmodern polish. He uses a Native theoretical perspective to critique Anglo-Canadian texts (in the face of the dominant tendency to use European theories to critique minority texts), and a Canadian perspective to critique American imperializing discourses such as Manifest Destiny. And in doing this he reveals an impressive command of the whole field, including the appropriation debate conducted primarily in the *Toronto Globe and Mail* and a range of recent Native

American criticism, often published in obscure journals and magazines. And yet Davidson wears his learning lightly; he has a storyteller's zest for the odd and the unusual as well as the theorist's ability to reveal the shakiness of the apparently solid ground he appears to be standing on. The result is an important book that makes a major contribution to Canadian and North American comparative literary studies.

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## Recovering Lost Voices

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**Lorraine McMullen and Sandra Campbell**

*Aspiring Women: Short Stories by Canadian Women.* U of Ottawa P \$17.00

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**Joyce W. Warren**

*The (Other) American Traditions: Nineteenth-Century Women Writers.* Rutgers US \$15.00

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Reviewed by Janice Fiamengo

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Two collections introduce material on nineteenth-century women writers: one an anthology of short fiction by Canadian women; the other a volume of critical essays on American women writers. Lorraine McMullen and Sandra Campbell's *Aspiring Women* brings together the work of fifteen English-Canadian women who wrote during the period 1880-1900 to create a companion volume to *Pioneering Women*, which focusses on the early nineteenth century, and *New Women*, which covers the period 1900-1920. In their critical introduction, the editors stress their recuperative impulse, stating that "short fiction by women needs to be recovered and reappraised; hence, this anthology." Joyce W. Warren, in her introduction to *The (Other) American Traditions* comments on her title that "although these traditions and the women who wrote in them have been made to seem *other* by their society, we need to see them as primary" and claims for her project an entire re-evaluation of the American canon: "Looking at the work of

nineteenth-century American women writers helps to bring American literature back into the mainstream of world literature, where it is the tradition of the insular male that is other." Undeniably, recovery work is required if scholars and students of literature are to have a fuller picture of this period, and these two texts make significant contributions to their respective fields. At the same time, however, both works suffer because, in their concern with correcting the omission of women from the literary canon, they engage problematic critical assumptions and strategies.

*Aspiring Women* includes the more familiar names of Sara Jeannette Duncan, Isabella Valancy Crawford, Pauline Johnson, and Margaret Marshall Saunders, but it also introduces the work of many writers who at present are virtually unknown, such as Annie Fowler Rothwell, Joanna Wood, and Ella S. Atkinson. The stories are arranged chronologically to present a snapshot of the two decades, and the collection attests to the variety of forms and styles with which women writers of this time were experimenting, from the stark surrealism of Susan Frances Harrison to the humorous rural sketches of Ella Atkinson, and from the gothic romanticism of Joanna Wood to the sentimental didacticism of Margaret Marshall Saunders. There is much to discover here. Annie Rothwell's "How It Looked At Home: A Story of '85" tells of the North-West Rebellion from the perspective of the women left at home, highlighting women's exclusion from official history and claiming the value and heroism of unwritten lives. Frances Herring's "Nan: A Tale of Crossing the Plains to California in the Rush of '49" presents a grimly realistic and tersely written account of the interlocking oppressions faced by a young pioneer woman. Lily Dougall's "Thrift" exposes misogynist Catholic dogmatism to scathing attack.

The introduction to the collection con-

textualizes the stories by detailing women's changing roles during this dynamic period in Canadian history, and outlining the development of the short story form. But it also inadvertently provides a faulty critical paradigm by assuming a seamless connection between marginalized writers and emancipatory writing. For example, arguing for these writers' ironic treatments of traditional female stereotypes, the editors commend Duncan for portraying "with both affection and irony the new woman on the prowl in the exotic tropics" but fail to comment on the reinscription of colonial power which forms the story's subtext. What I miss in this overview is a recognition that the texts often reinforce oppressive social hierarchies, such as those of race and class, as well as challenge those of gender. In addition, while emphasizing that the disappearance of these writers from literary history was the result of patriarchal interests rather than any objective judgement of worth, the editors fail to examine the criteria which have governed their own selections and exclusions.

*The (Other) American Traditions* is open to related criticism. In her Introduction, Joyce Warren expresses regret over the critical neglect of the authors and texts examined in the volume. Arguing for the value of these texts, she quotes Jane Tompkins that "a literary reputation could never be anything but a political matter" and asserts that "the question 'Is it good?' is inextricably bound up with other questions: 'Good for whom?' 'When?' and 'Why?'" But rather than pursuing the radical implications of these questions, Warren concludes that "[i]f each work is to carry its own weight, we can only determine the significance of that weight by looking at the work for itself." Thus Warren does not critique the institutional production of the canon so much as note that women have been left out of it; in choosing to argue according to received standards of literary value such as

"significance," she reifies the very literary judgements she is protesting. A number of the essays in the collection amount to an argument for the deserved canonical status of a particular writer. Carol J. Singley, for example, argues that Maria Sedgwick "deserves as prominent a place in an American canon as Cooper," an argument that legitimates the political judgements which excluded Sedgwick in the first place.

My other major reservation is that a number of the essays engage in uncritical celebration of the literary achievements of their women writers. Nina Baym's essay on Lydia Sigourney applauds her critique of White settlers' destruction of the aboriginal inhabitants of the New World, and also celebrates Sigourney's insistence that whites were morally obligated to befriend and to Christianize, rather than destroy, the Indians. What she calls Sigourney's "missionary perspective" receives no sustained analysis, although it is arguable that the destruction of cultures through enforced Christianizing (which happened with the support of white women like Sigourney) was equally devastating. That Sigourney's stance was an oppositional one (her poetry, Baym comments, "made public demands that at the time were thoroughly utopian," should not place it beyond critique. Fortunately, many of the essays are excellent. Deborah Carlin's article on the conflicting impulses which inform the articulation of social injustice in philanthropic literature is particularly good, as are essays by Judith Fetterley, Joanne Dobson, and Susan K. Harris. Despite unevenness, this collection has a good deal to offer.



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## Compassion & Solipsism

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**Gayla Reid**

*To Be There with You.* Douglas & McIntyre \$16.95

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**Matt Cohen**

*Lives of the Mind Slaves.* The Porcupine's Quill

\$14.95

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Reviewed by Jill Franks

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Even if you cannot judge a book by its cover, sometimes reading it affirms the cover's beauty. On the cover of Gayla Reid's first story collection we see a colorful triptych of three main characters from the stories, placed against three different backdrops: the prairies, a Vietnam storefront, and a Rocky Mountain alpine meadow. The characters on the outside panels gaze towards one another as though they yearned to know the stories of the other. Similarly, the characters in the stories long to know about others. They search for answers to the existential question: what is the experience of another who is both like and unlike myself? How can I understand the other?

Reid's style is so telegraphic and understated that her existential questions can easily go unnoticed. In that case, you finish a story without knowing what moved you, except for the wise, funny tone that populates each story like another character. On a reread, you find yourself marvelling at Reid's technique. Each story is carefully crafted to reach philosophical depth without apparently doing so. In "Listening to Music," the narrator visits her ex-husband to return some junk that her live-in lover would like to get rid of before they move from Vancouver to Montreal. The narrator is pleasantly responsive to her own hormonal instincts as well as her esthetic ones. Her ex plays Mahler's Fifth Symphony, knowing that she is particularly susceptible to its romantic beauty. As she charts the tonal progressions of the harps and violins, and struggles against a desire to bed her horny ex-husband, she "hears" the ups and

downs of her life with him and with her current lover. The harps come to represent the celestial beauty of a spiritual love that she finds impossible to achieve, while the violins, with their constant surging, represent love's lustful aspect. She is disappointed that the symphonic movement peters out, exhausted, as though it had nothing more to say about love. Her realization that she will not achieve with Claude, her second lover, the pure love represented by harp music, though he is nicer than Johnny, does not prevent her from trying. Reid avoids the potential triteness of the music/love analogy by interjecting world-wise comments that punctuate her character's longing, such as the joke that her ex's dream of paradise is an international airport where all the glamorous women are attracted to him. They are also always leaving.

There are a variety of points of view in this collection, which is ordered chronologically from childhood to death. Young, old, deaf, Vietnam war soldier, lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual—all are presented with compassion and subtlety.

Compared to this versatility and range, Matt Cohen's subject is monochromatic. *Lives of the Mind Slaves*, though funny and sometimes clever, focusses almost exclusively on the enslaved minds of lonely, middle-class, Jewish, male intellectuals. These anti-heroes are supposed to be attractive because they reflect the reader's own despair at the unfairness of life, particularly if that reader is an underemployed academic (the title refers to underpaid part-time lecturers at universities who cannot get real jobs though they have good credentials, a condition he calls "the desert"). On the contrary, the protagonists are not sympathetic, though they find funny expressions for the absurdities of life, like "love is the worst." These men are incapable of love, but very capable of lust. Their self-obsession is extreme. The character of the title story

finds that everything in his scattered existence relates to his angst, even the way a cucumber falls when he is slicing it. One narrator's self-description could apply to most of the protagonists: "With her [a prostitute] I feel like a real person. A total asshole, but without pretensions."

The title story reveals many of the faults and strengths common to the other stories. Its plot is that of the picaresque or anti-hero quest: this anti-hero, Norman, lives in a debased world (academia in competitive economic times). Despite resolutions, repeated adventures, and shallow thinking on the nature of his existence (usually induced by drunkenness), he only repeats his failures in ever more important circumstances. He meets his final opportunity—to have a loving wife, child, and tenured position at the University of British Columbia—with a suicide attempt.

A clear strength of this story is Cohen's skillful rendering of the self-aggrandizing illusions of the ordinary man. The author deftly describes his character's dreams with such absurd details that we realize they will never come true. Norman sees himself behind his tenured desk drinking a glass of beer and smoking a filter-tip. He clearly wants the status and accoutrements of the job more than he wants to work. Wanting to be a well-rounded man, Norman also sees himself becoming (simultaneously with full professor) a semi-pro basketball player known for "pure shooting" and superior speed and grace. This from a man who smokes two packs a day and drinks too much. Norman also claims to have finished a book that has been gestating for the past several years—in two nights!

But Cohen's penchant for stretching the truth to get laughs also sometimes mitigates the coherence of the story. His caricatures sometimes fall flat. For instance, one of Norman's idealized sex goddesses, Heloise, lives in a cedar mansion on the water in West Vancouver with a multi-mil-

lionaire husband and a perfect pair of twins. We recognize and appreciate the social (and regional) stereotype of rich Vancouverites who cannot stop praising the weather and the view, but just when we expect this "type" to be comically expanded, the character contradicts herself, stepping in and out of the stereotype without reason. In fact, in this story most of the female figures are sketchy; vastly superior to Norman in either their practical abilities or their moral values or both, they skate on the surface of the story like the water-bugs that Norman, in a drunken miasma, compares to "the entire human race, each locked in its own shell, each in a frenzy over nothing." Cohen's nihilism is funny, but it counteracts some greater moral message that is struggling to emerge from these tales of disaster.

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## Native Heritage

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**Ulli Steltzer.** Foreword by Doreen Jensen.  
*Indian Artists at Work.* Douglas & McIntyre  
\$26.95

**George F. MacDonald.** Foreword and graphics by Bill Reid; commentary by Richard J. Huyda.

*Haida Monumental Art* [:] *Villages of the Queen Charlotte Islands.* UBC Press /U. of Washington P  
\$39.95

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Reviewed by Bryan N.S. Gooch

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Neither Ulli Steltzer's *Indian Artists at Work* nor George MacDonald's *Haida Monumental Art* is new; the first book appeared in 1976 and comes to us in 1994, with a new preface by Doreen Jensen, in its third soft-cover edition, while MacDonald's volume (published by UBC Press in 1983) appears for the first time in paperback. Both works are as welcome as ever, and their release in soft-cover format brings them within easier reach of average wallets, an essential consideration in the process of making as widely available as possible the

marvellously rich cultural/artistic heritage of the native people.

Ulli Steltzer's work is a rich horde of splendidly composed black and white photographs taken during the early 1970s while on her journeys with Doreen Jensen, herself a 'Ksan carver, undertaken to secure a pictorial record of First Nations artists dealing with the materials with which they had been familiar for years. What emerged was not simply a book of pictures of individual works of art, although certainly there are some of those in the volume; rather, what we have here, for the most part, is an extended photo-journal revealing the human engagement in the artistic process, a sensitive and thoughtful positioning of remarkable native creativity within the geographical and social context. The brief preface by Jensen (new to the third paperback edition) and Steltzer's own modest introduction offer useful and compelling insights to the spirit which infuses the pages. The coverage is wide, and ranges from the Haida carvers and basket weavers, the Kwagutl carvers and blanket makers, the carvers and weavers of the west coast of Vancouver Island, the Cowichan knitters the Salish weavers, the Thompson, Mount Currie, coastal, and Carrier basket makers, the Okanagan and Carrier bead and leather artists, and the Gitskan carvers and blanketmakers, to the carvers of the Nass River, Stikine River, and Prince Rupert areas. All the photographs are clearly identified, and many are accompanied by short statements by the artists which reveal a good deal about social history, the creative techniques, and the mythological basis of some of the designs; Steltzer's approach serves nicely to reveal individual pieces within their cultural ethos, away from the sometimes detached and clinical light of the museum and gallery where such works have necessarily become familiar and, indeed, justifiably famous.

George MacDonald's massive *Haida*

*Monumental Art* is much more focused, for it deals only with the villages of the Queen Charlotte Islands, and the frontal, monumental, and mortuary poles which graced them are the main concern of the volume. However, here, except for a series of Harry Hawthorn's splendid 1957 colour plates of Ninstints Village, the photographs are archival, having been taken, largely, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by geologist George Mercer Dawson, Victoria photographer O.C. Hastings, American photographer Edward Dossetter, B.C. photographers Hannah and Richard Maynard, B.C. collector Charles F. Newcombe, and others. In a way, this book is a recovery operation in two senses: it provides a detailed and documented photographic record, to the extent possible, of the Haida villages as they appeared to late nineteenth century traders, surveyors, missionaries, and other visitors, and brings together in a comprehensive fashion an utterly remarkable collection of early photographs. Beyond the Introduction, which surveys the archaeology, cosmology, mythology, families, house construction, and pole design/decoration, each village is treated separately, with its own prefatory, detailed map showing house (and house site) and pole locations, and general commentary. An essay by Richard Huyda on early photography in the Queen Charlottes, biographical notes concerning the photographers, a selected bibliography, and a list of photo credits conclude the volume.

Each pole, identified by a reference code on the village map, receives specific and often extensive attention, the reader in most cases being able to move with freedom between the textual notes and the black and white plates (of which there are 278). What emerges as a result of MacDonald's extraordinary effort and dedication is an absorbing recreation of a life now lost, in many ways a victim of the white man's diseases and culture, its frag-

ments now preserved—for the astute or the curious—in locations far from Queen Charlotte shores (and for some of us it is alarming to realise how many poles and other items left the country, to enter foreign—often American—collections).

The glory of MacDonald's enterprise lies not just in the fascination of an organised historical photo-study but in the assiduous attention to detail, with which the book is replete. What might appear to some as yet another coffee-table ornament reads as well as most good novels, and it is just as absorbing in its explanatory process. And what come to life are not just the poles but the Haida society, the way of living, and the mythology and extraordinary craft which characterized the design and carving within each village. The very wealth of data does produce a number of inconsistencies, but while such difficulties can give a reader a moment's pause, they are but few in the total picture and they only surface because of the sheer delight in delving into the commentary.

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## Visions

### Randi R. Warne

*Literature as Pulpit: The Christian Social Activism of Nellie McClung.* Published for Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion by Wilfred Laurier UP \$19.95

### Clark, Sally and Beth Herst

*Big Time Women from Way Back When. Jehanne of the Witches* by Sally Clark and *A Woman's Comedy* by Beth Herst. Playwrights Canada P n.p.

Reviewed by Susanne Goodison

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Randi R. Warne's *Literature as Pulpit* is an admirable example of the results of critical interest in a wide range of women writers. Nellie McClung (1873-1951) is well-known and celebrated for her role in the Canadian suffrage and temperance movement, but her fiction receives far less attention than

her activism. In fact, her reputation probably contributes to the lack of critical attention paid to her fiction: social and moral commitment such as that evident in her work rarely remains popular after the issues provoking it pass. In this published version of her dissertation, Warne combines the approaches previously used to analyze McClung's work because, she argues, "mainstream history," feminist re-evaluations, religious history, and literary history all neglect some aspect of McClung's life or work and consequently become reductive. Her discussion of the Pearlle Watson Trilogy, *Painted Fires*, and *In Times Like These* uses these novels as examples of McClung's integrated religious, feminist, and social activism.

Warne's project is to elevate McClung as she re-evaluates her and, to this end, she addresses criticism of McClung's didacticism and of her politics. Rather than suggesting that the novels are not sermons, Warne argues that this didacticism is a conscious decision rather than an unconscious flaw; according to McClung, writing ought to "strengthen the weak, convict [sic] the stubborn, and shed light where darkness reigns." Warne's argument that this perspective is neither simplistic nor unrealistic is convincing; she shows that McClung had an increasingly difficult time finding answers to the social problems she exposed. In a discussion of *Painted Fires*, Warne argues that religious institutions (among others) need not be synonymous with social justice for McClung.

As Warne outlines McClung's conviction that every act, particularly the writing act, needs to be socially responsible, she uses terms such as "active care" which indicate, along with her bibliography, that she interprets McClung's fiction with the help of Carol Gilligan's *In A Different Voice* (1982). Warne's book would have benefited from a section which explicitly discussed theoretical works which both develop and question



paradigms based on women's experience. One of Warne's techniques is to acquaint the reader with McClung's work; while this method can be illuminating, the book is full of summaries. This problem could have been alleviated if Warne had looked at feminist theories concerned with theorizing women's experiences. In turn, such a discussion could have strengthened the point that women theorize about their experience and produce, as McClung and her companions did, philosophies of thought and action.

Warne's analysis of McClung's directly political writing works in two ways: she responds to criticism that McClung's *In Times Like These* is merely polemical by providing a very detailed background in the arguments of writers antagonistic to the suffrage movement, and she also demonstrates how McClung countered these arguments. The inclusion of "anti-feminist" material amply illustrates how McClung's work was based in response to attacks by anti-feminists (Sir Almroth Wright, Stephen Leacock, Sir Rodmond Roblin). Her arguments were intended to be politically persuasive and consequently, she ignored inconsistencies in her work and wrote humorous prose which was, at least, consistent in purpose. Warne's explication of Charlotte Gilman Perkins' writings and analysis of her influence on McClung similarly enlightens the reader as to the philosophies which motivated women activists such as McClung. Warne's contention that readers must be sensitive to ideas as well as style comes from a belief in the benefits of reading with a sense of the writer's historical place. Her book is a good and practical application of this belief, even if her insistence on "active care" becomes a bit repetitive. Although it lacks an index, the book is well-organized. The appendices that Warne includes: a guide to McClung's papers which are housed in the BC Provincial Archives, advertisements McClung wrote

for the pharmacy she and her husband, Robert Wesley, owned, examples of letters written to McClung by grateful readers, and finally an excerpt of Sir Almroth Wright's illogical and misogynist invective. These last two appendices are particularly interesting as they offer corroboration for Warne's argument that McClung was responding to women's experiences and was seeking to reduce the potency of the anti-suffragist's venom.

Warne makes a significant contribution to feminist studies in her respectful evaluation of McClung; she shows that an argument over whether patriarchy contains or is subverted by individual women writers can become an argument about whether women's rights are best served by entry into man's sphere or by an expansion of woman's. Refusal to devalue one woman's response to her situation or her definition of power is the answer Warne offers: critics are warned not "to assume . . . a normative view of feminism which sees any affirmation of women's traditional experience as necessarily confirming a patriarchal status quo."

The two plays in *Big Time Women from Way Back When* spark similar questions about what liberates women as the authors invoke two women who, like McClung, are heroines in any history of women: Joan of Arc and Aphra Behn. In *Jehanne of the Witches*, Sally Clark depicts Jehanne's life through a play about her put on by her fighting companion, Gilles de Rais; she thus makes this story about de Rais as well as about Jehanne. With smooth transitions between submersion in de Rais' play—not distinguished as such until the end of Act One—and the moments where this presentation is interrupted, Clark's play moves from a seemingly simple presentation of the clash between Christianity and the Old Religion into an increasingly complex interrogation of the nature of control, power and gender. Through a reversal of the audience's understanding of and sym-

pathy for de Rais' character and quest, Clark resolves the questions she raises and returns to an emphasis on the need for obedience to natural cycles and to continuity. In *A Woman's Comedy*, Beth Herst's recreation of Aphra Behn's dramatic career and of the relationship between Behn and Jack Hoyle has a fluid dramatic form which complements the coalescence of opposites that this play insists on. Herst's Behn is concerned with the maintenance of her artistic and personal integrity as she strives for acceptance in the male dominated theatrical world. Behn's search for glory leads her to seek entry into the system from which Jehanne stands removed. As these two plays offer alternative readings of their subjects, their inclusion in the same volume expands the range of possible models for women to follow as they confront patriarchy. The authors of all three works envision ways in which the women who are their subjects survived the limitations on their lives.

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## Multiple Discoveries

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**Rudy Wiebe**

*A Discovery of Strangers*. Knopf Canada \$27.00

Reviewed by Sherrill Grace

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Rudy Wiebe's new novel, *A Discovery of Strangers*, may take place in 1820-21 between Great Slave Lake and Great Bear Lake on or near the Coppermine River, but it is not about John Franklin and his first attempt to reach the Polar Sea. It is not about Franklin at all; it is, only incidentally, about the journey of "These English" through Dene lands and the territory of the Tetsot'ine. These men whose stories are so familiar from history—Sir John Franklin, Robert Hood, Doctor John Richardson, and George Back—are the strangers who come to discover, map, claim, name, exploit, disrupt, and move on. Those who

discover *them*, and with that discovery feed, clothe, guide, rescue, and love them, are the People, Tetsot'ine, called by Franklin and his men the Yellowknife Indians. And *A Discovery of Strangers* is the People's story.

At the centre of the story is a young Yellowknife woman known to us only as "Greenstockings," the name given to her by Robert Hood, who drew the picture that appears to have haunted Wiebe since his first discovery of her image and his first "story" about her in *Playing Dead: A Contemplation Concerning the Arctic* (1989). However, *A Discovery of Strangers* is much more than a love story about "Greenstockings," her English lover Robert Hood, and their doomed relationship. It is also the story of Wiebe's discovery of the north and his love affair with the land and its people; it is his discovering within history of many other stories.

This is not, of course, the first time that Wiebe has given us the history of this country in the stories of its First Nations peoples and their discoveries of the whites who came to explore and settle. This most recent novel has much in common with *The Temptations of Big Bear* (1973), in particular, but Wiebe's concerns in *A Discovery of Strangers*—with the north, the native people, with our collective, intersecting national histories—are familiar to us from his earliest novels. What he has done here for the first time is to dare to create the voice of the young woman "Greenstockings," and to give her equal weight with the many men, white and non-white, who clamour so loudly in his pages and who have dominated received history until now.

When he is not creating hitherto unimaginable voices, however, Wiebe is observing the facts as we know them and juxtaposing these facts with his discoveries. For example, we know that Franklin and his officers relied, every step of the way, on the efforts of their Canadian voyageurs and

the supplies provided by the Yellowknife. We know that they were obliged to turn back at Bathurst Inlet and to make their way, on foot, to Fort Enterprise. We know that many, including Robert Hood, died, and that Franklin, Richardson, and Back (the strongest of them all) only survived thanks to the Indians. Wiebe provides these necessary facts in the maps and dated selections from the published journals of Hood and Richardson that are included between chapters, in the interstices, as it were, of his story. The main narrative is carried in the private discourse of Wiebe's imagined voices, and this narrative is framed by and embedded in the myths and dreams of the Tetsot'ine.

For me the most successful of these voices is the one Wiebe creates for Seaman John Hepburn. Hepburn, an ordinary seaman who must sleep apart from the officers with the rough voyageurs, understands the British class and naval hierarchies that forbid him to see what is going on around him, let alone to speak of it. But Wiebe gives Hepburn an eloquent voice with the simplest, most direct, and most moving words. Speaking of starvation and Hood's death, he comments that: "The biggest problem is slowness: you are ready for death so long before it finally arrives . . . you recognize approaching death as a stranger whose coming grows steadily darker out of the whiteness that drifts and moans around you, and you begin to feel cold"

"Greenstockings" is an altogether more difficult and problematic creation. Although I applaud Wiebe for attempting to give voice to this shadowy figure from the past, I am finally unsure about where this voice is coming from. She is constructed as strong-willed, independent, and loyal to her ailing mother Birdseye and her proud father Keskerrah, as contemptuous of "These English," and scornful of George Back. But she is also constructed as the beautiful, eager, erotic native "other" for

Robert Hood (and the reader), and as little more than a sex object for the men who fight over her.

In some ways, *A Discovery of Strangers* is about "Greenstockings" as the object of male desire, the victim of patriarchal categories, and the contested site of male power that causes death and destruction on all sides. Wiebe sees this problem, I think, and thus gives "Greenstockings" the last word: when asked "whose child" she is carrying, she replies categorically—"Mine"—thereby denying and resisting the men, white and indian, who would take her baby with the blue eye, her daughter with Hood, away from her. But Wiebe cannot give "Greenstockings" her subjectivity or a subject position in history. As she did in *Playing Dead*, she once again escapes from Wiebe into the "arctic light" and "impenetrable" cold silence of the past.

In the last analysis, however, *A Discovery of Strangers* is a story of the north, a dialogic northern story that gives voice to the land. And on this ground Wiebe is entirely successful. In 1988 Wiebe retraced Franklin's expedition along the Coppermine River to Fort Providence and raised a cairn on Dogrib Rock. He tells us in his acknowledgements that in the cairn he placed a note with the phrase: "A Land Beyond Words." But *A Discovery of Strangers* belies that note by giving voice to the people, the histories, myths, and multiple discoveries of "the hump and hollow of island and hill and lake and the long eskers, and the southern sky burning from crimson to thick red down into the slow, sheltering twilight." This is not F.R. Scott's "inarticulate, arctic" waiting for human language to bring it into existence, but neither is it beyond Wiebe's power to represent it in some of the finest and most moving words he has ever written.

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## Matrix

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**Pratt, Annis**

*Dancing With Goddesses: Archetypes, Poetry, and Empowerment.* Indiana UP us\$39.95/17.95

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**McPherson, Karen S.**

*Incriminations: Guilty Women/Telling Stories.* Princeton UP us\$ 29.95

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Reviewed by Cynthia Hahn

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Annis Pratt, in her preface to *Dancing With Goddesses*, comments on the appeal of an inductive method in feminist (or “woman-valuing”) criticism: “. . . I realized that trying to explain women’s use of archetypes in terms of standard (masculine) myth criticism was like trying to fit square critical pegs into literary holes of another shape altogether.” This work, which adds to her prior study of women’s novels (*Archetypes in Women’s Fiction*, 1981), focuses on poetry in English in which four main archetypes appear, first from Greek and Roman mythology—Medusa, Aphrodite and Artemis, and then the more recent Bear archetype, figures representing aspects of the feminine. While recognizing the value of previous archetypal theories based on a patriarchal system of thought, she suggests that “. . . our literature is not entirely determined by patriarchy but is rather structured from a tension between our cultural and our authentic selves.” Drawing from archetypalists such as Jung, critics like Frye, mythologists, including Campbell, and feminists, from theologians to neo-Jungians to archeologists, she modifies their hypotheses as the texts suggest deviations from them. This new volume features poems by men as well as women in order to delineate the gender differences, which she theorized would take the form of contrasting approaches and attitudes to this set of archetypes.

The longest section of the book treats images of Aphrodite as the experience of feminine sexuality—the male coming to terms with the impact of a female lover on

the personality, and women coming to terms with their own sensual nature. The “dark mother” element of this goddess discussed overlaps with the extensive treatment of Medusa in the first section, and with Hecate of the third section, the death/night aspect of Artemis. Pratt states that it is easier to see these three goddesses as segments of a circle, rather than as separate archetypes, and she achieves this goal by focusing on the similar ways in which they have been reconstructed by different authors across time.

The work concludes with a look at the bear archetype. Pratt includes this symbol of power to note differences between our traditional European attitude with regard to this animal and a Native American approach to viewing bear as other than human, underscoring the need for humans to learn bear values in order to survive as a people. Unlike the other archetypes, Pratt admits that her interpretation of the bear archetype did not lend itself to gender differentiation in any of the cultures studied. In her conclusion, she states that gender differences are not necessarily destructive to a poet’s psyche (despite the perception of sameness by women approaching female archetypes such as Medusa, while men approach them as “other”) unless one sex attributes lesser being to the other and presumes a power/over relationship is natural.

Annis Pratt reminds us that “. . . archetypes are powerful psychosocial forces capable of unleashing destructive as well as constructive personal and social events.” In contrast to the traditional European and North American assumption of mind mastering nature the author has examined in over four hundred poems, Pratt’s conclusion supports the “Gaia” concept of the earth as an interactive, interdependent gestalt of life forms. She redefines archetypes as elements in an interwoven matrix comprising earth, humans, and other living creatures and plants.

Valuing literature as a means to express ethical choices, Pratt describes the function of poetry as a map for us to interpret. In this work, the writer's contribution goes beyond a discussion of archetypes as she engages herself frequently and explicitly as one invested in improving the atmosphere of classroom learning, a pedagogy of non-violence she refers to as the subject of future discussion.

Karen McPherson's *Incriminations: Guilty Women/Telling Stories* examines guilt as an important element of narration linking female protagonists to crime in five contemporary novels—Simone de Beauvoir's *L'Invitée*, Marguerite Duras' *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*, Anne Hébert's *Kamouraska*, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Nicole Brossard's *Le Désert mauve*. Women characters in the plots of these novels are incriminated and attempt to rewrite the sentence of guilt bestowed upon them. This author focuses on the narratological act of telling and on the *telling* voices in and of the text. These voices are the rising voices of women, voices transgressing imposed silence. "Silence is indeed a gendered question . . ." The script of "guilty women telling" is becoming recognized and inscribed as a kind of intertext in many novels by twentieth-century women writers, according to McPherson. Although each of the novels discussed contains inscriptions of police and law (structures of authority) and "incriminated" women, they convey four different perspectives on the "guilty woman telling" script. After identifying structures of authority, McPherson signals "criminal circumstances" (the pattern and logic of incrimination) and then discusses the articulation of a woman's voice telling. In every case, incrimination is associated with the liberation of a different (woman's) voice, and each story is in part a story of survival.

The "cries and lies" of the Duras work examined are a kind of "subversive

response to Beauvoir's controlled argument," her "Voice of Reason" that cannot make sense of itself. Hébert's *Kamouraska*, takes part in modernity by its treatment of the complex problematics of women's guilt and the letter of the law. McPherson speaks about Woolf's voice as one which has the "ability to speak beyond itself into a future it may not even imagine." Finally, Brossard's postmodern script calls into question the end of the story by speaking beyond it. For McPherson, she departs radically from the patterns of incrimination witnessed in the other four novels. Only in *Le Désert mauve* is the woman not described and objectified through another person's voice at the end; in this novel, the woman is still speaking on her own behalf, in her own "first person."

The central element of translation in this last novel underscores a perspective from which "the text is always in the process of crossing its own boundaries." This final chapter, called a "Post(modern) Script," serves to conclude study of the first four. These post World War II women writers, through protagonists who "live to tell," remind us of the vicious circularity that accompanies the woman's survival—damned if she lives to tell, damned if she doesn't. Brossard's text was chosen for discussion because it tries to break the vicious circle and tell the story differently. Appropriately, McPherson's text ends with an opening, "...some small hope for the possibility of rewriting the final (death) sentence." Her study relies on numerous quotations of the texts and of critics, and no opportunity escapes her to question both the text she is writing and the text in question. This attention to her own writing is remarkable and her use of questions makes this text a "writerly" text à la Barthes, whose "rewriting" the reader is understandably encouraged to pursue.

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## Other People's Movies

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**Peter Morris**

*David Cronenberg: A Delicate Balance.* ECW  
\$14.95

**Paul Quarrington**

*Civilization.* Random-House Canada \$27.95

Reviewed by Mark Harris

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No other nation has suffered as grievously from its too-close proximity to a filmmaking giant as has Canada. Hollywood did not, after all, seduce the brightest lights of the German, Swedish and British film industries away from their ancestral roots until those countries had produced cinemas sophisticated enough to constitute viable economic threats. In Canada, on the other hand, a combination of geographical contiguity and cultural Manifest Destiny resulted in a unified distribution territory stretching from the Rio Grande to Hudson's Bay. So far as Hollywood was concerned, Canada didn't need its own film industry because it already had the world's best: theirs.

That so many Canadians seemed to thrive in Southern California only made things worse. Mack Sennett, inventor of slapstick comedy and the Keystone Cops, was raised in Quebec's *cantons de l'est*. Movie mogul Jack Warner was born in London, Ontario, while Louis B. Mayer—arguably the most powerful film executive of them all—grew up in Saint John, New Brunswick. United Artists was co-founded by Toronto's Mary Pickford. Walt Disney, though born in the United States, was reared by Canadian parents. The list goes on and on.

By far the best-known battler of this century-long brain-drain is horror film specialist David Cronenberg. Despite repeated invitations to head south, Cronenberg continues to make movies in his native Toronto. What's more, these are *popular* movies that sell tickets in Peoria and get treated reverentially in the pages of *Cahiers*

*du Cinéma*. At least two of his theatrical features (*The Fly* and *Dead Ringers*) are widely believed to be masterpieces, while most of the rest enjoy solid cult followings. If any anglophone Canadian filmmaker can be said to have "arrived" without selling out, Cronenberg is by far the most likely candidate.

*David Cronenberg: A Delicate Balance*—like *Cronenberg on Cronenberg*, Chris Rodley's 1992 interview book—is a useful rather than a fascinating work. Film scholar Peter Morris provides his readers with an up-to-date filmography and a no-frills account of his subject's career thus far. Morris is at his best when describing the tragicomic birth pangs of New Canadian cinema in the mid-1960s—the result, no doubt, of both personal experience and previous research (*The Film Companion*, his 1984 encyclopedia of Canadian cineastes, is still a standard text). As a source of reference, this study could be profitably added to any film historian's shelf.

As a *biography*, however, *A Delicate Balance* is seriously deficient. David Cronenberg is a master of the "Sally Rand" interview, pretending to reveal more of himself than he actually does. In different guises, the same public myths get trotted out again and again: the happy middle class upbringing; the family tragedy that prompted his interest in "bodily horror." Because he is so slippery a subject, the rare openings that Cronenberg provides his interlocutors must be pursued with great resolution, and this is something that Morris neglects to do. Instead, we get so many re-heated quotations from old interviews that the book reads at times like a particularly turgid term-paper. Perhaps because no one has yet figured out how to win enough Cronenbergian trust to "betray" it with insight, the definitive account of his inner life remains to be written.

Although he is an author and not a filmmaker, Paul Quarrington's past year has

been almost as cinematic as that of Cronenberg. First he adapted his Governor General's Award-winning novel *Whale Music* to the screen, and then he published a picaresque tale about the rough-and-ready early days of celluloid dreaming. There's something peculiarly appropriate about the total absence of Canadian content from *Civilization*. American narcissism has never been receptive to heroes and themes from other parts of the world. The only thing un-American about this book is its dry, detached, almost British sense of humour.

*Civilization* consists of the prison memoirs of Thom Moss, rodeo-roughneck-turned-silent-movie-star. While Europe tears itself apart during the latter stages of the First World War, Moss tries to come to terms with a deeply repressed crime by recalling his halcyon days with mad movie genius Caspar W. Willison and weird but lovely leading lady, Thespa Doone. Making a four-part epic in the massive outdoor studio known as The World was the last thing that the narrator and his "poetic"—and decidedly unlucky—friend Jefferson Foote intended when they first set out in search of fortune and fun. Nevertheless, that is precisely where a pixillated destiny leads them after a ribald series of John Irving-like misadventures and pratfalls.

*Civilization*, the fictional feature of the title, is loosely patterned after D.W. Griffith's quadripartite epic, *Intolerance*, and not on the film of the same name that was contemporaneously lensed by Thomas Ince in the same year (Ince's movie wasn't as good as Griffith's, or as long, but it made more money). Willison's character is mainly Griffith, but also includes elements of Francis Ford (John Ford's western-shooting elder brother), John Huston and Eli Cross, the maniacal cineaste played by Peter O'Toole in Richard Rush's 1980 black comedy, *The Stunt Man*. If the novel's distant models were still alive, some of Quarrington's linguistic clues would be

libelously transparent. It doesn't take a genius, for instance, to figure out that Willison's chief cameraman Billy Bittner is meant to remind one of Griffith's famous cinematographer, Billy Bitzer, just as Mr. Inge might well be a veiled reference to Mr. Ince. There are as many in-jokes in this book as there are bawdy episodes and moments of cruel slapstick. Even the conclusion's comic left hook was borrowed from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919).

Like most successful Hollywood films, *Civilization* is a well-crafted entertainment rather than an individual work of art. Inner demons might prompt David Cronenberg to explore the same themes like a Biblical dog returning to his proverbial vomit, but no such necessity seems to animate Quarrington's clever, amusing prose. The author might live in Toronto, but his heart has already been partially colonized by Hollywood. *Civilization* would probably make an excellent movie—providing, of course, that it *wasn't* directed by a Canadian.

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## Firework

**D.M.R. Bentley**

*Mimic Fires: Accounts of Early Long Poems on Canada.* McGill-Queen's \$49.95

Reviewed by Tim Heath

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By sheer breadth of its chronological sweep, let alone its wealth of research and erudition, D.M.R. Bentley's *Mimic Fires* is an indispensable and essential work on early long poems on Canada. Framed by an introductory chapter and a conclusion, the discussion moves with meticulous care from Henry Kelsey's "Now Reader Read . . ." of the 1690s to Archibald Lampman's *The Story of an Affinity* in 1894. By devoting one chapter to each long poem (eighteen in all) from the two hundred year interval that constitutes his study, Bentley manages an

uncommonly even treatment of each poem. The result is a book more than 300 pages long, that for all its scope escapes the superficiality of a survey. Although a good deal of the material will look familiar to those well-acquainted with Bentley's work, *Mimic Fires* is a careful and authoritative distillation of years of work on early Canadian poetry. Beyond refining prior work Bentley introduces new and different material that strengthens his treatment of individual poems. New material includes consistent attention to the ways in which many early poets feminized the landscape they described poetically. This attention to "voyeuristic eroticism" is particularly helpful in pointing out a largely unexamined undercurrent in descriptive poetry, typically conceived of as rather uninteresting and conventional. Other new material is found in chapter thirteen, which treats Standish O'Grady's *The Emigrant*, a poem that Bentley's previously published work has not examined in detail. The title of the volume, taken from the final lines of Thomas Cary's *Abram's Plains*, is iconic of Bentley's approach to early Canadian long poems. Cary's "mimic fires" refers to fireflies and the way in which they seem to imitate lightning (the allusion itself, Bentley notes, is from Jonathan Carver's 1778 *Travels through North America*). Bentley takes Cary's metaphor to refer to the "small but bright colony on the St. Lawrence, as well as, perhaps, a metaphor for his [Cary's] own 'mimic' yet distinctive poetic efforts."

Bentley maintains that early poetry in Canada is less about invention and more about transplantation and adaptation of British models. The most vivid advancement of this thesis is found in his discussion of J. Mackay's poem *Quebec Hill*. Remarking on the fusion of travel writing and English poetry that form the intertextual web of *Quebec Hill* (and many other poems) Bentley envisions a paradigmatic

scene of composition in colonial Canada: "the poet with some engaging travel accounts open to his left and some admired English poems open to his right. This is the primal scene, the site of verbal intercourse which, in Cornwall Bayleys's phrase, 'Gives birth to song' on Canada." Bentley's ability to elucidate the prose (especially travel writing) and the poetry that shaped much early Canadian verse yields a rich matrix of discussion that considers both the ideological and the formal elements of these early poems. Consequently, every work, from Henry Kelsey's within the "residually feudal" system of the Hudson's Bay Company, to Isabella Valancy Crawford's Victorian and "languorously sensual—indeed, sexual" verse, is placed within its larger cultural and literary framework, a task which few critics are able to accomplish.

For all the strength of *Mimic Fires*, it is possible to have some reservations about the book. In places, Bentley so compresses his argument that without a working knowledge of the many parenthetical citations made, the argument becomes cryptic. On the other hand, the density of discussion in the book demonstrates that early poetry in and on Canada is becoming an increasingly intricate field of literary inquiry. The book is slightly marred by the absence of any organizing scheme save sheer chronology; however, the historical overview of chapter one does somewhat alleviate this difficulty in part.

A word of caution should be noted here: *Mimic Fires* is not a trendy book nor is its methodology fashionable. Nevertheless, *Mimic Fires* is a remarkable volume of original criticism that no one who is interested in early Canadian long poems should be without.





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## Types & Functions

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**Hans Ulrich Seeber, ed.**

*Englische Literaturgeschichte*. Metzler DM 45.00

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**Barbara Korte**

*Körpersprache in der Literatur: Theorie und Geschichte am Beispiel englischer Erzählprosa*.

Francke DM 86.00

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Reviewed by Gabriele Helms

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An understanding of a dynamic relationship between past and present informs Hans Ulrich Seeber's remarkable second edition of *Englische Literaturgeschichte*. History, according to Seeber, needs to be constructed and narrated over and over again because different generations view and interpret the world differently. Chronological order is probably the only reminder of traditional literary histories; this volume accounts for many parallel developments and centrifugal cultural forces that constitute English literary history without imposing one coherent, teleological version. Moreover, the contributors frequently reflect on the problematic process of periodization, recognizing that descriptive labels do not reflect an objective reality but are retrospective constructions that create a sense of coherence for the reader.

Seeber explains in his preface that literature reflects, interprets, and comments upon social and cultural changes, and thereby contributes to them at the same time—a perspective in line with the insights of 'New Historicism.' A preoccupation with the social roles of literature demands the consideration of 'extraliterary' contexts because literature is only one element in a complex net of mutual influencing discourses that constitute historical reality. The "Modernisierungstheorie" (theory of modernization) is used throughout to focus the complex interactions of social and intellectual history.

Carefully composed chapters ensure that the accumulated information never over-

whelms the reader. Thanks to a total of seven contributors (Stephan Kohl, Eberhard Kreutzer, Annegret Maack, Manfred Pfister, Johann N. Schmidt, Hans Ulrich Seeber, and Hubert Zapf), chapters differ stylistically but also in their organization. The authors have been allowed to set different priorities, be self-reflexive, and organize their chapters according to genres, phases of development, or issues. Variety, a language that is free from unnecessary jargon as well as a large number of reproductions of paintings, book illustrations, portraits, photos of theatre performances and so on ensure that this literary history remains readable and captivating throughout. You may want to read it from cover to cover or focus on individual chapters; either way this literary history will stimulate readers' appetites for more.

Especially the final chapter on Commonwealth Literature should be treated as such an appetizer. In his preface, Seeber recognizes the importance of English literatures outside of Great Britain and is particularly interested in the continuing dynamics between these literatures since the beginning of decolonization. Consequently, Kreutzer attempts the difficult task of situating "commonwealth literature," outlining some of its central concerns and developments, while also reflecting on his own undertaking. In this context, English-Canadian writing is discussed as the literature of a settler colony. While any such discussion has to be limited, and tokenism is a constant danger, Kreutzer manages to discuss Canadian literature, albeit briefly, in terms of its relationship to the United States, its search for a national identity, literary regionalism, women's literature, and trends of multiculturalism and minority literatures. Finally, Seeber's *Englische Literaturgeschichte* is not only a highly informative, useful, and engaging literary history but its reasonable price makes it affordable for students,

teachers, and any other interested readers.

While non-verbal communication (NVK) has attracted much attention in various disciplines and art forms over the last few decades, literary critics have only begun to modify their terminology and methodology in order to determine the characteristics of literary body language. In *Körpersprache in der Literatur* Barbara Korte argues that the semiotics of the body deserve attention as a crucial “künstlerisches Gestaltungsmittel” (artistic device) of the literary text. While her primary goal is to provide a heuristic model for the systematic analysis of literary body language (limited to the semiotics of the moving body, thus excluding aspects of physiognomy and so on), she also presents a diachronic view of selected British and Irish fiction to show how and in relation to what contexts body semiotics in the novel have changed.

According to Korte, body language in literature is actualized by readers on the basis of what they know about types and functions of everyday NVK and their understanding of its specifically literary forms. Therefore, her model consists of two parts: first, she delineates a closed system of categories to describe NVK in terms of its modus (kinetic, haptic, proximity), function, and communicative framework. The second part provides a repertory of questions to determine the literariness of body language; these questions consider its semiotic status, presentation, its role in the text and the overall aesthetic concept, and the influence of genre and period conventions as well as authorial idiosyncrasies.

As Korte carefully develops a detailed model for the analysis of literary NVK, she provides numerous examples and extensive quotations to illustrate her points. Moreover, she intersperses frequent summaries and helpful diagrams. In this second part of *Körpersprache in der Literatur*, Korte shows convincingly that her analytic model can enable readers to view many familiar

texts from a new perspective (with sometimes surprising results) and be more methodical and terminologically precise in their analyses. Margaret Atwood’s novels, for instance, repeatedly figure as examples here. Korte’s comments about *The Handmaid’s Tale* are especially intriguing; by focusing on the depiction of Offred’s body language and her concern that her unconscious movements may betray her non-conformist attitudes, Korte is able to show the crucial role of non-verbal communication (and its repression) in a totalitarian system.

In the third part of her study, Korte examines approximately eighty British and Irish novels from the Renaissance to the present. Although she cannot present a comprehensive history of literary body language, her observations are insightful and will hopefully invite more detailed studies especially in the context of cultural studies. Korte’s final consideration of other contexts with which literature interacts reinforces the notion that literature and literary body language can only be understood in an interdisciplinary framework that recognizes the social function of literature.

*Körpersprache in der Literatur* is Korte’s slightly modified German habilitation thesis. That her highly theoretical and methodologically oriented study remains reader-friendly is one of Korte’s major achievements. This thoroughly researched volume is an important contribution to literary studies because it presents an analytical model that will enable critics to recognize the significance of NVK in literature, approach its analysis systematically, and communicate their results in an intersubjective manner.



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## Essays

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### John Metcalf

*Freedom from Culture: Selected Essays 1982-92.*  
ECW \$17.95

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### David Carpenter

*Writing Home: Selected Essays.* Fifth House \$14.95  
Reviewed by Catherine Hunter

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In *Freedom from Culture*, John Metcalf is at his best when writing about writing and at his worst when writing about politics. Several of the essays in this collection display his keen attention to minute elements of style, as he analyzes the work of Alice Munro, Rudy Wiebe, Rohinton Mistry, and even John Metcalf. His first essay, "Lieutenant Lúkas's Cat," provides a glimpse of the writer himself, struggling with usage and tone and the subtle connotations of various synonyms. This essay is remarkable for its depiction of writing *as work* and for its vivid evocation of the artist as a young man, favouring the sounds and texture of his favourite words.

Metcalf can be brilliant when examining diction, syntax and prose rhythms, but he is not so impressive when he turns his hand to logical argument. His 1987 pamphlet *Freedom from Culture* is reprinted here, along with a postscript entitled "Three Cheers for Yogurt." In this pair of essays, Metcalf offers numerous weak arguments for the abolition of state support to the literary arts. As one wades through these pages in search of a premise, one becomes rather suspicious. How is it that a man who can write fiction with such meticulous precision can pay so little attention when constructing an argument? The structure of Metcalf's logic is difficult to determine, but it seems to run as follows: *Government funding inhibits excellence. Anything that inhibits excellence should be abolished. Therefore, government funding should be abolished.* The only difficulty in countering this argument is deciding where to begin.

First of all, Metcalf never properly defines the term "excellence" (though he attacks the Canada Council for the very same flaw). Instead, he appeals to the vague notions of a "natural" audience, "common sense" and "common experience." These categories are so fuzzy that they are virtually meaningless. Where has Metcalf's craftsmanlike concern with diction flown? Admittedly, his vagueness is not quite enough to conceal his meaning entirely. When he holds up "artistically-inclined Inuit single mothers" as figures of ridicule, for example, one can guess that his own "common experience" does not include any such persons.

Secondly, even if "excellence" were not problematic, Metcalf offers no convincing evidence to prove that government funding inhibits it. He resorts to false analogy, comparing the state of publishing in Canada to that in Britain. He contradicts himself, claiming for example that if subsidies are abolished, "books will be better because each one will be the result of someone parting with hard-earned money." Yet there is no evidence that the spending of money leads to "better" books—in fact, Metcalf's whole argument seems to be based on the very notion that it *doesn't*—nor is there any evidence that the money spent will be "hard-earned." Metcalf complains that subsidies have produced too much literature, and in his most illogical moment, he offers the argument that the very abundance of Canadian literature is bad because it hampers the recognition of excellence: "The spate of books pouring from the subsidized presses makes it increasingly difficult to discriminate." One wonders how this leap was made. The sentence suggests that readers' main concern is whether or not they can "discriminate." Perhaps Metcalf believes that writers should be concerned with making things easy for critics? Surely not. Perhaps he simply realizes that the fewer books there are, the less competition

there will be—less chance that a customer, bewildered by the sheer number of titles on the shelf, might pick up a book by that Inuit single mother instead of one by John Metcalf?

Ultimately, the worst flaw in Metcalf's logic is that it rests on a false dichotomy. Metcalf presents some legitimate criticisms of Canada Council bureaucracy, but he assumes only two possibilities: the present state of affairs or the abolition of state funding for the literary arts. There are doubtless a multitude of other alternatives, and if Metcalf could hone his argumentative skills, he just might convince some of us of one of them.

David Carpenter's *Writing Home* is an eclectic mix, ranging from personal reflection to literary criticism, but the best essay in this collection is a combination of both modes. "Nomme de Plume" recounts Carpenter's relationship with the French Canadian writer Georges Bugnet. This is a first-class piece of writing, full of warmth, humour, intelligence, and charm.

In 1972, assuming Bugnet dead, Carpenter searches for persons who might have known him. At a Catholic nursing home north of Edmonton, he is surprised to discover that a Georges Bugnet is in residence there, although the Sisters have no idea that he is an author. The scene in which the young graduate student approaches the elderly writer's bed is a delicate one, and Carpenter handles the dramatic meeting with an appropriately subtle touch:

I walked into a small dim room with a bunk bed and a tiny desk. The room smelled strongly of pipe tobacco. A short man with a scraggly white beard was lying on the bed.

"Are you Georges Bugnet?" I said.

"Yes," he said.

"Georges Bugnet, the *writer*?"

It was the old man's turn to look incredulous. He sat up in his bunk. "You have read my books?" he said.

Bugnet at this moment is 92. He survives another ten years, to see Carpenter's translation of his novel *La Forêt*, and to be granted an honorary doctorate by the University of Alberta. When Carpenter translates Bugnet's word *maudit* as "GOD-DAMNED," Bugnet's elderly daughters, outraged by the blasphemy, begin a campaign against him. As a result, Carpenter has to appear at the University ceremony under an assumed name. The anecdote is hilarious, and Carpenter manages to narrate it all with gentle irony and an admirable absence of arrogant posturing.

In his introduction to this collection, Carpenter laments the status of the essay in contemporary literature: "It's an undervalued form, a misunderstood genre with a bad rap." "Nomme de Plume" goes a long way toward reversing that unfortunate reputation.

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## Indispensable Companion

Cathy N. Davidson and Linda Wagner-Martin, eds.

*The Oxford Companion to Women's Writing in the United States.* Oxford US \$59.95

Reviewed by Eva-Marie Kröller

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*The Oxford Companion to Women's Writing in the United States* is one of those books that make one wonder how one ever got along without them. Conscientiously edited, this more than 1000-page tome brings together a mass of information. Long entries on ethnic groups such as Americans of African, Asian, Latin, and Native descent are complemented by equally comprehensive articles on historical, legal, and social developments. The editors have taken great care to document the diversity of women's literary lives and to respect conflicting positions by granting separate entries to as many of these as possible. There are for instance entries on bi-

sexuality, heterosexuality, and lesbianism, as well as pieces on androgyny, cross-dressing, and transsexuality; Asian-American writers receive a collective overview but also special entries under Japanese, Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese-Americans, and under specific names.

Furthermore, the *Companion* features articles on literary genres and publications of particular interest to women writers, such as biographies and autobiographies, diaries and journals, as well as etiquette books, marriage manuals and women's journals.

If the coverage is catholic, the individual entries are not always equally so. As is common in such reference works, the quality of the entries varies, and it is probably an honest thing for the editors to have drawn attention to the subjective nature of such an enterprise by leaving some of the tonal differences intact. As a result, some pieces adopt the dispassionate style of a reportage while others are opinionated, judgemental, and even hectoring in tone (thus demonstrating female "ranting," an activity which, slyly enough, receives a separate entry). The entry on fashion is singularly humourless, pronouncing categorically that "a woman's regard for accoutrements rarely constitutes a litmus test for character, and women writers usually avoid an either/or attitude toward fashion, acknowledging its double-edged effect on women's lives," a conclusion that is arguably more prescriptive than descriptive. While this excerpt is at least clear, other articles practice academe of the most constipated sort. Only someone who has never attended an international Joyce conference could suggest that "since she has elected to ally herself, however marginally, with the predominantly white male community, the feminist critic working on a canonical male writer also finds her access to the emerging power structure of gynocriticism problematic." The entries on "bisexuality," "heterosexuality," "lesbianism," and "sexualities" all

come from the same author; the entry on "heterosexuality" reads like an extension of the preceding piece on "heterosexism" and with its numerous cross-references to "racism," "classism," "prostitution" and other terms barely constitutes a recognizably defined term. This is, of course, a point which the author who suggests that "heterosexuality is both the least adequately theorized and the most highly visible sexuality in American literature" may wish to underline, but the result is still disquietingly one-sided.

Ironically, given its alleged centrality, heterosexuality seems to be less well served in this book than the other sexualities. The entries related to lesbianism, for instance, cover a full range of expression, including popular culture phenomena such as "Lesbian Pulp Fiction" in addition to "Lesbian Feminism," "Lesbian Herstory Archives," "Lesbian Literary Theory," "Lesbian Publishing Outlets," "Lesbian Separatism," and "Lesbian Writing" (a 12-page entry). There is no comparable entry on (and context for) mainstream pulp fiction ("Romance Novels" does not take adequate account of the genre), and articles related to it, such as the one on "fashion," tend to adopt a somewhat dismissive attitude to popular romance. Also pervasive is an elitist attitude when it comes to contemporary theory, although the article on "poststructuralism" faithfully records multiple resistances to it. The views of leading theorists such as Gayatri Spivak are nevertheless reviewed uncritically, whereas older feminists receive somewhat patronizing coverage for engaging in the all-too-basic work of establishing taxonomies. The Canadianist will find a great deal of interest here, ranging from entries on Pauline Johnson and Bharati Mukherjee, to material on Sylvia Fraser, Joy Kogawa, Sky Lee, and the ubiquitous Margaret Atwood scattered throughout; an alphabetical index helps to locate these easily.

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## L'art de la nouvelle

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**Jean-Pierre Boucher**

*Le recueil de nouvelles.* Fides n.p.

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**Luc Asselin**

*Guerre.* L'Hexagone \$19.95

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**Lori Saint-Martin**

*Lettre imaginaire à la femme de mon amant.*

L'Hexagone \$15.95

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**Micheline Lafrance, ed.**

*Nouvelles de Montréal.* Typo n.p.

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Reviewed by André Lamontagne

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On sait la ferveur que connaît présentement la nouvelle: on l'explique par notre époque à la temporalité morcelée, par l'impossibilité d'une vision du monde unifiée. Si dans le contexte québécois, cet essor se mesure à l'accroissement du nombre de titres, à leur qualité ainsi qu'à la diversité des lieux de publication, le discours méta-critique sur le sujet demeure embryonnaire.

L'ouvrage de Jean-Pierre Boucher constitue un apport important en ce qu'il traite un sujet très largement ignoré par la critique: la dynamique du recueil de nouvelles. Plutôt que d'étudier individuellement chaque texte, l'auteur les interprète en fonction de l'ensemble tout en abordant les questions théoriques que soulève cette poétique ouverte. L'étude se concentre sur le recueil-ensemble, sous-genre qui traduit la volonté de construire un tout cohérent et où chaque nouvelle a un rôle et une place déterminés. Ainsi, dans le chapitre consacré aux recueils à nouvelle éponyme, Boucher compare les deux éditions du *Torrent* d'Anne Hébert et montre comment l'ajout de nouveaux textes modifie non seulement la structure globale, mais aussi la signification de chacune des nouvelles. Cette intertextualité interne peut prendre différents aspects, comme l'illustre l'analyse de textes de Gabrielle Roy, Adrienne Choquette, Madeleine Ferron, Alain Grandbois et Claire Martin. L'examen des nombreux possibles narratifs

qu'offre un recueil, pour prendre cet exemple particulièrement intéressant, révèle comment la peur de l'amour se conjugue à la peur du je dans *Avec ou sans amour*. Parmi les nombreux mérites de l'ouvrage, il faut encore mentionner l'attention que l'auteur attire sur des textes moins connus, tel que *Maria de l'Hospice* de Madeleine Grandbois, et la relecture stimulante qu'il fait de textes au statut ambigu, comme *Les Roses sauvages* de Ferron et *La Scouine* d'Albert Laberge.

Si je retiens la classification proposée par Boucher, seul *Guerre*, parmi les trois recueils ici recensés, constitue un véritable recueil-ensemble. Les nouvelles de Luc Asselin, que coiffe un titre original, sont disposées de façon à établir une chronologie de la guerre à travers les siècles. Depuis l'assiégé d'Orléans qui va quérir Jeanne d'Arc à la cour jusqu'au soldat qui s'embarque sur les toits au retour du Vietnam, en passant par un tambour qui voit son seigneur déshonoré lors de la Guerre de Trente ans ou un conscrit canadien-français qui tue ses officiers pendant la Première Guerre mondiale, les acteurs de ces différents drames se font écho pour témoigner, au-delà du temps, d'une certaine immuabilité de la condition humaine. C'est dans le dévoilement de l'individualité, de l'altérité qui se cache derrière le mouvement collectif de la guerre que réside la signification et le grand intérêt du recueil. Par une stylisation réussie, des choix narratifs pertinents et un réseau thématique complexe, l'auteur parvient, malgré quelques accrocs au rythme de la nouvelle, à créer un univers fictionnel d'une grande richesse.

Les dix-huit nouvelles que Lori Saint-Martin consacre au triangle amoureux forment de toute évidence un recueil thématique, même si la moitié des textes ont été publiés indépendamment. La grande unité de ce recueil repose moins sur la donnée initiale (deux femmes aiment le même homme) que sur le geste subversif

que suggère la nouvelle éponyme: le décloisonnement des murs que l'homme dresse entre l'épouse et l'amant. La modernité de *Lettre imaginaire à la femme de mon amant* est là, dans cette prise de parole de l'autre, dans l'ouverture du discours amoureux aux différents points de vue. Certes ce premier recueil de Lori Saint-Martin n'est pas sans défauts: l'emploi répété de la structure en contrepoint (amante/épouse; femme/homme; présent/ passé) devient lassant, sans compter que l'écriture date parfois un peu dans sa description complaisante des intérieurs bourgeois. Mais il faut surtout dire l'ironie du quotidien et les petites fins tièdes qui se substituent aux dénouements dramatiques, comme dans "Une femme, seule" et "Le coeur de la neige." Ce lyrisme désabusé cautionne le retour du sujet et de l'intime qui caractérise la nouvelle écriture québécoise.

Autre recueil thématique, *Nouvelles de Montréal* est un collectif auquel ont collaboré trente écrivains qui sont nés ou qui vivent à Montréal. Cette entreprise s'inscrit dans un vaste mouvement de réappropriation littéraire de la ville qui a donné lieu depuis quelques années à divers écrits et projets, tels que "Montréal des écrivains" et "Montréal imaginaire." Le vaste choix de textes et l'ordre choisi par Micheline LaFrance révèlent plusieurs villes dans une: le Montréal qu'on traîne dans ses bagages (Francine D'Amour, Denise Boucher), le Montréal qu'on retrouve en défaisant ses valises (Hélène Rioux), le Montréal des événements qui ne peuvent que se produire là (Jean-Paul Daoust, André Major, Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska), le Montréal des rencontres (Claire Dé, Louise Desjardins, Daniel Gagnon), le Montréal des femmes (Lise Gauvin, Louise Maheux-Forcier, France Théoret) et, bien entendu, le Montréal hanté par Émile Nelligan (Hugues Corriveau, Louise Desjardins). Cette énumération ne rend pas justice à tous les auteurs, pas plus qu'elle ne traduit la riche

gamme de registres qui traverse le recueil, entre le réalisme et l'étrangeté du quotidien inspirée de la littérature latino-américaine. Trente ans après le discours de fondation de *Parti Pris*, pareille diversité stylistique et urbaine témoigne de la nature désormais plurielle de la littérature québécoise. Ville hétérogène, ville fragmentée et schizophrène, Montréal est le lieu tout désigné de la nouvelle. A l'image du Québec.

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## Canadian "Posts"

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**Gillian Whitlock and Helen Tiffin, eds.**  
*Re-Siting Queen's English: Text and Tradition in Post-Colonial Literatures.* Rodopi \$35.00

**Theo D'haen and Hans Bertens, eds.**  
*Postmodern Fiction in Canada.* Rodopi \$20.50

Reviewed by Jennifer Lawn

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The seventh title in Rodopi's Cross/Cultures series offers several nifty puns. "Re-Siting" adds a geographical twist to the refusal of self-identity and origin conveyed by the Derridean notion of "reciting." The book is also a festschrift for John Matthews, who taught Commonwealth Literature at Queen's University for many years and acted as thesis supervisor for the fifteen contributors to the volume. In a personal note Bruce Nesbitt chronicles Matthews's diverse life experiences; appendices list Matthews's publications and the seventy-eight MA and PhD theses supervised by him at Queen's.

Matthews has thus founded a considerable empire of academic minds which, like colonies, show evidence of common influence within diversity. In general, the contributors write lucidly, appeal to continental literary theory in muted fashion if at all, avoid the intense self-reflexivity now associated with post-colonial studies, and prefer close readings and literary surveys to historical or materialist analysis—with the unfortunate consequence that the

dynamics of racism, a key interest of post-colonial theory, disappear from view in many of the essays. Whitlock's fine essay on gender, race, and genre in life-writing by Mary Prince, Catharine Parr Traill, and Susanna Moodie provides an exception: Whitlock compares masculine access to the autobiographical "I" with Prince's efforts to establish her own authority and Moodie's "discontinuous subject position—slippery and ill-shod."

The volume offers geographical and historical spread, but omits Asian literatures; Canadian and Australian settler literatures figure strongly, including two essays comparing Australian and Canadian versions of nationalism. Terry Goldie analyses the nationalist rhetoric of two periodicals in the decades prior to World War Two, *Canadian Forum* and *The Publicist*; he briefly develops P. R. Stephenson's 1936 comment that "the nation [is] an extension of the ego," a nod towards psychoanalysis which begs further elaboration (perhaps with reference to Bhabha, Kristeva, or Zizek). Adam Shoemaker's article surveys regionalism, settler attitudes to land, and government multicultural policy, concluding that "the search for national identity may matter more than the elusive concept itself."

Two pieces depart from the impersonal cautiousness of standard academic papers, and remind us that personal writing brings risks precisely because it is excruciating to read if badly performed. Inspired by the "revolutionary," cyclical structure of *Ana Historic*, Stan Dragland creates his own circumambulatory criticism, in an essay memorialized by the ostensible occasion of its composition ("I am writing this on the day of the annual Take Back the Night March"—one pictures a throng of gesticulating women crowding past his window as he meditates on male violence). Like Marlatt's novel, this essay is both piecemeal "book of interruptions" and redemptive narrative, for Dragland implicitly births

himself as a feminist in the course of his paper. Under the penultimate subheading "O" he pronounces his "hypersexual [*sic*] . . . fascination with the cunt" and confesses his previous hebetude (he did not initially find the Freudian notion of penis envy ridiculous). Dragland does manage some convincing readings, including analysis of the "gothic spiral" and defence of the novel's gender binarism. By contrast James Wieland's personal memoir, "Writing and (Re-) Thinking," veers from engaging reflection upon the current state of English studies into self-absorbed apology; his piece might accurately be re-titled "Why My Thesis Was Out-of-Date (By Several Years) Even at the Time of Writing, and My Book Was Too."

*Postmodern Fiction in Canada* gathers ten articles, mostly contributed by academics at European universities. The presiding genius of this volume turns out to be Linda Hutcheon, whose work receives mention in all but two of the essays. Hutcheon's influence is signalled in the Preface with the unattributed assertion that Canada's literature has, "over the last decade or so," "repeatedly been called 'postmodern' *par excellence*"; contributor Geert Lernout devotes his article to an insufficiently critical overview of Hutcheon's major premises. The volume is short on materialist analysis of the era of late capitalism and the economic and social phenomena attendant upon it—an oversight exemplified by Lernout's conclusion that "the question whether Canada is in itself a postmodernist country . . . is ultimately not important." Only Heinz Tschachler raises the "undeniable fact" that "the internationalist character of postmodernism . . . undermines the very idea of national literature" in describing Atwood as "caught between the horns of cultural nationalism, and the pull of the international art market." Tschachler reads *Surfacing* as postmodern myth, a concept which remains nebulous to me—perhaps



because his sometimes tangled elaboration leaves key terms vague (“subjectivity,” “ideology,” “radicality”).

Other critical approaches in the volume are thematic (Coward on images and doubles in *Cat's Eye*, Delbaere's survey of magic realism), with a strong dose of narratology and stylistics (Giltrow and Stouck on postmodern pastoral in *Running in the Family*, Ventura on tense and pronouns in Munro's "Tell Me Yes or No," Vauthier on Levine's "Something Happened Here"). While I am open to persuasion that discussion of texts such as *Cat's Eye* belongs under the rubric of postmodernism, only Vauthier justifies or explains her text selection: she quickly acknowledges that Levine's short story is not formally postmodernist (a label which she questions) and comments that her historicist principles are "not . . . postmodern enough"; nonetheless her reading proves attentive to textual subtleties.

Neil Besner's opening article suggests that Canadian postmodern fiction transcends the anxiety about identity, Nature, and place canonized by *Two Solitudes* and *Survival*. Besner bases his peculiarly Canadian definition on epistemological rather than formal criteria; thus fiction by Gallant and Munro is postmodern, the former for its dislocations of time ("North Americans and Europeans alike are set adrift in history") and the latter for its domestic rather than symbolic representation of place, paradoxically both "profoundly regional" and "international (because profoundly ordinary)." In asserting that "postmodern writing often interrogates centres of authority and power" Besner conflates postmodernism with post-coloniality, although his conclusion disclaims any sense of national "arrival" in post-*Survival* representations of Canada. In emphasising multiplicity his final words signal the diverse, conflicting values which continue to be heaped upon the concept of "postmodernism."

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## Colonialism Retold

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**M.G. Vassanji**

*The Book of Secrets*. McClelland & Stewart \$19.99

Reviewed by Amin Malak

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After three successful works of fiction, *The Book of Secrets* establishes its author, M.G. Vassanji, as one of the most impressive voices in postcolonial literature. First winner of Canada's prestigious award for fiction, the Giller Prize, the novel is set in East Africa during three quarters of empire building and dismantling. It begins in 1913 with the intrigues and machinations of two empires (the British in Kenya and the German in Tanganika) determined to out-manoeuvre each other, thus extending their European conflicts and carnages into other peoples' lands.

The novel's multi-layered structure is based on a Shahrazadic narrative frame involving a retired Goan teacher of history in Tanzania, Pius Fernandes, who is entrusted with the diary of an ex-colonial officer, Alfred Corbin, detailing his experiences as a newly-appointed British administrator of a small town on the Kenya/Tanganika border. This diary functions as a clever interlinking device, not only because it details what Corbin witnessed in 1913-14, but also because it connects with chains of events that span three generations and spread over three continents.

The secret centre of the novel is the enchanting, enigmatic figure of Mariamu. With a name that recalls the Virgin Mary, she is yet accused of being possessed by Sharitan (the Islamic equivalent of Satan); Corbin rescues her from her harrowing exorcism and agrees to employ her temporarily as his housekeeper till she gets married to Pipa, a fledgling shopkeeper. However, on her wedding night, Pipa accuses her of "impurity" and of being deflowered by Corbin, leading to tantalizing suggestions throughout the novel that

Mariamou's son, Ali, might be Corbin's, not Pipa's. Eventually, Mariamou's mysterious demise—gruesomely raped and murdered—endows her in Pipa's eyes with such spiritual powers that he erects for her in his shop an expiatory, syncretic shrine combining Hindu and Muslim symbols. Meanwhile, the child, Ali, abandoned by both Corbin and Pipa, is adopted by his Asian granduncle and African grandaunt. Growing into a dashing young man who impersonates in dress and manners Prince Aly Khan, Ali elopes with his Rita (*à la* Rita Hayworth) to England, where he becomes a successful international businessman. Significantly, Ali's mongrelized triple parentage, together with his subsequent triple marriages, symbolizes the three sources of cultural identity for an Indian Muslim community in East Asia (the Isma'ilis, fictionally referred to here as Shamsis): Asia, through historical roots and religion; Africa, through settlement and trade; and Britain, through education and colonial affiliation.

This exciting, at times confusing, cultural hybridity emerges through the detailed drama of the community's triumphs and tragedies. The same community has been the resourceful inspiration of Vassanji's three earlier works of fiction. As there, the novel's political discourse is definitively, if imperceptibly, established. The British-German war waged in Africa is not Africa's, but one more byproduct of an arrogant imperial enterprise about which the Africans have no say, despite the heavy sacrifices imposed on them. As an illustration of this coercive practice, Pipa, in an intriguing twist to the narrative, gets manipulated and/or forced into spying for both the British and German intelligence services during the first world war. The reader feels the anxiety, suffering, and torture he undergoes while being coopted into a risky, cynical contract that he cannot comprehend. Significantly, few characters

in the novel have deep roots in Africa, if any: most are either functionaries and officers of the colonial project or Indian middlemen and traders seeking a better life in the town and villages of East Africa.

Despite the large cast of characters, the focus of this refined, evocative novel is established through the voice of its narrator-historian, Pius. Recalling and reconstructing past events, retrieving and reading earlier texts, Pius acutely perceives his own rootlessness, which for him and for the Shamsi community in the novel, is both liberating and tragic. A *de facto* custodian of confidences and consciences, Pius recognizes that he has all along been evading a cardinal, existential question posed by the poet Gregory, his alter ego: "Would you do it again, has it been worth it?" Lucidly, if belatedly, Pius achieves his own epiphany, thereby mediating a profound and exciting message about the transience and transcendence of being: "To live is to risk, and so you did not live."

Pius' insights evolve in tandem with his awareness of the shift in his own attitude toward the diary: his impartial search for clues solving its puzzles assumes, in yet another astonishing twist in the narrative, a personal dimension. Rita, his former student and Ali's second wife, claims the diary in order to avoid revealing uncomplimentary aspects of her family's past. Rita's reappearance in Pius' life evokes his erstwhile silent, "impossible" love for her—a love that he dared not proclaim due to ethnic, religious, and social barriers. Now in his old age, Pius appreciates the significance of what his audacious schoolgirls used to reiterate to him: "the world belongs to the one who loves," meaning to the one who *risks* maintaining a forbidden love. As the self-assured, now divorced, Rita impresses upon him, the present and the future can never be divorced from the past; therefore, her children's *nouveau riche* status in Europe need not be jeopardized by "unnecessary"

revelations about the past. In one sense then, Pius' surrender of the diary to Rita represents a compromising act, a betrayal of his commitment to truth, however tentative and partial that truth might have been: his pious pursuit of history veers to a self-gratifying indulgence in *his* story. In another, it represents a compromise, a gesture of genuine loyalty and love, signifying that our reading or telling of history is neither absolute, nor objective, nor out of context: we often proclaim and endorse that which is most convenient. A human construct, history, as with beauty, is in the eye of the beholder or reader.

Accordingly, in this *tour de force* of a novel, Vassanji succeeds in threading a complex web of interlinked events pointing in diverse directions, while evoking scenes, sounds, sensations and sentiments. Paralleling metaphors and motifs, switching between the present and the past, interweaving private acts with political events, the author skilfully structures a refined, balanced narrative. Ever the enchanting storyteller, Vassanji astutely puts his intimate knowledge of the African terrain to maximum aesthetic use through a representation that blends humour with pathos, irony with compassion, subtlety with simplicity. *The Book of Secrets* thus becomes an eminent landmark in Canadian and post-colonial fiction.

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## Revenge of the Dead Author

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**Gary Whitehead**

*I Can Fix Anything*. Arsenal Pulp \$13.95

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**George Bowering**

*The Rain Barrel*. Talonbooks \$15.95

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Reviewed by Paul Malone

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At one point Gregory Sampson, the central figure of Gary Whitehead's story "At the Turn of the Century," ponders Franz Kafka's

"The Metamorphosis," and thinks to himself, "That's what it must have been like to live in Prague at the turn of the century. . . . Life was uncertain then." As the rest of "At the Turn of the Century" demonstrates, life is still uncertain; and the landscapes of both Whitehead's and George Bowering's imaginations often bear a passing resemblance to Kafka's mythicized Prague. Both contemporary authors delight in themes that Kafka would easily have recognized: alienation and non-communication between people, highlighted by the tacit acceptance of the most bizarre circumstances. However, Whitehead and Bowering live and write not only long after Kafka (who also turns up peripherally in Bowering's "Discoloured Metal"), but after Barthes: whatever safe refuge Kafka may have found from life in his work has been whittled away by the notion of the death of the author, and the resultant ever more precarious and problematic position of the narrator. Whitehead and Bowering use this problematic position as a main theme in their collections of short stories, and reveal this seeming weakness as a creative strength.

Among Gary Whitehead's stories, for example, "I Can Fix Anything" features a first-person narrator who recounts, at length, details he cannot know of a scene at which he was not present; while the narrator of "I Love Raisins" cannot remember his neighbours' names—though he tells the reader their names in order to explain how forgettable they are. Whitehead's "King Kong" and "Everything is Bamboo" present the fictional worlds of the films *King Kong* and *Casablanca* as factual backgrounds against which the stories play out (Kong is depicted as a real, living cast member, interacting with Fay Wray; Bogart is portrayed as actually being in North Africa during the war). In "A Situation Comedy, Now" the narrator describes his flight into the refuge of Mayberry, from the old *Andy Griffith* television show—a world of nostal-

gia where the sun almost always shines, yet is subject to the moods of the godlike Sherriff Andy. And “My Finite Chevy” is a brief vignette starring figures who are not so much “I” and “You” as they are *named* “I” and “You.” Less metafictional but no less unsettling, Whitehead’s “She Makes the World Flat” presents a brother and sister reunited over a jigsaw-puzzle map of the world, whose empty spaces—the sister’s husband, not yet home from work, pieces together the oceans—echo the emptiness between all three of them; “Supply and Demand” features a laid-off bus driver who fails at door-to-door sales until winning the lottery allows him to become his own best customer, a self-contained consumer society of one; and “Naked Us” demonstrates that an academic freed from convention by the free lifestyle of a progressive nudist university can still be fettered by the bounds of childhood traumas. Whitehead pares exposition to the minimum, mixing logic and paradox with a straight face; his stories flow in compact, economical yet surreal scenes.

George Bowering’s prose style is often more expansive than Whitehead’s, but like Whitehead, Bowering constantly undermines the author/narrator’s position. In “Rhode Island Red,” a first-person narrator chattily explains that “. . . the first person singular pronoun . . . is not my favourite,” and then goes on to describe clearly events which no living person could possibly have seen; “Staircase Descended” and “Fred and Pauline” emphasize the control the narrator has over the narration—the ability to intrude editorially, to magnify and even invent details, casting doubt on the most (apparently) naturalistic and autobiographical of stories; while both “Familiar Admonitions” and “Nadab” use multiple narrators—multiple witnesses—to muddy the clarity of events and motivations. In the interests of metafictionality, many of the stories even concern professional writers, some of whom may or may not ‘really’ be George Bowering (as the

narrators of “Discoloured Metal,” “The Ryerson Split,” and “Being Audited”; or central figures in “Blithe Trees,” “The Creature,” and “The Probable Event”), while others appear to be Robert Kroetsch (“The Stump”) or Fred Wah (“Fred and Pauline”). Bowering’s sure touch brings uncanny overtones even to tales that would seem in synopsis to be shaggy-dog stories (for example, the brief “Spread Eagle,” and the longer “October 1, 1961,” and “Diggers”), thanks to a rare gift for tracing the mechanics of odd quirks and obsessions.

But Bowering can also explore with grace much less conventional forms. In “Discoloured Metal,” a story about an overseas flight, the text literally recedes from the page as the airplane passes into the distance, and returns as the plane approaches: the body of the story is a blank page, out of our sight. “Desire and the Unnamed Narrator” seems to be a critical essay on Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing*, complete with scholarly apparatus, until the critic enters the synopsis plot and carries the pursuit of Atwood’s protagonist to its erotic fulfilment; and “Little Me” takes the form of a journal whose author finds his vocabulary withering away to non-verbality as he is unnerved by the recurring appearance of a strange familiar child.

In “The Rain Barrel,” the nostalgic vignette which provides both an introduction and a title for his collection, Bowering explains that the great joy of having a rain barrel was that a boy could “yell[ . . . ] for the marvelous echoes” and “look[ . . . ] at the reflections of the puffy white clouds” where Bowering one day saw the face of God. The echoes and reflections produced in Whitehead’s and Bowering’s metafictional allow us to see their creators; if this makes clear the problematic nature of fiction, it also allows us, the readers, to glimpse and share in the authors’ joy (and toil) in creation, and shows us our readership as a necessary step in the creative process itself.

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## Fictions of the Mind

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**Jeffrey Berman**

*Narcissism and the Novel*. New York UP \$44.00

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**Katherine Cummings**

*Telling Tales: the Hysteric's Seduction in Fiction and Theory*. Stanford UP \$32.50

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**Carol de Dobay Rifelj**

*Reading the Other: Novels and the Problem of Other Minds*. U of Michigan P \$32.50

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Reviewed by Kevin McNeilly

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These three texts each address the relationship between fiction and the mind from strikingly different and often incommensurable positions, ranging from post-Freudian clinical psychology or Lacanian deconstruction to the plain-spoken anti-scepticism of Austin and Wittgenstein; but all three discover, at least for our present purposes, a little common ground, as each manages contingently to define from within the hazy boundaries of "literature"—taking, as points of departure, established sets of canonical literary works—what a mind might be.

Berman's *Narcissism and the Novel* is in many senses typical for this kind of criticism. Berman defines his cognitive paradigm in an extended introduction, following a clinical tradition of psychological investigations of narcissism and arguing for the validity of the narcissistic model as a basis for understanding cognitive processes and disorders. He turns for theoretical direction to the work of two "leading authorities" on narcissism, Otto Kernberg and Heinz Kohut. From Kernberg, he adopts a pathology of narcissism, elaborating, cautiously, on the somewhat rigid "diagnostic categories" that the psychologist has established for neurosis and cure. From Kohut, Berman lifts the key notion of the narcissistic "selfobject," a kind of cathectic fusion of grandiose self and perceptual object, a melding which, for Kohut, is apparently crucial to the preservation of

a healthy, stable sense of self. In his investigations of texts, Berman will often pursue both the fictive and the semantic realizations of such objects, for author and for character, and will attempt to show how such fusions are crucial to the moulding of self within imaginative works by Mary Shelley, Emily Brontë, Dickens, Wilde, Hardy, Lawrence and Woolf.

Berman's own analytic clarity, his ability to sort through the welter of information and theorizing on narcissism and to present it in what seems to me to be a radically simplified and understandable form, serves him here—as he himself says of Kernberg's theory—as both an asset and a shortcoming; his simplifications are a little too neat and tidy, too "controlled and prescriptive," to be so easily applied to so many texts. The narcissistic model appears, that is, to explain away everything, a reductionist rhetoric which Berman wants, in spite of himself, assiduously to avoid. "I do not intend," he writes of *Dorian Gray*, "to reduce a complicated theory of aesthetics to a personality disorder." But that is precisely what he does for each novel. His aim is repeatedly to "reconstruct a fictional character's life." But he blurs a simplified analysis of the author, often based on conjectural biography, into the fictional "lives" of the characters, and at the same time reconstructs those "lives" beyond the texts themselves, in order to make characters fit his model. He "suspects," for instance, that Woolf is "holding back," and builds a reading based on Mrs. Dalloway's apparent "illness" which Berman himself has largely made up. The narcissistic model assumes an undue primacy over the literary texts here, and ends up too obviously overwriting and distorting them. The model itself is of considerable interest, but Berman oversteps the limits of careful reading.

Cummings' *Telling Tales*, by contrast, consistently obscures itself in Lacanian terminologies and neologisms to the point of

being rather unreadable to all but those who are deeply—very deeply—immersed in the jargons of post-structuralist psychoanalysis. Her aim is to “repeat and revise” both theoretical and fictional scripts—texts by Freud, Nietzsche, Lacan, Derrida, Richardson, Dickens and Fitzgerald which she contends encode designs of male mastery—and to cross these readings over onto each other, effectively blurring theory and fiction into a single form of writing/reading. Seduction, her key trope, is inherently deconstructive, she argues, because it “upholds and perverts the father’s law in one stroke”; the “scene” she sets repeatedly in her interrogations of these texts is that of analysis, particularly the so-called talking cure for the hysteric. Her identification of psychoanalysis with seduction, while not new (she acknowledges Luce Irigaray as her “chief prompter”), is nevertheless what is most compelling here, and her literal playing out of a Sophoclean drama across Lacan and Freud fosters considerable theoretical interest. But her reading of *Clarissa* becomes, as Cummings herself says of the famous coffin, “so overdetermined as to resist meaning anything altogether.” Her assessment of *Bleak House* is thin and rather *ad hoc*, a splicing of Lacanian and Derridean puns into a fairly standard reading of doubles and substitutions in Dickens. And her take on homoeroticism in *Tender Is the Night* offers nothing new, except, again, a deft terminology (although the equation she briefly presents between post-structuralist translation theory and psychoanalytic transference might, if it were more fully developed, prove fascinating).

Rifelj’s *Reading the Other* is by far the most readable and balanced of these three texts. Rather than examine the nature of the cogito directly, she turns to the question of cognitive certainty about other minds. Sidestepping the conundra offered by sceptics and solipsists (she offers brief synopses of Descartes and Hume), Rifelj

examines a set of ordinary-language philosophers—including Wittgenstein, Wisdom, Strawson, Austin—as well as critics such as Stanley Cavell, in order to establish a model for alterity which does not depend on sceptical doubt. (Wittgenstein’s rejection of “private” language in his *Philosophical Investigations*, and his explorations of a “community” of speakers, serve as Rifelj’s touchstones here, though it is to the work of Austin, Wisdom and Cavell that she repeatedly turns for support in her textual analyses.) She then charts a course through a variety of French and English-language texts, focusing in particular on detective fictions (Doyle, Hammett) and fictions of obsession (Villiers, Mérimée, Proust). In each of these instances, Rifelj maps out fictional strategies for overcoming scepticism—Sherlock’s Holmes’s unflinching insights into human nature, Marcel’s slow sifting through semblance and appearance in search of the “truth” of Albertine—and the simultaneous readerly failure of those strategies—marked by the ultimate unknowability of Holmes himself or by Marcel’s letting go of his “captive.” We find ourselves, in each of Rifelj’s readings, balancing between “the radical alterity of the other and [the] possibility of union,” and it is this irresolution which she carefully traces, never allowing a particular paradigm (in this case, of “the other”) to overdetermine her encounters with the texts themselves. Anthony Powell’s *A Dance to the Music of Time*, which occupies Rifelj’s final and longest essay, is tentatively offered as a “limited success,” a provisional “solution” to the problem of the other mind, not because Powell’s novels present a transparent means of access to that radical alterity, but rather because in their “sociability” the novels trace the very community of speakers which Wittgenstein sought to explicate. Powell’s novel offers Rifelj an instance of “living” rather than reasoning through sceptical doubt about the other, and as such

points to a fictional practice which both evades psychoanalytic dogmatism and philosophical self-defeat.

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## Mors Tua, Vita Mea

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**Neil B. Bishop**

*Anne Hébert, son oeuvre, leurs exils (essai).*  
Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux \$45.00

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**Anne Hébert**

*Aurélien, Clara, Mademoiselle et le Lieutenant anglais (récit).* Seuil \$12.95

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Reviewed by Grazia Merler

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La prudence est le trait dominant de l'essai de Neil Bishop. L'appellation même, d'ailleurs, implique sa nature tentative, sa texture ouverte et libre, son hésitation devant le développement d'une idée directrice.

Cette étude se situe aux frontières de plusieurs méthodologies: biographique, thématique, structurale, féministe. Parfois l'étude des textes se fait dans une perspective synchronique, se concentrant davantage sur différents types d'exil (psycho-spirituel, spatio-politique, spatio-social), d'autres fois, cependant, l'auteur se concentre sur le développement de certaines préoccupations, surtout sur l'évolution de la femme dans l'oeuvre d'Anne Hébert. A tout moment, néanmoins, est visible dans ce texte l'effort de dépister les traces de l'écrivain Anne Hébert dans son écriture (poésie, roman, théâtre). Cette démarche spéculaire n'est pas toujours convaincante dans la mesure où Bishop accorde aux remarques qu' Hébert a pu faire au cours d'une conversation, lors des nombreuses entrevues accordées depuis 1970, la même valeur qu'à ses écrits, qui eux, par contre, sont longuement mûris, travaillés, polis. Les entrevues touchent des sujets d'actualité: la femme, la langue, le Québec, le nationalisme. Le ton est poli, mondain. En dépit de l'honnêteté des

réponses de Hébert, ces dialogues n'ont certes pas l'intensité de son écriture. Vouloir illustrer certaines attitudes narratives ou thématiques par les entrevues n'est pas toujours satisfaisant.

L'étude de Bishop s'adresse aux spécialistes et aux non-spécialistes de littérature québécoise. Dans son souci d'atteindre aussi un public non initié, cette étude transcrit en entier la chanson "Un Canadien errant" pour établir la genèse du thème de l'exil et du dépaysement au Canada. En effet, le reproche principal qu'on peut faire au sujet de cet essai est qu'il veut être "académiquement correct": rendre hommage à la critique canadienne de bon aloi en citant abondamment différentes opinions et en même temps faire l'éloge à l'une des auteures qui, par la nouveauté et l'indépendance de sa voix, a pu précisément franchir toute étiquette de chapelle littéraire. L'ensemble de l'essai manque de cohérence car il accorde davantage d'importance aux opinions souvent contradictoires de la critique et ne développe pas assez une vision personnelle du thème.

Le choix même du thème (l'exil) répond davantage à l'aire critique d'une époque où le multiculturalisme est de rigueur au Canada plutôt qu'à une véritable préoccupation de Hébert. Bishop est le premier, en effet, à admettre que l'occurrence du mot exil est rare sous la plume de Hébert. Il arrive même, deux chapitres plus tard, à parler d'un "anti-exil." Contradictions et répétitions sont fréquentes dans cet essai.

Il est significatif, par ailleurs, de constater combien la critique littéraire canadienne reflète fidèlement certaines préoccupations nationales. Les années soixante ont vu des études sur les thèmes de la solitude et de l'aliénation existentielles, les années soixante-dix ont témoigné de la recherche d'une identité personnelle et collective, tandis que les quinze dernières années ont vu une grande variété d'études sur le

fémminisme et les thèmes de l'abus, de l'exil, de la marginalisation des minorités.

Le mérite principal de l'essai de Bishop est d'avoir fourni un aperçu détaillé de la littérature sur l'exil pour, d'une part montrer l'inflation sémantique du terme et d'autre part constater la portée de ce thème au Canada. Le chapitre 3 traite de la vie de Hébert et de l'importance de ses déplacements géographiques et de ses difficultés éditoriales en début de carrière. Les chapitres 4 et 5 traitent de l'oeuvre de Hébert, de l'espace romanesque et des différents types d'exil. Le chapitre 6 élargit la notion d'exil pour inclure l'idée de marginalité, de transgression. Le fantastique et le féminisme y trouvent aussi leur place. L'intérêt particulier de cette étude est d'avoir inclus l'analyse de textes moins connus de Hébert: des nouvelles, des pièces radiophoniques, des scénarios, des poèmes qui n'ont pas encore paru dans des collections et qui, aujourd'hui sont peu ou pas accessibles. Le dernier chapitre, dédié au roman *Le Premier jardin*, résume et conteste à la fois l'importance du thème traité tout au long de l'essai.

Une lecture plus rigoureuse des épreuves de cet essai aurait pu éliminer les nombreuses fautes de frappe et de syntaxe ainsi que les inconsistances dans l'emploi des citations et des références.

Il va de soi, me semble-t-il, que toute littérature, et non seulement la littérature canadienne ou québécoise, traite du tragique de l'homme ou de sa condition de non appartenance, d'écart. Il est certes légitime pour la critique littéraire de traiter des types d'exil, de solitude, d'aliénation. Ce que cette étude ne fait pas, cependant, c'est de rendre compte de l'agilité, de la rapidité, du rythme de la phrase chez Hébert et par conséquent de l'humour, de l'ironie tragique de son univers d'exil. Le désespoir, le tragique sont anéantis par la maîtrise du métier de l'écrivain, par la simplicité rigoureuse de l'écriture, par cette capacité

de transformer de façon lyrique le tragique du monde. C'est ainsi que Hébert entraîne le lecteur dans cet autre monde, bien plus attirant, celui de l'art.

A deux reprises Bishop emprunte à la théorie des actes du langage et à Jakobson la notion de la fonction conative du langage pour expliquer, précisément cette capacité de survoler le niveau mimétique. Il faut espérer que dans une prochaine étude Bishop poursuivra cette analyse de l'ironie tragique du langage.

Le nom de Clara vient s'ajouter à la galerie de portraits féminins d'Anne Hébert. Ce dernier récit qui commence par une kyrielle de noms *Aurélien, Clara, Mademoiselle et le Lieutenant anglais*, s'inscrit dans un univers où la vie revendique la vie. Clara prend, sans crainte ni soucis, ce que la vie lui offre et adapte ce don à sa taille et à ses besoins. L'ordre du monde est cruel et brutal, mais la ténacité du désir et l'état d'urgence dans l'apprentissage de la vie bouleversent et entraînent l'entourage. Ce chavirement se fait avec une telle insouciance que la sagesse et la continuité du monde sont rétablis.

La mère de Clara meurt en lui donnant la vie, l'institutrice (Mademoiselle Blandine Cramail) meurt phtisique à dix-neuf ans, juste après avoir transmis, avec frénésie et passion, toutes ses connaissances et compétences à sa jeune élève. Elle lui lègue aussi ses biens matériels: ses bagues, ses vêtements, même sa flûte à bec (son talisman secret). A la fin de la première partie du récit qui se déroule sous le signe de la glace et de l'hiver, "Deux fois engendrée, par deux femmes différentes, Clara soupesait en secret le double mystère des héritages mêlés." Conjuguant ses héritages biologique et spirituel, Clara, fascinée par les sons et la musique, aura appris l'enchantement de trois langages différents. Sous la tutelle d'Aurélien, homme taciturne, sombre, sauvage mais père attentif, elle aura appris à imiter les animaux et à



connaître la nature. De l'institutrice, Clara apprendra les codes de la science (lire, écrire, compter) et de la musique (la flûte). Clara n'a qu'un regret au sujet de son éducation, que "Mademoiselle ne lui ait jamais appris à conjurer le sort en marche dans la campagne enneigée, en plein coeur des ténèbres, sans lune ni étoile"

A la sortie de cet hiver d'apprentissage, dans la deuxième partie du récit, c'est l'été qui éclate, la chaleur, l'étourdissement du soleil; c'est aussi l'arrivée du Lieutenant anglais. Les murs qu'Aurélien a bâti autour de sa fille Clara, pour la garder sauvage et pure s'émiettent. Peu importe que le Lieutenant traîne avec lui l'héritage d'enfant lâche et de militaire ayant subi échec et humiliation, sa "voix, sa rauque douceur étrangère dénouée de sens, sans mots perceptibles, rien que l'enchantement de sa voix accompagnée" désormais Clara. La maigreur, les rires maladroits, l'embarras de John Christopher décident Clara à poursuivre sa nouvelle fascination, la connaissance de l'homme.

C'est après des pluies torrentielles où la rivière menace de tout avaler que l'arc-en-ciel paraît dans la troisième partie du récit. Clara, en secret, sous le regard désemparé d'Aurélien, fait l'inventaire d'elle-même, choisit son costume parmi les vieux vêtements de Mademoiselle et "se retenant d'éclater de rire, à mesure que les paroles inouïes sont chuchotées, dans le silence de la cuisine déserte: -Je le ferai. Je le ferai. Je le ferai. Je serai la femme du Lieutenant anglais.-" Elle annonce ainsi le prochain acte dans la pièce de sa vie. Ni le mépris, ni l'embarras, ni le manque d'emportement du Lieutenant ne la retiennent de son but. Tout se passe comme il se doit, comme entre deux animaux qui se flairent et se prennent. Pendant la nuit le Lieutenant, fidèle à son rôle de lâche, quittera la région pendant que Clara, de retour à sa maison, dort tranquillement bercée par le bruit de la pluie et des nouveaux "songs les plus

étranges." Le jour reviendra et la vie continuera jusqu'au prochain épisode.

Le récit est bref et séduisant. Une sensualité inconsciente éclate à tout moment. Au fil du récit se matérialisent des idées d'abord silencieuses et invisibles (douleur, tendresse, désir). Il existe une correspondance intense et une harmonie inaltérée entre l'homme et la nature. Tout comme les sons et la musique prennent une importance grandissante dans l'oeuvre d'Anne Hébert, ainsi le langage devient toujours plus juste, plus précis. Pour l'envoûtement du lecteur ce sont les comparaisons inattendues, les juxtapositions étranges, une focalisation toujours changeante qui fascinent.

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## Museums and Empire

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**Randall White**

*Too Good To Be True: Toronto in the 1920's.*  
Dundurn \$21.25/\$16.99

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**Lovat Dickson**

*The Museum Makers: The Story of the Royal Ontario Museum.* UTP \$24.95/\$14.95

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Reviewed by Cynthia Messenger

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Randall White reminds us in *Too Good To Be True* that Toronto was once a city of Empire. A photo from the City of Toronto Archives depicts young girls, batons held high, dressed in starched and pleated white cotton, black ties and shoes providing contrast, as they drill for the "Empire Day Parade." This holiday was eventually replaced by Victoria Day. The rituals and strict codes of these early times are, of course, lost on us now:

Toronto's prohibitions were varied; they went far beyond alcohol: There were a great many things it was illegal to do in the city of churches on a Sunday, especially during the 1920's. It was illegal to operate almost any kind of business. During the winter months it was even illegal to use the toboggan slides in city

parks. It was certainly illegal to go the movies. [sic] (Or, more accurately, it was illegal for theatres to open for business.)

White's book is full of interesting cultural tidbits; it is a popular rather than a scholarly text, and it looks briefly at all aspects of life in 20's Toronto. The period photos and the black and white reproductions of ads that accompany the text are in themselves worth the price of the book. Advertisers and marketers played a critical role in the cultural and artistic development of Toronto. White notes that they "helped support the city's graphic arts industry and paid some bills for the Group of Seven."

Toronto was a much more uniformly Anglo-Saxon city in the 1920's. The long-standing Jewish community of Holy Blossom Synagogue had been, even if condescendingly, accepted by the city because, according to Stephen Speisman it was "English-speaking and Anglophile, cultured and middle class." The arrival of east European Jews, however, evoked a latent anti-Semitism in its fullness. In 1924, for example, the *Telegram* proposed a Jewish poll tax.

White mentions other social and cultural problems, some we might think of as contemporary to us, such as the question of official bilingualism and the fear of Quebec's separation. In May, 1927 the editors at the *Mail and Empire* called for unity: "CANADIANS, ENGLISH AND FRENCH, MUST SPEAK TOGETHER," and the *Star* called bilingualism an "asset."

Despite its vulnerability, and perhaps because of it, the 1920's as a decade retains its very powerful charm. But the 1920's are a kind of fiction for most people; part of the value of White's book is that it shows us how foreign that decade is, though it is removed from us by only seventy years.

The Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) is a very different place today from the museum its collectors had envisaged in the early years of this century. In *The Museum Makers: The Story of the Royal Ontario*

*Museum*, Lovat Dickson offers a history that is gentle, laudatory, uncontroversial, and really very interesting; his serviceable prose serves the purpose—to record names, facts, many anecdotes. The book will disappoint you if you're looking for rigorous analysis of an important cultural institution.

One is astounded at the determination of early collectors such as Sir Edmund Walker, Charles Trick Currelly (who published his memoirs *I Brought The Ages Home* in 1956), George Crofts, and Bishop White. Women of any stature were small in number in the very male museum world, but the educators Lilian Payne and Ruth Home were two who offered brilliance, hard work, and much expertise in the early days of the ROM.

Scholarship at the ROM (its early curators were academics at the University of Toronto) had to fight for survival as fiscal considerations slowly took power from scholars and put it into the hands of managers and accountants. By 1968, no longer under U of T's governance, the ROM had created hierarchies of its own. In explaining the ROM's various structures, Dickson focuses nine times out of ten on the personalities involved, given that they made all the difference.

Almost twenty years later, the ROM's mandate continues to emphasize education and popular appeal, perhaps now more than ever in its history. The deep problematics of this mandate were illustrated for us only too clearly in the controversy surrounding Jeanne Cannizzo's 1989 exhibit at the ROM entitled "Into the Heart of Africa." Several critics have pointed out that Cannizzo used quotation marks to encourage an ironic reading of the exhibit's accompanying text. The intent was to expose and ridicule the colonizing minds of Europeans in Africa, but quotation marks and irony are not part of everyone's lexicon, and they were misread by the very people they were meant to honour and

defend. The ROM simply did not see the irony and contradiction implicit in mocking the collecting of artifacts while also exhibiting them. "Into the Heart of Africa" was allowed its full run at the ROM. It was cancelled at other venues, including the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, and the Albuquerque Museum in New Mexico.

Somewhere between the unintended self-indictment in a title such as Currelly's *I Brought The Ages Home* and the failures of late twentieth-century irony lies a means of addressing the problematics of the museum. We have not found it yet.

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## Confrontation with Mortality

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**George Woodcock**

*Walking through the Valley: An Autobiography.*  
ECW \$16.95

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Reviewed by John Moss

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Is it possible to approach an autobiography objectively? Great autobiographies are the works of fine writing, not great lives. The reader is more than receptacle, the writer, more than recorder. If there is no vital connection between consciousness and text, the autobiography acting as mediant between the disparate lives of writer and reader, the outcome is memoir, document, artifact. The reader as object, objective, is largely irrelevant.

Therein lies the major problem with *Walking Through the Valley*. It is astonishing how little of Canada there is in this book by George Woodcock, Canada's leading man of letters; and more astonishing how little there is of the man, himself, in this third volume of his autobiography. As the title implies, *Walking through the Valley* is a confrontation with mortality, yet the writer as individual is curiously opaque in

its pages, an accumulation of attitudes rather than anecdotes, tonalities rather than ideas, a pontifical of facts and of opinions with little sense of the 'urgency of being,' even though his narrative is informed from beginning to end with the shared knowledge of tenuous health in the early years of his ninth decade.

George Woodcock has written with wisdom and sensitivity about Canadian subjects. His *Peoples of the Coast* (1977) is remarkable for its insights into native cultures during the times of their early dealings with the white invasion along the Pacific coast. His books on British Columbia, on Gabriel Dumont, on Canadian society and culture, on Canadian history and Canadian literature speak for a man with passionate interests in his adopted home (To think of Woodcock as a returned Canadian is both naive and presumptuous; he grew to manhood, through education and early intellectual experience, in England, and only came to the land of his birth after his attitudes and ideas were resolutely formulated, if not yet fully explored.). Canada has been for Woodcock a subject of variegated intellectual inquiry, but his personal affinity has always been for the region, not the country, the cosmopolitan, not the national, and for ideology over the workaday world of practical human intercourse.

Woodcock, the professional writer, like a chameleon its context, conveys place, whether Canada or elsewhere, as an extrusion of personality and himself as the distillation of place. It is by being somewhere, especially if it is, or seems, exotic, that he fully recognizes himself as being at all. Inevitably, then, an autographic project like this will focus in large part on location, especially on travel. So Woodcock travels repeatedly to India, and to Australia and China, and to the Canadian past of Doukhobours, Metis, and Coastal Indians. He says: "I gloried ... much in my knowledge of strange places." Describing these

places in a mixture of itinerary notes and reflective judgements, usually on history and aesthetics rather than occasion or custom, he fills his book with evidence of his own passing.

For some, nothing is real until it is written. Perhaps Woodcock, preternaturally active as a man of letters, has been so prolific on such a wide variety of subjects that he has had no time, energy, or inclination to separate life from art. If writing is how he affirms the reality of his knowledge and experience in the world, then autobiography is the obvious mode by which he would bear witness to his presence in the collective text. As the protagonist of his own narrative, he writes in affirmation not so much of what he has done but of what he has documented. His book is a post-modern poem whose constituent parts range from autobiographical notations and travel schedules to rhetoric and spleen. The consciousness it conveys is of a man of the modern age who has chosen words as his armour, an envelope protecting and concealing the person inside.

There is something sad in this. Yet the Woodcock of this book would scorn sympathy, just as he would treat with contempt pity that his wanderings have largely, due to flagging health, come to an end. He now writes from a more fixed perspective. He is a man who, rather than either courting death in old age, or dismissing it, seems to treat diminishing mortality with a laudable, an enviable, mixture of annoyance and affection. It will come; and meanwhile, there are words to be written, writing to be proofed, books to be published. There is no sense in *Walking through the Valley* of a person driven to transliterate life into art before it has slipped away, not even evidence of the very human need to set the record straight, to get it right, as it were, while there is still time.

There is much in this book to be relished and admired. Woodcock is feisty, opinion-

ated, and remarkably well-informed on any variety of topics. His gifts beyond the text are prodigious and his literary contributions overwhelming; the presence of his personality in Canadian letters is sometimes daunting (consider his years as the influential editor of *Canadian Literature* or his sequence of introductions to twenty volumes of the ECW extravaganza, *Canadian Writers and Their Works*), but never less than impressive. He has written works of singular importance on Peter Kropotkin and George Orwell. He has published poetry that may yet prove to be his most enduring achievement. And he has been a model for Canadians of just what a man, a person, of letters may accomplish, if only one has the imagination, the discipline, the intellectual confidence, the personal hauteur, and the gift of a strong if, in these pages at least, spectral partner.

*Walking through the Valley* is of value as a gloss on Woodcock's vast and eclectic canon and as the closing work of a three-volume exercise in embedding the self in a remote shadow-world between text and context. It does seem that ECW, the publisher, has done a disservice in allowing the author to publish what is essentially an eccentric and awkwardly-paced record, rather than what could so easily have been the celebration of an astonishing literary life from the celebrant's perspective. The reader looking for a personal connection, that illumination of merged personality, the revelation of our common humanity despite our awesome differences, will have to look elsewhere. Woodcock's refusal to adopt theory, or adapt himself to literary modes of the last generation or two, has led him to write some astute critical commentary, but has perhaps prevented him from discovering just how affirming the autographical mode might have been, for both himself and the readers whose community he shares.

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## Fahrenheit 451

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**Cary Fagan**

*The Animals' Waltz*. Lester \$22.95

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**Patricia Seaman**

*The Black Diamond Ring*. Mercury \$14.50

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**Patricia Robertson**

*City of Orphans*. Porcupine's Quill \$12.95

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Reviewed by Lachlan Murray

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Halfway through Cary Fagan's novel *The Animals' Waltz*, the narrator watches herself in a film made by her former lover. For several pages Sheila Hersh, a young Jewish woman working for her father in his north Toronto mattress business, seems three-dimensional. In *The Art of Fiction* David Lodge maintains that dialogue is "the purest form of showing," and because Fagan briefly limits himself to on-screen dialogue and camera-eye description, his narrator finally comes into focus. Before and after that, she and the rest of the characters in this uneven novel are smothered by exposition: we are told about the inner mechanism of each before we have really met them, thus robbing us of the pleasure of implication, of constructing the characters as we go, and stripping the novel of tension. *The Animals' Waltz* is full of sentences like these:

I could see the growing sadness hidden by [my father's] outwardly cheerful demeanour. But I didn't know what to do, and the agony for me was that I didn't want to think about it. I had my own problems, not the least of which was a desire to stop putting off my escape from those who loved me too much.

Far more evocative of Honest Abe Hersh, king of the low-budget, do-it-yourself TV ad, is this glimpse, unexplicated:

In malls, people recognized him; small children would point at him and cry gleefully, "I guarantee it!!!" My father kept caramels in his pocket for such occasions.

As the novel closes, Sheila says, "Not every-

thing has to be spoken." If only Fagan had trusted his own character's advice.

Patricia Seaman is undermined in similar fashion by one of her creations. In the story "Casa Abril" a character says, "what she wanted to see on the page was emotion." Hear! Hear! Seaman may be within her rights to dispense with adverbs, adjectives, traditional narrative, and sympathetic male characters (although beginning eight of the nine short sentences comprising a single paragraph with "She" is perhaps overdoing things), but the author cannot be forgiven the anesthetized consciousness at the center of these thin, cynical pieces. By assuming in advance that characters are inherently interesting because they are female, and inherently callous or worse because they are male, the writing nullifies itself. How can the reader feel involved if the author has already decided what everyone should think? Seaman abrogates her responsibility to build her case on the page, to make us *feel* and *believe* the hurt of the women in these stories, and instead offers us a cauterized aftermath in which minds are already made up. Besides leaving the narrator, the unnamed male character in "The Sly, The Slick, The Wicked" does nothing more than break off a guitar serenade, dislike a belt given him, and engage in some ambiguous pillow talk. And yet, the narrator presumably expects our sympathy when she announces: "I didn't break his nose with my right tetsui fist though by then I knew how to do it and it would have been easy."

Patricia Robertson understands flames—that is, how to let the silences and chosen details in fiction combust, unhampered by authorial intrusion or withdrawal. Her mix of expository restraint and emotional acuity causes some of the stories in *City of Orphans* to catch fire, yielding marvellously wrought pieces of anguish and tension. Perhaps the best example is "Rooftop Dancing," the final story, in which a woman rushes from Toronto to Vancouver to meet

her brother, on the news their younger brother has jumped off his highrise:

They held hands like children as they followed the blue-shirted man down the long fluorescent-lit corridor. Are you sure you wouldn't prefer to watch on the colour monitor? he said, opening a door. Moustache, large ears, a fatherly face—did he go home and hug his wife and children to him after his shift? Bruised of course but the face is intact, he said. . . .

She leaned over him and touched his face, as bloodless and cold as a saint's. If only she could warm him, watch the colour return to the lips and the eyelids flutter. . . . Richard. Richie. It's me, Maureen. Look, Edward's here too, we've come to take you home.

The visit to the morgue is purged of sentimentality by the almost hyperrealistic description of the attendant and the surroundings. ("His black heelworn shoes stepped easily and solidly one after the other along the glossy linoleum in front of them as she and Edward walked hand in hand back up the corridor.") It's a matter of balance: the disjunction and shock felt by the characters, the wallop of "we've come to take you home," magnified by, in fact made possible by, the acutely observed details of the everyday, the authorial reticence when reticence is the most powerful mode of communication.

The other essentially traditional stories in the collection—"Counting," "Bolt Bomb," "The Edge of the World," and "Pretty Bangs"—make similarly effective use of speech, silence, and skillful showing. Robertson is less engaging, I feel, in the mildly magic realist first half of her book. The initial five stories are technically adventurous, tale-like fictions which incorporate shape-shifting, temporal and spatial travel, enigma, and living dream, their method an impressive stereoscopic effect which allows the narration to flow rapidly and seamlessly between divergent realities.

The writing can be quite beautiful: in "Arabian Snow," for instance, the stately evocation of a wintry, fourteenth-century Norwegian kingdom and an Arabian palace. But there is something disengaged, cool, passionless about it all. This may be partially a function of the genre itself, which can offer plenty in the way of literary surprise and delight, but sometimes does so at the expense of emotional depth. No doubt the magic realist stories will be judged more original, but does this necessarily make them better? An interesting moment occurs in "The Edge of the World" when the narrator, Eva (Robertson in fictive guise?), contemplates her two selves—one, the black-clad Continental sophisticate, thoroughly conversant with Europe, the other, the small-town Canadian trapped at "the farthest edge of the New World." What strikes me is the stubborn luminosity of those things Eva (and perhaps the author and much of her audience) would reject:

No one glittered on those streets where foxtail grew through the cracks in the sidewalk, where the drivers of pickup trucks stopped in the middle of the road to have conversations. Where the raw earth was churned up, houses thrown down carelessly, urgently, in the short northern summers.

Several months after reading the ten stories for the first time, I find there is something about those pickup drivers which stays with me in a way some of the more fanciful scenes do not.

What amounts to a schism in *City of Orphans* does find a synthesis in "Rooftop Dancing," which may account for the position of the story at the end. Maureen, looking out the window of Richard's eleventh-floor bedroom, levitates, and then floats through the ceiling to the roof, where she relives in an intense, visceral fashion the last few seconds of her brother's life, before collapsing back inside and vomiting

in the toilet. In the final scene of the story and the book, Maureen lies in a hotel bed with Edward, a bed which becomes the beach Richard had wanted Edward to visit:

There they were, her brothers, Edward in his suit and Richard in his leather jacket, sipping their drinks under a sun so bright that when she looked again she couldn't see them. She gazed out at the bright blue ocean and saw two figures swimming through the waves, racing each other to a breakwater a hundred yards offshore.

The difference between this finale and the first half of the collection is that here the magic makes the real more real, more poignant, instead of less.

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## Of Loss and Hope

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**W. P. Kinsella**

*The Winter Helen Dropped By*. HarperCollins  
\$26.00

**Cordelia Strube**

*Milton's Elements*. Coach House \$18.95

Reviewed by Ruth Panofsky

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Although each addresses such contemporary issues as the often diminished lives of Native Canadians and the pervasive presence of television in urban North America, two recent novels by W. P. Kinsella and Cordelia Strube are traditional in form and ideology. Each novel charts the linear development of a male protagonist, whose private struggles through a series of difficulties result in a sense of closure. As Jamie O'Day and Milton seek to construct rounded world views out of the disparate, chaotic elements of their lives, they move gradually and progressively toward the hope that concludes their respective narratives.

*The Winter Helen Dropped By* continues the story set out in Kinsella's earlier novel, *Box Socials*. Its narrator, Jamie O'Day,

begins with a portentous quote from his one-time illiterate father, turned household philosopher: "Every story . . . is about sex or death, or sometimes both." And so a narrative unfolds of the first eleven years of Jamie's life, spent largely in the Six Towns Area of Alberta, a rural setting isolated for most of the year by either snow or floods. Unaffected by the daily passage of time, Jamie's early experiences are nonetheless shaped by the time-related circumstances of seasonal change and his family's relative poverty. A precocious and sensitive boy who must complete his elementary education through correspondence courses, Jamie is a keen observer of the people of the Six Towns Area. His storytelling, distinguished by a gentle and loving irony, reveals a depth of understanding of himself and others.

The novel consists of four sections which follow the fall and rise of the O'Day fortunes. The narrative, however, tells as much of other characters as it does of the young Jamie. Although his mind and voice shape the narrative, the reader does not feel Jamie's presence to be either intruding or controlling. In fact, it soon becomes clear that one is reading the work of an accomplished novelist who has fulfilled his early secret desire to become a writer. In his record, author Jamie O'Day, while remaining faithful in spirit and understanding to the child Jamie, seeks to record both the heroic and comic aspects of individual lives marked by trying conditions.

The cast of characters includes the young, pregnant Indian woman, Helen, who frames the novel. Although she is central to the text, she appears only briefly in the first section and again at the end. One is left to speculate, along with Jamie, whether she was first physically abused and later murdered by the young Indian, Bartholomew White Chaps, who is pursued by the RCMP and whose death Jamie himself witnesses. The death of Jamie's infant sister Rosemary,

twelve hours after her birth, is essential to section two of the novel and provides the impetus for poignant character portraits of his parents, Olivia and John Martin Duffy O'Day. The bizarre marriage of Beatrice Ann Stevenson and Earl J. Rasmussen takes place in section three and brings together a community of eccentrics starved for social excitement. The power of Kinsella's novel lies in the sympathetic rendering of character, the natural appeal of his narrator, and Jamie O'Day's optimism, which endures in the darkest moments.

Like Kinsella, Cordelia Strube is interested in sex and death and fills her canvas with less fortunate characters who recently have found their place in fiction. Strube's novel also begins portentously—"Milton sits in traffic picking his nose"—and the reader is drawn immediately into the mundane, darkly comic world of her protagonist. Unlike *The Winter Helen Dropped By*, however, *Milton's Elements* is an urban novel told in the present tense by a third person narrator. It chronicles the angst-ridden life of Milton, who is suffering the loss of his three-year old daughter to a freak accident: she was crushed by a falling television set. Hence, the novel's critique of television and its enormous influence on contemporary life.

On the surface, Strube's plot may seem unlikely since it brings together outrageous characters, each of whom faces a personal crisis. Struggling with Ariel's death, Milton loses his factory job. His cashier wife Judith recovers through therapy and new-age spiritualism and eventually leaves Milton for another man. Soon Milton finds he is the reluctant host to various family members, including his sick mother Mare, his gay brother Leonard who has AIDS, his sisters Connie, a drug addict and prostitute, Mandy, and Mandy's sons, Rory and Morty.

Throughout the difficulties with his family, his attempt to come to terms with Ariel's death and his failed marriage,

Milton turns to television as a means of escape and an anodyne for his pain. Although television provides the numbing effect he seeks, what he views bears no resemblance to Milton's experience of reality. Ironically, television finally helps reconnect him to the world that frightens and intimidates him. After he rescues a young woman from a burning building and television reporters distort the facts of the incident for the purpose of creating an engaging story, Milton is completely disillusioned with the medium. Gradually, he accepts responsibility for his life and, at Mandy's urging, agrees to learn to read, a hidden source of shame all his life. It is a testimony to Strube's unique humour and deft characterization that, despite the sordidness of her plot, the reader comes to care a great deal about Milton and celebrates along with him the hope that beckons at the novel's close.

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## Others' Histories

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**Dionne Brand, et al.**

*'We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up': Essays in African Canadian Women's History.* U Toronto P \$45.00/\$17.95

**Carol Camper, ed.**

*Miscegenation Blues: Voices of Mixed Race Women.* Sister Vision \$19.95

Reviewed by Donna Palmateer Pennee

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*'We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up'* brings together the work in progress of six Black women scholars of African Canadian women's histories, all committed to educating Canadians on the historical presence and contribution of African Canadians in Canada (particularly Ontario and Nova Scotia). The collection arose specifically out of the recognition that "how we [Black women] have managed historically to survive both racial and gender subordination deserves special atten-



tion." Fifteen or so titles of Black women's historiography and several general histories of Blacks in Canada have not entered mainstream history, and the lives of Black women in particular have not been represented in Canadian feminist historiography in the last twenty years: the contributors came together in agreement that "these omissions in Canadian history are part and parcel of the endemic racism that fuels the Canadian intellectual tradition."

Although the collection concentrates on the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, together the essays cover three hundred years of African Canadian history, from slaves in New France to Loyalists who emigrated from the American War of Independence (1776) and the War of 1812, fugitives from slavery who entered Canada via the Underground Railroad, and domestic workers imported from the West Indies in the 1950s and 60s. Drawing on personal letters, oral histories, published slave narratives, census data, newspapers (especially the *Black Voice of the Fugitive* and *Provincial Freeman*, the latter the first newspaper in Canada to be established, edited, and published by a woman), naval diaries, church registries and magazines, official government documents, and secondary sources in Canadian and American Black history, the essays illustrate how the history of African Canadian women attests to racist policies in Canada that made it less a "Canaan for Coloureds" and more like racist America than many Canadians persist in thinking. The research also attests to the resourcefulness, resiliency, and institutional astuteness of Black women who played central economic roles in their private families as well as crucial leadership roles in church organizations, missionary and abolitionist societies, and in the establishment and maintenance of formal schooling for Black children and adults.

The essays differ in focus and scope, from a survey of early Black women in Nova

Scotia to women and the Underground Railroad Movement, Black women in Buxton and Chatham (1850-64), the biography of a Black woman teacher in nineteenth-century Canada West, Black women in factory work from the 1920s-40s, and Black women and the State. All the essays illustrate that while Canada offered the promise of racial freedom not available in the US, "the abolition of slavery did not eradicate racism as an organizing principle within the social, economic, or political life of Canada . . ." Census data at mid-nineteenth century, for example, classified immigrants by "country of origin," but maintained a separate classification for "Colored Persons, Mulatto or Indians." Loyalist Blacks often did not receive the land and implements to which they were entitled under British Law, or received land that was so remote and/or unproductive that they were forced back into conditions of enslavement; likewise, the government provision for separate schooling for Blacks should they desire it became the legal means by which Whites would insist on segregated schools; similarly, the movement of Black women out of domestic service into waged factory labour during the war years was foreclosed when the war ended and when further Black women domestics were imported (and their movements restricted) by the government's West Indian Domestic Scheme (begun in 1955), a practice that persists to this day in the Foreign Domestic Movement program that imports women from the Third World.

While the collection has no index, it offers an excellent bibliography as well as a lesson to other historians of Canada, namely, that the Anglo- and Franco-centrism of much of Canadian historiography has not only elided the history of African Canadians but has neglected comparative Canadian-American history: the diasporic experience of Blacks in Canada and the absence of African Canadian women's his-

tory have required these six historiographers to attend to American sources on Black women's history and to the relations between Canada and the US in the making and telling of Canadian history.

*Miscegenation Blues* also speaks from diasporic sites but much more broadly through the diaspora of ancestral blood: as one of the contributor's mothers said, each of the more than fifty writers here is "a citizen of the world." In many ways, this volume offers what is too frequently lacking for the historians of *'We're Rooted Here'*: firsthand textual accounts of the experience of growing up female and of mixed race. Indeed, "experience" is the category upon which the volume is structured and out of which it is motivated: close to four hundred pages of essays, poems, stories, letters, transcripts of performance pieces and radio programs, reproductions of visual art work and family photographs, are organized under such headings as "Edge to the Middle . . . location, identity, paradox," "But You Don't Look Like a . . . faces, body, hair," "My Name is Peaches . . . objectification, exoticization," and "The Unmasking . . . betrayals, hard truths."

Many of the entries relive painful memories of overt racism in the playground and classroom (from students and teachers alike), overt racism within families (grandparents who disapproved of mixed marriages, white mothers, biological and adoptive, who never acknowledged their daughters' mix), covert racism in women's friendships, in workshops on sexuality and race, in feminist formations and activism, in the workplace, and in love relationships. Many of the entries also deal with internalized racism, the years of "passing," and the painful unearthing of the archaeologies of race buried by parents and now experienced as betrayal, denial, and wilful hurt. Some of the most painful entries deal with the hatred these women feel towards their mothers, and while I do not wish to deny or devalue

such experiences, I think there is a reversal of racism here without much hope for rapprochement: it's rather like hating your mother and feeling betrayed by her for not being a feminist. However, I am persuaded of the necessity for these "unmaskings, betrayals, hard truths" not only because of the long trial of reversal in the history of feminisms and postcolonialisms, but also because of the eloquence and pain with which these unmaskings are expressed.

*Miscegenation Blues* is not an easy book for a White feminist to read, even one who is well versed in postcolonialism, for White is the enemy here in so far as it always represents dominant culture. The women in this book often deal with their mixed race by choosing not to be White, by choosing to re-hierarchize the constituents of their mixed ancestry. As the editor says of her solicitation of these works, "previously mixed race women 'need not apply.'" This may not be an easy book for mixed race women to read, either, who wish to perceive themselves as liberal, for liberal is treated in this book as at best naively racist, at worst intentionally so. *Miscegenation Blues* is rich and painful, hateful and loving, bitter and celebratory. Above all, it is necessary precisely for these "hard truths," and necessary to the contributors and to the constituencies they might represent.

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## Borderlands

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**Marisa De Franceschi**

*Surface Tension*. Guernica \$15.00

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**Denis Lynn Daly Heyck**

*Barrios and Borderlands: Cultures of Latinos and Latinas in the United States*. Routledge UP  
\$63.95/31.50

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Reviewed by Lisa Pottie

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*Barrios and Borderlands* has clearly been prepared, as Heyck notes in the Preface, with the teacher in mind, a fact which lim-

its somewhat its potential for critical examination of the organizing themes and their content, which are family, religion, community, the arts, (im)migration and exile, and cultural identity. Each theme is neatly woven into the next through brief introductions to the selections; the content of the sections includes short stories, poems, essays, excerpts from novels, a play, and photographs. A special feature, also noted by Heyck, is "the inclusion of interviews and oral histories of Latinos from diverse walks of life and geographical areas." The interviews are indeed an interesting feature, particularly in the section on community, which focuses more precisely on community organizing and includes interviews with a number of activists, in particular María Guadalupe Martínez Torres, who organizes women workers in the *maquiladoras*. One minor irritation is, that despite the presence of many Latina writers in the anthology and Latina in the subtitle, Heyck consistently refers only to "Latino" when generalizing. There are, however, many notable selections; Roberta Fernández' short story "Filomena," Dolores Prida's play "Savings," which is included in its entirety, a poem by Roberto Durán, and an excerpt from Rudolfo Anaya's novel *Bless Me, Ultima* are only a few worthy of mention. Also useful and noteworthy are the chronology of Latino/a events, the historical introduction to Latino/a peoples, the Appendix of population, ethnicity, and language use statistical charts, and a glossary of terms. The potential for diverse interpretation of the selections is limited to a certain extent by the thematic organization, which tends to structure our readings of the individual texts, and does not take up a fascinating issue raised in the Preface about borders. Heyck writes that the concept of borders "implies more than geographical boundaries between countries: it also implies a critique of arbitrary barriers erected to separate cultures, language

groups, races, sexes, and economic and political groups." The obvious aim of the anthology, "celebrating unity in difference" to teach tolerance for diversity, means that a theoretical examination of borders is largely unrealized, except briefly in geographical terms in Heyck's argument that the border between Mexico and the United States is unrealistic, since "Psychologically and culturally, Mexicans are not emigrating to the Southwest; they are returning there, or, perhaps more accurately, migrating within one homeland." A more critical examination of borders as an aspect of identity is undertaken by some of the writers selected in the final section of the anthology, on cultural identity. For the most part, the selections are fairly conservative or straightforwardly positive: Américo Paredes' classic account of the border hero/outlaw Gregorio Cortéz, an interview with Joaquín F. Blaya, the president of the Spanish language television network Telemundo Group, Inc., and an excerpt from Virgil P. Elizondo's book *The Future is Mestizo: Life Where Cultures Meet*. But Aurora Levins Morales' poems, "Puertoricanness" and "Child of the Americas" and Gloria Anzaldúa's "To live in the Borderlands means you . . ." offer challenging readings of borders, of identity at or as a crossroads. The introduction to the cultural identity section disappointingly does not take up the potential for critical dialogue presented by the diversity of views, but instead limits itself to noting the writers consider the "difficult problems of affirming one's cultural identity in the face of racism, sexism, cultural loss, uprooting, and language and economic barriers while, at the same time, highlighting the strong sense of self, pride, faith, place, history, and destiny that make the Latino cultural identity a positive force for the future." The concluding phrase collapses critique into uncritical celebration, once again. Nevertheless, the act of bring-

ing together such a rich and diverse range of material in *Barrios and Borderlands* should certainly not be undervalued, and the anthologized material can provide the basis for more critical examination.

While the thematic organization and celebratory aim of *Barrios and Borderlands* limits the selected material's potential complexity of representation, the material of *Surface Tension*, a novel by Marisa De Franceschi, is too formulaic to achieve the complexity it strives to represent. The plot has all the right ingredients for a Nineties tale: Margherita, the Canadian middle-aged child of Italian immigrant parents is rediscovering her past, including her memories of childhood sexual abuse and later sexual salvation through a handsome Italian lover, Daniel, a process which is engendered by, and forces her into deeper awareness of her present dissatisfaction with her obtuse, demanding, and childish husband Steve, and her unhappiness over her son leaving home. This plot summary obscures the fact that the novel does offer a readable story; the movement back and forth in time keeps the reader interested, and De Franceschi exhibits a good command of details, particularly those of Margherita's childhood. Nevertheless, both Steve and Daniel are caricatures, not characters, and the dialogue is often stilted or curiously formal. When Margherita and Daniel visit Pompeii, for example, their conversation sounds like a travel brochure description. Margherita exclaims, "Oh Daniel. Did real people actually live in the midst of such beauty?" Daniel responds, "Incredible, isn't it? They were architectural masters." The imagery suffers from the same awkwardness. The metaphors do not really feel integral to the story. That disjointedness is a consequence of their overexplanation; rather than letting the reader make the connection between the images and the narrator's state of mind, she points out their significance. Near the end of the novel, Margherita describes watching

a television show on arms silos: "At first, we are shown an expanse of grassy meadow somewhere in middle America. It is punctuated in the distance by a lone, white, clapboard church, its steeple rising into the horizon. A perfectly innocuous, tranquil setting. But the utter calm and beauty of the surroundings is shattered when I hear the commentator tell us of the arsenal of weaponry that is stored in bunkers beneath the prairie landscape." Rather than simply allowing the inferences to be drawn, she then tells us, "I think of Vesuvius. I think of myself. I am that grassy meadow." While one might reasonably argue that the narrator's drawing out of inferences reflects realistically her own process of thought, the effect is irritating rather than interesting. Some attempt to unify the imagery is made through the pattern of "counting," but the effect is still awkward in comparison, say, to Susanna Kaysen's smooth integration of formal patterns in *Girl, Interrupted*. The problems of control over tone and the intrusiveness of imagery interfere, ultimately, with the story: one cannot simply escape into it. De Franceschi does have a good sense of timing, a knowledge of when to leave off one plot trajectory and pick up another, but *Surface Tension's* depths are awkwardly illuminated.

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## Negotiating Cultural Boundaries

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**Thomas King**

*One Good Story, That One.* Harper Collins \$14.95

**Douglas Cardinal and  
Jeannette Armstrong**

*The Native Creative Process.* Theytus \$24.95

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Reviewed by Catherine Rainwater

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A unifying strain of Coyote laughter binds the ten stories contained in King's new collection. As in King's latest novel, *Green*

*Grass, Running Water*, sometimes Coyote's victim in these vignettes is a character or a group of characters, sometimes the careless reader, and sometimes Coyote himself. The opening piece, "One Good Story, That One," puts the wary reader on alert for Coyote's antics. The narrator and his cohorts tell a recycled, Native version of the Adam and Eve creation story to gullible "whitemen," fully equipped with high-tech gadgetry for cultural appropriation (cameras and tape recorders), but unable to see "all the coyote tracks on the floor." With their totalizing vision of the cultural Other and their apparent sense of some absolute, clear-cut boundaries between themselves and Indians, these "whitemen" apparently cannot recognize their own Judeo-Christian creation myth because the Native storyteller has promised a "good Indian story" about "how the world was put together."

The last story in the collection, "Borders," likewise comments upon cultural boundaries as primarily mental constructions. A Blackfoot woman and her child spend two nights in the parking lot of a Duty Free shop at the Canadian-U.S. border because the woman refuses to identify herself as anything but "Blackfoot" (not Canadian or American). Her predicament quickly becomes a media event, sponsored by people presumably rushing to the aid of a poor "Indian without a country." The narrator remarks that, on the contrary, she has a nice house and owns horses. Although she is finally allowed to cross the border, neither the border patrol nor anyone else ever understands the subtle implications of her refusal to name her country as Canada or the U.S. As a member of the Blackfoot tribe whose territories span the border, she simply does not acknowledge the border's reality.

Several of the remaining eight stories concern other types of boundaries and things out of bounds. "A Seat in the Garden" features a media Indian of dubious ontological status who takes up resi-

dence on Joe Hovaugh's "private property." To Joe, this "big Indian" resembles "Jeff Chandler," "Ed Ames," or "Sal Mineo," and he repeatedly speaks only one decontextualized line of dialogue from the film, "Field of Dreams": "If you build it, they will come." Not knowing what to make of the stranger, Joe asks a friend, Red, for help. Like Joe's, Red's information about Indians is limited to the movies as a source. Red wonders if Joe's cornfield used to be an Indian burial mound. Finally, Joe asks some local Indians if they can figure out what the "big Indian" wants. These Indians, who cannot even see the intruder, advise Joe to "stop drinking"; to humor Joe, they eventually agree that the Indian must be some type of spirit, but they are certain he is not "one of [theirs]." Apparently, the visitor is merely a semiotic phenomenon, a slightly confused trope of an Indian escaped from inside the boundaries of western films starring such notables as Jeff Chandler and Ed Ames. Like King's "big Indian," such characters portray the Indian Other primarily in terms of outward, physical signs of difference, and they often speak only one or two cryptic, stereotypical lines in films that emphasize the cultural other's "enigmatical" nature. Joe, unlike the Indians, never sees that the "big Indian" in the garden is merely a figment of his own culturally constructed imagination.

Indeed, a unifying thematic concern in King's stories involves this failure to see, as well as the outright refusal to see. In "Totem," museum curators repeatedly cut down totem poles that not only grow through the floor of the building, but also grunt, moan, chuckle, chant, laugh, and sing. Unable to halt the bizarre phenomenon and even less able to understand it, they mutually decide not to pay attention anymore. Eventually, they stop seeing and hearing the totem poles, King's humorous and complex symbol of appropriated

Native cultures. Another type of blindness occurs in “How Corporal Colin Sterling Saved Blossom, Alberta, and Most of the Rest of the World as Well”; Corporal Sterling and others convince themselves they are heroes in the midst of outlandish events they cannot begin to control or understand. When extraterrestrials appear to collect Indian people the world over, the white men brag about how they “stood up to those aliens,” even though the aliens never threaten the whites or even seem to take note of their existence.

As though to underscore his point about missing the point, King has written “A Coyote Columbus Story,” in which Coyote, an egocentric interpreter, remains narcissistically blind to the implications of a story he hears about the decimation of Indians after Columbus’ arrival in the allegedly New World. This piece like the rest of the works in King’s collection serves as a humorous warning to the reader about failure or refusal to see or hear. Metatextually, King apprises us of his authorial trickster role through the voice of the narrator in “A Coyote Columbus Story”: “You got to watch out for [Coyote]. Some of Coyote’s stories have got Coyote tails and some of Coyote’s stories are covered with scraggy Coyote fur but all of Coyote’s stories are bent.” All of the stories in this volume are, likewise, “bent,” much to the delight of the alert reader who enjoys “clean[ing] up . . . coyote tracks” in the wake of a trickster-storyteller such as King.

Not the voice of a trickster, but the collaborative voice of two artists speaking straightforwardly to the audience about their craft comes through powerfully in *The Native Creative Process*. Metis architect Douglas Cardinal and Okanagan author Jeannette Armstrong discuss their individual aesthetic visions as these have been shaped by their respective Native cultural backgrounds. Cardinal writes provocatively about the ceremonial healing that he

underwent before he was able to develop his art in ways most desirable to him. To be a Native artist, he insists, one must be strong enough to “carry your own world around with you,” despite daily immersion within a mainstream, Eurocentric culture. For Cardinal, such strength makes a person “a true warrior. It was after I went on a long ceremonial fast that it all came together. It was as if I had two separate bubbles of perception, which suddenly came together into one bubble of perception twice as large. I could see that there were not two separate realities but a oneness of a broader reality. I have to watch at all times so that I don’t lose that” vision.

Like Cardinal’s, Armstrong’s contribution to the collaborative dialogue emphasizes the difficulties of maintaining a Native vision in a Eurocentric world that does not widely acknowledge the spiritual dimensions of everyday life, and that rarely acknowledges the great social responsibility borne by creative people. “Full creativity,” she insists, always involves understanding the “impact” of one’s art upon others. Both Cardinal and Armstrong beautifully describe the transformational nature of art—the ways in which art potentially changes the world. Both artists insist upon the power of art to shape reality, and especially the power of human creativity as defined by Native peoples to turn the world off of its current, extremely destructive course.

Not to be overlooked in *The Native Creative Process* are the many excellent photographs by Greg Young-Ing that punctuate the dialogue between the other two artists. Young-Ing’s photographic art testifies to the truth of Cardinal and Armstrong’s claims about the powers of creativity. His photographs of Cardinal’s architectural creations successfully reveal the architect’s deliberate allusions to the natural beauties of the landscape in the designs of his buildings. Other photographs successfully con-

vey the sacred aspects of the landscape that are so profound a part of the Indian's general, land-based aesthetic.

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## Unhappy Endings

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**David Helwig**

*Just Say the Words*. Oberon \$34.95/\$17.95

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Reviewed by Norman Ravvin

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The strength of David Helwig's new novel, *Just Say the Words*, lies in its ability to portray characters' past and present lives, to draw a line between youthful dreams and their often dark outcome. Through his depiction of Martin and Ruthie, who are ageing actors, Charles, a washed up newspaperman, and Vera, whose long exile has taken her through Manchuria, Shanghai, and London to Toronto, Helwig presents a cast of very nominal Canadians. Each one of his characters led a more vital and meaningful life elsewhere—in England or in Asia—and Canada is the land of their dotage, the place where they gain a final opportunity to take stock of their wanderings.

The Canadian sections of *Just Say the Words*, set largely in downtown Toronto during the late 1980s, have a gritty feel. They treat, with care and a minimum of sentimentality, the sense of helplessness with which old people are confronted as they begin to lose friends, their foothold in their careers, and their health. No longer able to act, Martin is left with nothing but his beautiful voice; Ruthie buries her disappointment in drink; Charles' *weltschmerz* is conveyed through a black and antic stream of consciousness.

But it is in the chapters set in England and China that Helwig is at his best as a literary portrait artist, a creator of scenes that ring with impressive clarity and detail. In Shanghai, shortly before the arrival of Communist troops, Vera and Charles are aimlessly in love, bit players on the cusp of

brutal change. Helwig brings a tense and disorienting feel to his version of the famous open city, with its rattling late-night pick-ups of the anonymous dead, night voices and "hanging lanterns" glimmering aboard anchored barges, and streets serenaded by nightclub bands playing Benny Goodman with "strange hints of Oriental intonation." Helwig works equally hard at bringing to life 1950s London. It is there that Martin and Ruthie—having come to the bright centre of English theatre life—try desperately to overcome the fear that they will never quite make a success of themselves.

Whether they find themselves caught in a city under siege or with time to kill in staid London, Helwig's characters manage to live lives of "exile not merely from a country, but from the habits and patterns of life—marriage, children, the rich usual things." His untethered men and women are interesting for the depth of their estrangement from larger circles of community and kin, but their outsider lifestyles envelop them a bit too completely. Vera is constantly referring to herself as an old woman and relying on her sense of exile to wax philosophical. She is compelling and wise but her wisdom is as much a burden as a gift. And Martin, who never misses a chance to refer to himself as an "old fruit," is at times too much the figure of wasted desire, the keeper of a young man's heart trapped in an old body.

As the novel comes to a close, important longings shared by this group of friends are fulfilled, and in a final section called "The Appetites Blessed" Helwig strives to close his narrative under the sign of comedy. "Nobody could be left out," Martin thinks as he plays in what will likely be his final role in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. "Happy endings for monsters too." This sentiment, however, amounts to little more than wishful thinking for the main players in *Just Say the Words*. They remain to the end oddly uncomfortable with themselves on

Canadian ground, weighed down by burdensome memories and regret. One cannot really imagine them gathering into the conventional comic circle that signals reconciliation at the end of Shakespeare's forest romps.

In much of *Just Say the Words* Helwig stays true to his own dismissal of "willed resolutions," made in an interview some 15 years ago. "If you take *Surfacing*, *Bear*, and *The Manticore*," he said, "these three are all somehow about getting in touch with the depths of yourself and having a resolution grow out of that. I don't really believe in the emotional rightness of those resolutions." *Just Say the Words* is truest to its author's designs and to the nature of its characters when it examines the elusiveness of such resolutions.

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## Gay Writing and Queer Theory

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**Timothy F. Murphy and Suzanne Poirier, eds.**

*Writing AIDS: Gay Literature, Language and Analysis.* Columbia UP n.p.

**Alberto Manguel and Craig Stephenson, eds.**

*Meanwhile, in Another Part of the Forest: Gay Stories from Alice Munro to Yukio Mishima.* Knopf Canada \$23.00

Reviewed by Helmut Reichenbacher

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A century after the Oscar Wilde trials, the 1990s have brought an increased interest in the study of sexual orientation. An astonishing development has taken place: from the taboo and criminalisation of homosexuality in the 1890s, the study of homosexuality has now matured into an academic discipline. Both the appearance of AIDS in the 1980s and a renewed interest in theories of gender have already revolutionised Gay Studies, a term associated with the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Since Teresa

de Lauretis's special 1991 Queer Theory issue of *Differences*, which provided a crucial site for definition and analysis, Queer Studies has rapidly become a buzz word in academe. This renewed interest in breaking a circle of silence, denial, and taboo has resulted in an avalanche of new academic courses, conference papers, and publications.

These two books under review come from opposite ends of the spectrum of Gay writing: a collection of critical essays tackling the problem of writing about AIDS is contrasted with an anthology of Gay male short stories, which largely ignores the existence of the epidemic.

*Writing AIDS*, a collection of critical essays, incorporates a considerable range of analyses, bringing together such varied topics as the representation of AIDS on American television, first-hand experiences with the teaching of AIDS at an American university, the racial component in the reactions to an African-American television speaker's death, and two contributions from outside the US sphere in order to show the "national variations" of AIDS discourse in France and Germany. In addition, an important resource for further study is provided by the extensive annotated bibliography of AIDS literature, fiction, poetry, drama, biography, autobiography, and non-fictional writing, covering the years 1982 to 1991.

However, the collection leans towards one side in a crucial dispute. Representatives of Queer Theory position themselves against the kind of political activism that Gay Studies once argued for. A playful postmodernism, complete with intellectuals who hatch word games in their writing lab, to celebrate narcissism, is setting out to replace the earnestness of political activism that once took place on the streets. Lee Edelman's "The Mirror and the Tank," provides the best example of this postmodern stance.

The collection focuses primarily on the



US situation with an emphasis on AIDS and popular culture. This type of analysis leads to repetitive references to events in the US media, especially to commercial television. Canadian responses to AIDS are not reflected in the volume. The two essays on France and Germany are tightly focused on specific topics. If the editors felt that these contributions somehow provided representative pictures of the discourse on AIDS in those countries, they have missed the mark. Sander L. Gilman's essay provides a convincing reading of the parallels between a 1939 German novel full of Nazi ideology and "the first German AIDS novel" written in 1989. This analysis of fictional representations of racism and phobia of otherness is striking. However, the editor's remark in the introduction to this collection about "history and culture as a silencer," because "Germany's Nazi past creates a tremendous barrier to an open discourse about AIDS" is a non sequitur. This bizarre judgement completely ignores the presence of a prominent public discourse - such as safer sex brochures and sex education campaigns. While German literature may indeed scarcely offer representations of AIDS, public discourse on AIDS is significantly more open than in most Anglo-Saxon cultures. Monographs of critical writing on AIDS—those by Richard Dellamora, Judith Pastore and Emmanuel Nelson, for example—have avoided this confusion by focusing on literary responses to AIDS.

The reliability of references must also be raised, at least in the foreign language essays. The bibliographical references to the German sources in Gilman's article are littered with numerous errors. When publishers print such material, they should employ proof-readers who can deal with it!

In contrast, Alberto Manguel and Craig Stephenson's anthology of Gay stories virtually ignores AIDS. This anthology has predecessors by Edmund White, as well as

by David Leavitt and Mark Mitchell, to name only two such collections which have appeared just since 1991. While these three anthologies occasionally overlap in the choice of texts—a sign of canon formation in Gay short fiction?—the focus of this anthology is different. *Meanwhile, In Another Part of the Forest* breaks out of the monopoly of English-language writing, for it includes translations from Russian, Spanish, French, and even Yiddish. These translations, however, constitute only a fifth of the volume; the majority of pieces come from the US or the UK. Considering the scarcity of Gay writing published in this country, the inclusion of six Canadian pieces is of particular interest.

While Manguel's introduction to the collection acknowledges the necessarily arbitrary decisions involved in putting together an anthology, his choices hinge on a problematic definition of what Gay writing means. The editor rightly rejects as too narrow a definition requiring Gay authorship in addition to Gay subject matter. However, he is not so bold as to develop a solid definition of his own. By excluding prejudiced writing about homosexuality, Manguel seems to toy with a didactic ideal, in which Gay writing seems to serve as a guide to illuminate and encourage coming out. He therefore postulates an evolution of Gay writing through several stages: "apologetic, self-descriptive and instructive, political and testimonial, iconoclastic and outrageous." The next stage, he ventures, will constitute a fiction which "introduces characters who happen to be gay but whose circumstances are defined well beyond their sexuality." Manguel provides each of the selected pieces with a short introduction: half back-ground, half meditation, refraining from overtly providing interpretations, but spiced with quotations and bon mots.

If the AIDS collection reveals an overemphasis on US work, the anthology does not entirely escape ethnocentrism either. The

anthologist's introduction—including a brief historical survey—focuses for the most part on Anglo-Saxon writing, despite the presence in the anthology of writers from other literatures. With such an emphasis, Mishima, Singer, and Popov, become tokens, which simply point up the absence of writers like Mikhail Kuzmin and Karol Szymanowski. While certainly a more pleasurable read than the AIDS volume, this anthology should be viewed as only a small advance on its predecessors. Nevertheless, its content offers numerous delights and discoveries to readers.

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## Metonymies of Desire

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**Bert Almon**

*Earth Prime*. Brick \$11.95

**John Barton**

*Designs From the Interior*. Anansi \$14.95

Reviewed by Alan Richards

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Bert Almon's *Earth Prime*, like the "twin planet on the other side of the sun" in the title poem, is a world where the absent is real and where fragmented desires are positioned on the other side of experience—in language. It is a poetry formed around malls, high art, the sex life of cats, and fragments of music, time, and travelled places. From "odd bits of learning" ("Supermarket Encyclopaedia"), Almon creates a language whose gravitational force repositions the truths we desire as a collage of dissimilar realities.

The collection is populated with real names. Almon, a professor at the University of Alberta, drops references to Auden, Birney, and others; in the process his poems, like comets, wobble the orbits of such luminaries. In "The Clematis Seminar," for example, he escapes a lecturer on Derrida to take in a gardener's slideshow. "Wilt, cultural materialism, slugs and snails, the insinuation of speech-acts" are

"enemies of the cultivar." And of the (super)cultivated—the Derrida lecturer will not "winter-over in Alberta." Family names, and those of his friends and colleagues, appear frequently and the poems approach inside jokes but these intimacies work as the inflections of a personal voice. "Mycenae," for example, reads like a story from Almon's dinner table while it laughs gently at the poet and his family's travels in Greece and makes comic a desire to move in orbits where only language is familiar.

This personal voice enables Almon to juxtapose family events, history, and cultural icons. "San Jacinto Battlefield Monument," for example, collects a photograph of Almon and his father, a list of items contributed to the Civil War by an ancestor, a legend of "The Yellow Rose of Texas," and Kennedy's assassination. This is language in which past and present intersect, absent realities are given embodiment, and a future that is already past is made the future again ("blocked arteries that would kill [his father] five years later are not visible in the photograph"). Intimate and literary names represent a discourse in which Almon positions his father, a moment in Greece, or the clematis, within the movement of his poetry but in which he does so as a subject himself defined by those family and cultural narratives orbiting around him.

No planet is perfect. "Poetry Tour" criticises small town teachers for photocopying, rather than juxtaposing, realities (his poems); others are rebuked for a language as dead as a plaster nativity ("Crèche"). These poems also read as urbane, and urban, condescension—"My eyes not being plaster / I had to turn them away." A blonde graduate student in "Think and Grow Rich," with white plastic boots, and the "girl from USC" who reconfigures English with the word "like" ("A Likely Story"), threaten to plug the gap between language and reality with stereotype. *Earth Prime* works, however, for, as previous collections

show, Almon delights in representing domestic relations and ordinary moments of speech as the sites of the extraordinary.

John Barton, National Aviation Museum librarian and editor of *Arc*, draws us into another world with his seventh collection, *Designs From the Interior*. In “Physical,” boys uncover themselves playing “doctor” and the poet discovers “we have come / to acknowledge the body, not through / words, which are dangerous, /but through touch and gesture.” But it is in the words of this collection that men touch each other tenderly, furtively, or lustily. Or violently; dismembered pieces of those whose families “never knew why / we never came home” are stored among kitchen jars and lettuce (“Ripper”). Barton’s is a language in which the body functions metonymically as the site of “designs from the interior” landscape of men growing up and growing up gay.

Their exterior landscape is a kaleidoscope of mood and colour. Calgary hills become “fallen horses, dusky brown in late winter” (“City in the Foothills”). Swimmers move through a metaphysical landscape from “windy green / reflections” towards “an absence ahead” (“Meech Lake, Late Afternoon”). Barton’s world includes a “sunset sweating in the wind” and the history of prairie exploration (“This Side of the Border”), hotels and locker rooms, a hinterland of “difference and fear” (“Best Man”) and bewildering options for intimacy and isolation in a “northern suburb / where wilderness was so within reach / and risk a part of the landscape” (“Stickmen”). Landscape, maps, and borders delineate that region where the subject is constituted among shifting patterns of relationships and identity is drawn between desire and the contours of family life, the ambiguities of friendship, alienation—“our bodies bits of mismatched tectonic plate” (“West Then East”)—and violence. Barton’s representation of an external environment is a way of mapping a passion that cannot be named as

“love” (“Ecology”). His is a sexual discourse, a gay language at times joyful, angry, or elegiac, in which the body stands in for a man’s deep desire for communication, for a language “charting the interstices / that grow between men at night” (“Physical Education”).

Barton’s images are sometimes clever—the collection closes on a plane “bringing to Canada Customs its cargo of dreams” (“California Notebook”)—and often evocative. The daily intimacy of lovers is represented, for example, by “four identical socks. . . / confused / in louvered shafts of light” (“Time Pieces”). Others, however, are flawed. A boy smelling a rose on a farm in Alberta (“This Side of the Border”) and a gay man recalling a childhood of dolls, dough, and mother (“Touch”) are tangled in frayed metaphors while “Artificial Intelligence” overworks its conceit—“Where are the fathers, / the mothers. . . / the lost programmers who failed to enter / enough in the help files. . . .” When he fails to trust his metonymy of the body and metaphors of landscape to chart the interstices of desire, Barton programmes his poems didactically. “We all carry a darkness within us,” he reflects in “The Man from Grande Prairie,” and we “must learn to carry this darkness / toward each other.” In “Notation” Barton writes that the “music I was born with is quiet, difficult, and unnamed”; from this interiority, however, he finds a discourse in which to give back the friendship (“Continuity”) for which words are often dangerous but whose touch shape these poems.

In “House of Carpets: Valentine’s Day Sale,” Almon ironically weaves together the intricate signs of Persian rugs with the beer and car posters surrounding their sale; both *Earth Prime* and Barton’s *Designs From the Interior* repeatedly juxtapose separate orders of reality. They mourn the bathos and the tragedy that emerge from our blindness to signs of alterity. And they cele-

brate ordinary moments and day-to-day relations—and the desires that, hidden within the mundane, reconfigure its designs.

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## Le Québec et sa culture

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**François Gallays et al., dir.**

*Le roman contemporain au Québec (1960-1985).*

Fides n.p.

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**Yvan Lamonde**

*Territoires de la culture québécoise.* PU Laval

\$29.00

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Reviewed by Alain-Michel Rocheleau

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Depuis plusieurs années, le domaine culturel québécois raffermi et consolide son autonomisation. À travers ses institutions, sa culture d'expression française (livres, théâtre, cinéma, art visuel, danse, musique) et ses valeurs pluralistes, le Québec d'aujourd'hui arbore une identité nationale qui se veut et qui est distincte de toutes celles qui l'entourent. C'est du moins l'idée qui se dégage de deux ouvrages publiés récemment: *Le roman contemporain au Québec (1960-1985)* et *Territoires de la culture québécoise*.

Le premier ouvrage, qui correspond au huitième tome de la collection "Archives des lettres canadiennes," réunit trois types de contributions: trois articles de portée générale sur le roman québécois, une bibliographie chronologique pour la période 1970-1985 et vingt-quatre monographies (relectures, synthèses ou bilans critiques d'oeuvres diverses) qui témoignent de la richesse du corpus romanesque québécois. Dans un premier article d'ensemble, intitulé "Fifty-Fifties: espaces socio-fictifs du réalisme spirituel," Jacques Allard analyse la production romanesque des années 50 dans une perspective sociocritique. L'auteur démontre avec exhaustivité que le roman des "fifties" s'oriente de manière à régler une crise intérieure liée au profil politico-religieux du Québec d'alors, phénomène

qui assurera une mutation de la société québécoise et qui influencera la production romanesque des années 60.

Dans un deuxième article de portée générale ("Le roman de 1960 à 1985"), Gilles Marcotte illustre d'abord comment certaines oeuvres narratives (celles de Gabrielle Roy, d'Anne Hébert et de Jacques Ferron) entrent de plain-pied dans la littérature de la Révolution tranquille tout en épousant certaines caractéristiques essentielles: "l'enthousiasme du langage, la réflexivité et la présence de la durée subjective sur le temps historique." Cette idée est reprise dans la monographie de Nicole Bourbonnais, qui entrevoit l'oeuvre de Gabrielle Roy comme un "retour vers le passé [qui] s'accomplit parallèlement à un retour sur soi, confondant ainsi quête du temps et quête d'identité," et dans celle de Janet M. Paterson, qui définit l'ensemble des romans d'Anne Hébert comme une "poétique textuelle [...] où les renvois à la quête de la mère, d'un pays et d'un langage laissent parler le désir de l'être dans la création de la parole." Par la suite, Gilles Marcotte démontre comment les oeuvres de Jacques Godbout, d'Hubert Aquin, de Réjean Ducharme et de Marie-Claire Blais, forment le corpus le plus prestigieux des années soixante. D'après l'auteur, ces oeuvres collent à la réalité et au vécu collectif tout en privant le lecteur d'un déroulement temporel ordonné. Dans sa monographie, Jacques Michon rejoint ce point de vue en affirmant que les romans de Godbout interpellent "le lecteur social dans le vif de ce qui semble le préoccuper: l'autonomie politique et culturelle durant la Révolution tranquille." Anthony Purdy estime, pour sa part, que l'oeuvre aquinienne est "une prise de conscience des structures mythiques d'un inconscient à la fois individuel et collectif." Dans la dernière partie de son article, Marcotte démontre qu'à partir de 1970, la plupart des romans traduisent les profondes mutations qui continuent à toucher

la société québécoise. En référant, entre autres, à certains romans d'Yves Beauchemin, de Victor-Lévy Beaulieu ainsi qu'aux *Chroniques du Plateau Mont-Royal* de Michel Tremblay, l'auteur note que la plupart des textes de cette époque situent l'action et les personnages dans un passé relativement récent, celui des années 40 et 50, qui correspond souvent aux années d'enfance des narrateurs désireux d'exorciser le passé pour mieux vivre le présent. Dans une perspective complémentaire, les monographies qui portent sur les oeuvres de Gilles Archambault (Marc Pelletier), de Nicole Brossard (Bianca Zagolin), de Louis Caron (Sylvain Simard), de Jacques Renaud (Pierre-Louis Vaillancourt), de Louis Gauthier (Robert Vigneault), d'André Major (Robert Major), de Jacques Poulin (Ginette Michaud) et d'Yvon Rivard (Patrick Imbert), permettent au lecteur de bien saisir la variété thématique et formelle des romans québécois de cette période.

Enfin, dans un troisième article d'ensemble ("Les 'jeunes' romanciers"), François Gallays interroge la portée discursive et l'esthétisme qui caractérisent certains romans publiés entre 1978 et 1988. Tout en référant aux oeuvres de Jeanne D'Arc Jutras, de Francine Noël, de Robert Lalonde, de Monique LaRue, de Pierre Turgeon et de Jacques Brossard, l'auteur estime que les "jeunes romanciers ont dans l'ensemble tourné le dos à l'association du roman à la problématique nationale," que beaucoup d'auteurs pratiquent l'intertextualité et que leurs romans consistent en une exploration de la langue française dans toutes ses dimensions.

Avec ses trois articles de portée générale et ses vingt-quatre monographies, de richesse analytique assez inégale, *Le roman contemporain au Québec (1960-1985)* apparaît donc comme un livre précieux et fort bien documenté. On s'étonne néanmoins qu'aucune ligne de cet ouvrage de 545 pages n'ait été consacrée à l'oeuvre de Suzanne

Paradis, qui a pourtant publié sept romans entre 1970 et 1985.

Le deuxième ouvrage, intitulé *Territoires de la culture québécoise*, regroupe douze articles qui ont déjà été publiés entre 1974 et 1991 dans différentes revues spécialisées. Yvan Lamonde tente d'abord de circonscrire les exigences théoriques et méthodologiques liées à l'étude de l'histoire des idées au Québec. Partant du principe qu'"il n'y a d'histoire culturelle satisfaisante que sociale," l'auteur interroge les idées fortes, les perceptions, les valeurs et les institutions qui témoignent, depuis 1760, de la culture sur le territoire québécois. Ses propos portent sur l'histoire socio-culturelle et, plus particulièrement, sur les associations littéraires au Bas-Canada (1840-1867), sur la bibliothèque de l'Institut canadien de Montréal (1852-1876), sur la pensée nationaliste de Mgr L.-A. Pâquet (1900-1929), sur les travaux du père Georges-Henri Lévesque ainsi que sur l'influence culturelle américaine au Québec. S'intéressant de près à la culture territorialisée, Monsieur Lamonde explore aussi les multiples avenues de l'historiographie culturelle montréalaise au 19<sup>e</sup> siècle. L'auteur pose un regard critique sur la sociabilité à Montréal entre 1760 et 1880, sur sa culture urbaine (1820-1920) et sur le commerce international du livre lié à la librairie Hector Bossange (1815-1819). *Territoires de la culture québécoise* se présente donc comme un ouvrage éclectique qui contribue, à sa façon, à l'élaboration d'une histoire de la culture québécoise.



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## "Littérature-ra-rité"

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**Louise Milot et Fernand Roy, dirs.**

*La littérarité.* PU Laval \$32.00

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**Lucie Robert**

*L'institution du littéraire au Québec.* PU Laval

\$26.00

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Reviewed by Alain-Michel Rocheleau

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La littérature est-elle une donnée essentielle à un ouvrage publié? Et pour le secteur de la recherche, est-il possible de concevoir une méthodologie qui pourrait permettre à la fois de définir la spécificité interne d'un texte (sa "littérarité"), ses propriétés socio-historiques ("littéraires") et son encadrement institutionnel (dans la "littérature")? Tel est le type de questions auxquelles s'efforcent de répondre les co-auteurs de *La littérarité* de même que Lucie Robert dans *L'institution du littéraire au Québec*.

Le premier ouvrage nous plonge au cœur d'un débat qui oppose, depuis une vingtaine d'années, les tenants de l'analyse interne à ceux d'une approche contextuelle. D'entrée de jeu, Louise Milot souligne l'importance, dans une problématique de saisie de la littérarité, de "garder en concomitance et en égale importance l'analyse d'un certain texte et d'un certain contexte."

Fernand Roy applique même ce principe à *la Princesse de Clèves*. Mais une lecture des autres communications laisse entrevoir que tous les participants, que nous regroupons ici en fonction de leurs allégeances théoriques, partagent à des degrés fort divers cet effort d'intégration méthodologique.

Un premier groupe d'intervenants s'interroge d'abord sur les limites inhérentes au concept de littérarité. Jean-Marie Klinkenberg se demande si la définition linguistique de ce concept n'est pas un leurre. Joseph Melançon, pour sa part, affirme que cette notion est pertinente au niveau du littéraire, puisqu'elle permet à ce dernier

d'instituer "l'extériorité des autres disciplines." À l'inverse, d'autres participants abordent la notion de littérarité pour mieux démontrer l'importance de l'analyse contextuelle. Jacques Geninasca, à l'instar de Pierre V. Zima et d'Éric Landowski, soutient que toute "poétique se définit par rapport à la distance qui sépare [...] les discours dont relève [...] le lecteur défini par le contexte."

Dans une autre perspective, plusieurs intervenants s'entendent pour dire que la littérarité a pour fonction première de définir les aspects fondamentaux de la littérature. Marilyn Randall rejoint les propos de Denis Saint-Jacques, de Ghislain Bourque et de Denis Bertrand, en affirmant que "la littérarité témoigne d'une nécessaire coïncidence entre les stratégies déployées dans le texte et les présupposés admissibles par la communauté exerçant l'autorité." Robert Dion soutient, pour sa part, que l'intertextualité constitue "une réflexion sur la littérature et sur la littérarité." D'autres participants, comme Agnès Whitfield, Remy Ponton, Jacques Geninasca et Janvier García Méndez, s'unissent pour mettre en valeur les possibilités opérationnelles du concept de littérarité. Lucie Robert établit un lien théorique entre littérarité et théâtralité, Anthony Purdy soutient que "l'alternance fait partie de la rhétorique conflictuelle d'autonomisation et de légitimation qui caractérise la littérarité proprement québécoise," alors qu'Elisheva Rosen tente d'illustrer certaines interférences entre la littérarité et les stratégies de légitimation du récit d'enfance.

Ces différentes propositions, formulées au cours d'un colloque organisé par le CRELIQ de l'Université Laval en novembre 1989, ne résolvent certes pas l'épineuse question de la spécificité des textes littéraires mais peuvent susciter des nouvelles problématiques de recherche dans le domaine de la théorie littéraire. Il en va de

même pour *L'institution du littéraire au Québec* qui est à la fois une étude portant sur les critères de régularité qui ont fondé la littérature québécoise et un bilan fort bien documenté de la critique, des débats et des querelles qui ont marqué la vie littéraire québécoise depuis le début du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle jusqu'aux lendemains de la Seconde Guerre mondiale.

Dans le premier chapitre de son ouvrage ("Fondations. Clôture et socialisation du texte"), madame Robert définit le processus d'automatisation de la littérature québécoise comme un ensemble de solutions apportées à des conflits touchant la propriété juridique du texte littéraire, la rémunération des écrivains non journalistes ainsi que la banalisation des canaux de diffusion (journaux, revues, livres). Ces conflits vont créer chez un ensemble d'écrivains et d'éditeurs, dès la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, une prise de conscience qui favorisera la création d'associations professionnelles, puis l'instauration du droit d'auteur.

Dans le deuxième chapitre ("Questions de stratégie. La double condensation du pouvoir"), Lucie Robert explique comment l'État contrôlera peu à peu le champ culturel, grâce à l'introduction des concepts de "culture nationale" et "d'intérêt public," aux subventions accordées à ceux qui correspondent aux besoins définis par l'État, à l'élargissement du réseau des écoles primaires et à l'implantation de bibliothèques publiques où sera diffusée la littérature. Le clergé, quant à lui, favorisera l'importation de productions étrangères, surtout françaises, puis "la création d'une industrie locale du livre et de l'édition tout en créant un public captif [...] qui reçoit des livres que d'autres ont choisis pour lui." Ces mesures conjointes de l'Église et de l'État engendreront un mouvement de résistance dans les milieux littéraires, puis "un processus d'autonomisation de la littérature comme entité autonome à l'intérieur des "humanités" universitaires," mouvement

qui conduira, selon l'auteure, "à l'institution d'une pratique et d'un corpus en savoir."

Dans son dernier chapitre ("L'illusion juridique. Le fétichisme de la littérature"), madame Robert démontre que la divulgation et que l'enseignement de la littérature au Québec ont d'abord été conçus comme une sorte de typologie historique ou d'"archives nationales," qui tendaient à favoriser la reconnaissance d'une littérature distincte des pratiques scripturaires françaises et canadiennes, et non comme un corpus dans lequel dominerait une quelconque esthétique. Plus tard, l'imposition et la légitimation de cet axiome historique du littéraire, puis la mise en cause de celui-ci, donneront naissance à des écritures de résistance. Peu à peu, l'oeuvre littéraire québécoise, que l'on considérera successivement comme le reflet du génie de la personne (sphère personnelle) et comme le fondement du génie de la nation (sphère publique), sera reconnue, étudiée, commentée, analysée et comprise. Cette mutation coïncide, selon l'auteure, avec la crise de l'interprétation qui traversa toutes les sciences humaines après 1960.

*L'institution du littéraire au Québec* apparaît donc comme un ouvrage sérieux qui contribue, à sa manière, à l'élaboration d'une histoire de la littérature québécoise. Il aurait été tout de même souhaitable que l'auteure consacre quelques lignes supplémentaires à l'institutionnalisation des premiers textes dramatiques publiés au Québec.



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## Fate and Native Experience

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**Hugh A. Dempsey**

*The Amazing Death of Calf Shirt and Other Blackfoot Stories.* Fifth House \$15.95

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**Ronald Cross and H el ene S evigny**

*Lasagna: The Man Behind the Mask.* Talonbooks \$16.95

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Reviewed by William J. Scheick

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Both the old narratives collected in Hugh A. Dempsey's *The Amazing Death of Calf Shirt* and the contemporary account presented in Ronald Cross and H el ene S evigny's *Lasagna: The Man Behind the Mask* suggest that fate is a significant feature of Native experience. While in the former book fate is said to account for the historical displacement of a Native culture, in the latter it is said to account for the personal failure of a representative of a Native nation.

Ranging from the late seventeenth-century to the early twentieth-century, the Blackfoot stories retold by Dempsey are based primarily on oral histories gleaned from years of interviews and secondarily on written records left by Jesuit missionaries and government officials. Dempsey's chronicles frequently feature inter-tribal warfare and inter-racial conflict, both reflecting the nature and effects of the Native experience of the post-colonial destabilization of their culture. Sad memory—particularly concerning the disappearance of the buffalo, the restriction of personal movement to reservations, and the attenuation of Native spirit—pervades these accounts. Accommodation, rather than angry resistance, influences their prevalent tone.

Informing this theme of accommodation is a mystical sense typical of the Blackfoot manner of perception. A regard for the supernatural is evident throughout Blackfoot culture, and so in the stories collected by Dempsey spiritual forces govern a

world where “nothing happen[s] by accident.” These stories, accordingly, register a keen sense of fate, which provided a general explanation of what was happening to the Blackfoot during their nineteenth-century encounters with Anglo culture. This belief in fate, however, may in turn have contributed to the unfortunate outcome of this encounter.

For the attentive reader, the stories collected by Dempsey incidentally provide many pieces of cultural information. For example, in the tale about White Clay, a warrior, we learn that in Blackfoot lore beavers possess great magical powers. In the tale about Red Crow, a Blood tribal chief, we learn of the symbolic importance of a circle of stones with radiating lines. In the tale about Dave Mills, “more Black than Indian,” we learn of the rarity of twins among Natives, who tend interpret such births as omens. These and other embedded details contribute to the value of Dempsey's volume, which beyond question provides a laudable archival service in preserving the very stories in which these stray details occur.

Readers may not find all of the chronicles in this collection of equal interest. I found two accounts particularly entertaining. One concerns White Clay, whose seventeenth-century encounter with a Shoshoni chief seems far more an ingenious Native recasting of the Old Testament account of David and Goliath than a genuine recollection of tribal history. The other tale concerns the nineteenth-century nephew of Calf Shirt, who routinely carried a live rattlesnake inside his blanket coat and who earned money by cramming its head eight inches down his throat. Less to my taste are the many war-party episodes recorded by Dempsey. I admit, however, that the prevalence of these narratives of raids on enemy camps may bear two insights. They possibly express the subconscious desires of those Blackfoot who delight in telling such war-



rior stories and they potentially serve to undermine contemporary Anglo cultural fantasies pertaining to early Native life.

Desires and cultural constructions of another kind are lodged in *Lasagna: The Man Behind the Mask*, the informally written and haphazardly organized account of Ronald Cross's role as a Mohawk warrior during the crisis at Oka in 1990. This book, an expanded and better version of the French edition published in Québec in 1993, presents two records. The part that details the history of the conflict between governmental authorities and certain representatives of the Mohawk nation—a conflict that leads to the death of a Sûreté de Québec officer—is reliable. There is no doubt that injustice, disrespect, and environmental hazard were features of the attempt to expand a golf course on Mohawk burial grounds. Especially valuable, too, is Hélène Sévigny's exposure of the irresponsibility of both the press and provincial authorities during the crisis. The other and main story, the part that justifies Cross's role in the Oka episode, is far less reliable. Associated with Cross's legal defense, Sévigny has a strong incentive to present her subject as a bearer "of the burden of peace."

When Cross falters in this self-assigned role, Sévigny capriciously exonerates him by blaming fate: "When you examine the life of Ronald Cross, you wonder who is writing his fate. Each time he decides to straighten up and fly right, he finds himself on a path that is both unpredictable and catastrophic . . . as if fate did not want him to have his life of peace." So much here, by way of evasion of responsibility, hinges on the deceptive locution "he finds himself." Sévigny's manner in this instance, as elsewhere in the book, is designed to suggest that Cross's alcoholism, addiction to drugs, history of trouble-making, family feuds, desertion of a child, and beating of a traitor somehow should not count in our final

assessment of his motives. They are injuries inflicted on Cross by fate, she implies, rather than the self-inflicted results of the choices he makes. It is noteworthy in this regard that in one of his own narratives, Cross reports speaking with a medicine woman who bluntly tells him, "Nobody's working on you. You're working on yourself. You're doing it all to yourself. You're creating this . . . monster of negativity around you that works on you."

Cross, in short, hardly seems an apt representative of the Mohawk Nation. Yet this role is specifically assigned to him by Sévigny, who says of his treatment in court, "a phrase from history haunts me: 'Napoleon was too great for France and too small for Europe.'" The indirect equation of Napoleon and Cross is startlingly grandiose, to say the least, and not the wisest choice. This specific allusion aside, the palimpsest underlying Sévigny's view here and throughout her book is the Hegelian notion of the great representative man who serves as a special instrument of the spirit of a time or nation. Cross, however, seems too small, too weak, and too conflicted a person to be an Hegelian representative man. Yes, he was "always in front of the camera" as "the most visible" of the warriors at Oka, where he admits he "made mistakes by sometimes drinking and doing drugs while on duty." But when we consider this prominent visibility, we are finally left with a disturbing question concerning the relationship between Cross's sense of a special "role to play" and his personal interest in the spectacle.



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## Postimperial Identities

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**Samuel Selvon**

*An Island is a World*. TSAR \$12.95

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**Lakshmi Gill**

*The Third Infinitive*. TSAR \$12.95

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Reviewed by Wanda Taylor

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What does it mean to belong? And how does one develop a sense of identity in a world that has little certainty and no single set of cultural or religious structures to guide its inhabitants? Both Selvon and Gill raise these questions in their work. First published in 1955, *An Island is a World* is Samuel Selvon's second novel, now reissued with a substantial and informative introduction by one of the more important literary critics of West Indian literature, Kenneth Ramchand. Selvon, the once Trinidadian, now Canadian author, is already well-known to many readers as the author of *A Brighter Sun* and *The Lonely Londoners* (also republished by TSAR) among many other works. Lakshmi Gill is perhaps less well known, although she has published several collections of poetry. Like Selvon, Gill was born and raised under the aegis of imperialism, in her case the Philippines, and now lives in Canada. *The Third Infinitive* is her first novel.

Foster, Selvon's principal character, is a Trinidadian of East Indian descent who seeks to understand the meaning of life and define his own purpose in it. He is overwhelmed by the world (of the 1930s and 1940s), which he feels spinning in his brain, and by his sense of not belonging. When his brother Rufus goes to the United States to study and better himself, Foster decides to travel to England in search of clarity. But while Rufus finds solace and purpose in his love for an American woman, choosing eventually to live in permanent exile, Foster comes home as uncertain as ever.

Having once considered his lack of national ties an asset, Foster's time in

England has made him see it rather as a liability. So unlike his brother, Foster's decision to marry the young Indian woman, Jennifer, at the close of the novel seems more a desperate attempt at claiming some kind of security than a genuine expression of love and selfhood.

Selvon explores here the problematic process of decolonization and the awkward but necessary emergence of nationalist sentiments. But the novel extends beyond these political issues to more fundamental philosophical questions of building individual identities and societies. These questions are raised principally in the conversations and correspondence between Foster and his closest friend Andrews, a painter turned politician. The emergence of a third friend, Father Hope, in the course of the novel also introduces a religious and spiritual element into the debate. As a philosophical probing, this is an important novel in Selvon's oeuvre. As a work of literature, however, it is not as strong as some of his other writings. Selvon himself alludes to the problems of style and structure. On the other hand, Selvon's straightforward style and his skill at creating character and writing natural dialogue all shine through.

In *An Island is a World*, like all of Selvon's fiction, the female characters are generally portrayed in terms of their relationship to men. They are terrifying, threatening, seductive, burdensome or contemptible. Selvon's masculine perspective here is all the more pronounced when set against Gill's novel, a first-person narration of a teenage girl growing up in Manila of the 1950s. Women reign in *The Third Infinitive*, be it the narrator's mother, matriarch of her household and terror of all who dare to tread on her territory, or the Catholic nuns who run the private school and college attended by the novel's heroine, Jazz, and her two older sisters, Sis One and Sis Two. There is a difference of class here as well. Unlike Selvon's characters, who are often

working class and have little education, Jazz grows up among the wealthiest and most educated families in the Philippines. Her father, an Indian (from India) nationalist, has married a landed Filipina with pure Spanish pedigree, and Jazz recognizes that her ancestry places her among the imperialists no less than the colonized.

*The Third Infinitive* is highly impressionistic. It is rich with references to high and low art alike, reflecting both the traditional and primarily (although not exclusively) Eurocentric education of the principal characters and the prevalence of Western popular culture that arrived with the Americans after the war. Politics also hover in the background, with numerous allusions to the impact of an American military presence in the country, the traumatic effects of an earlier Japanese occupation, and the sometimes violent emergence of nationalist identification among the native Filipinos. Underpinning all these cultural and political references is the ever-present Catholicism of the country and especially of the American nuns who rule the young girls' student lives. It is the kind of Catholicism we tend to associate with Jesuits, erudite, abstract, and philosophical, so that Jazz reveals a highly sophisticated and at times playfully irreverent understanding of her faith.

For all its richness of suggestion, the fluidity of this novel (each scene, event, and image slides almost imperceptibly into the next) has the unfortunate effect of undermining the work's coherence. It is often difficult to know when or where the events described take place and what their significance is to the rest of the novel. Gill's imagistic style gives the impression that many layers lie hidden beneath the surface and that the string of potent experiences will lead us to an eventual climax. But nothing ultimately emerges. What seemed at first to be an ironic perception of the privileged environment in which Jazz develops her

sense of political and social awareness appears in the latter half of the novel as little more than the portrayal of a wealthy and highly educated but utterly bored teenager who takes all this privilege for granted. The suggestive questioning of imperial history never delves beyond the most obvious assertions, and there is no sense of movement or growth in the characters themselves, so that the novel never finally rises above a succession of nostalgic and playful reminiscences.

Despite this disappointment, Gill shows some promise as a novelist, and we are grateful to TSAR for making available to Canadian readers these two postcolonial authors. Selvon is an important writer whose novels must not be allowed to fall out of print. And perhaps Gill will likewise emerge among the names to be remembered.

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## Late Debates

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**Karen Hohne and Helen Wussow, ed.**

*A Dialogue of Voices: Feminist Literary Theory and Bakhtin.* U Minnesota P \$44.95/17.95

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**Luce Irigaray, Tr. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill**

*An Ethics of Sexual Difference.* Cornell UP n.p.

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Reviewed by Penny van Toorn

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It took a surprisingly long time—thirteen years from the date of the English translation of *Rabelais and His World* (1968)—for Bakhtin to come to the notice of feminist theorists. Nobody remarked that his model of social and linguistic stratification was entirely gender-blind, nor did anyone notice that his work provided useful avenues of access to key questions in contemporary feminist debate. Not even Julia Kristeva, reading Bakhtin in the original Russian in the mid 1960s, challenged or appropriated Bakhtin expressly for feminist purposes. It was not until after the publication of Holquist and Emerson's English

translation of *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981) that Wayne Booth first subjected Bakhtin's work explicitly to "the challenge of feminist theory" in *Critical Inquiry*. Since that time, the interanimation of feminist and Bakhtinian theories has intensified and diversified. Hohne and Wussow's anthology *A Dialogue of Voices*, joins works by Dale Bauer and Susan McKinstry, Peter Hitchcock, Clair Wills, Nancy Glazener, and others who in recent years have challenged and/or appropriated Bakhtin.

Generally speaking, the contributors to *A Dialogue of Voices* adopt one of two approaches: some mechanically apply a monologized version of Bakhtin to generate a feminist reading of a text; others dialogize both Bakhtin and aspects of feminist theory by using each to focus a re-reading of the other. The latter approach, to my mind, proves far more productive than the former.

For these and other reasons, the quality of the essays in *A Dialogue of Voices* is uneven. The essays that draw on Bakhtin's theories of language, ambivalence, and authority are more interesting on the whole than those based on his work on Rabelais, carnival, and the body. Bakhtin is used effectively in Elizabeth Butler Cullingford's discussion of Yeats' "poetics of excrement" in the Crazy Jane poems, Patrick D. Murphy's theorization of nature writing, Suzanne Rosenthal Shumway's examination of the chronotope of the asylum, and Denise Heikinen's astute analysis of Manuel Puig's *Kiss of the Spider Woman*.

I braced myself for something flaky and incomprehensible when I came to the unorthodox format and typography of Virginia Purvis-Smith's "ideological becoming: mikhail bakhtin, feminine *écriture*, and julia kristeva." But this paper turned out to be the most creative, searching, and powerful in the collection. With acumen and humour, Purvis-Smith anticipates and guides her readers beyond any initial scept-

tical judgement. Her brief narrative of a conference of women preachers in Boston is keyed numerically into fourteen pages of endnotes which explain her unusual methods, and focus the questions of voice, language, history, authority, and gender that are raised tacitly in the narrative. Against feminists who argue that women must choose between silence and inauthentic male speech, Purvis-Smith uses Bakhtin's model of linguistic appropriation to deconstruct essentializing binaries and ask "is not the language of my religious tradition and the academy a part of who i now am?"

The most disappointing section of *A Dialogue of Voices* is the editors' introduction which is weak in both its articulation and utilization of Bakhtinian theory. Brief definitions of key Bakhtinian terms are offered in passing, but they are so short and simplistic that they succeed less in assisting readers who may be new to Bakhtin than in irritating those already acquainted with his work. Hohne and Wussow spend an inordinate amount of time worrying about whether a theoretical system devised by a male can be of any use to feminists. Once they decide Bakhtin *can* be used, they grant him absolute authority, wheeling him in as a closing device whenever a question resists resolution. The problem is that Hohne and Wussow never seriously read Bakhtin through any but a narrow range of the lenses developed by feminist theory. As a result, they can, for example, dismiss "*écriture féminine*" as a theoretical impossibility, without ever considering the question of its strategic value as an *imagined* autonomous space, a utopia outside the bounds of male discourse.

Questions to do with the gendering and appropriation of voice and language must also be raised in any reading of Luce Irigaray. Originally published in French in 1984 as *Ethique de la différence sexuelle*, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* consists of lectures and seminar readings delivered by

Irigaray at Erasmus University in Rotterdam in 1982. Characteristically, Irigaray takes on canonical male philosophers—Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas—weaving a rapturous but cohesive series of dialogic meditations with/against their major writings on the topic of heterosexual love as it impinges on ontologies of place, body, science, the erotic, and the divine. Many passages of striking poetic beauty and intellectual courage are to be found in *Ethics*, but at moments Irigaray sinks into what would be unpardonable banality were it not for the fuzziness of the lines separating parody, stylization, and direct authorial discourse in her work.

The extensive experience of Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill in translating Irigaray's work is apparent in their sensitivity to both the technical and the political difficulties involved. Readers are assisted by references to the standard English translations of the texts Irigaray quotes or mimics, and the format of the text is designed to preserve the politics of Irigaray's linguistic practices. Certain kinds of ambiguity and difficulty are deliberately left in, on the grounds that, as Burke and Gill put it, "it is only when Irigaray's readers engage with her textuality that they fully experience what she is 'saying.'" By leaving certain words untranslated, the translators retain Irigaray's polyglossic style, allowing readers not only to enter into her distinctive way of thinking, but also to appreciate the etymological roots of the words she is recontextualizing. Key words and passages thus become both the stakes and the sites of dramatic political struggle in Irigaray's text.

The only problem with this translation is that it comes rather late in the day. In the twelve years since Irigaray first delivered her lectures at Rotterdam, the ethnocentricity of French and Anglo-American feminism has been challenged by an array of voices insisting on the need to historicize

and culturally particularize sexual difference. "An Ethics of Sexual Difference" addresses the problem of scientific language that "fails to consider the living subject." Yet it could be argued that Irigaray's own feminine sublime seems pitched to transcend certain major differences between culturally diverse "living subjects." Irigaray's engagement exclusively with the "greats" of Western philosophy, and her abstraction of sexual difference from the diverse material and historical conditions under which it is constituted, work regressively within the large and diverse arena of contemporary feminist debate, to perpetuate an outdated Eurocentricity.

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## Writing Canadian Relations

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**Joyce Marshall**, selected and with an Afterword by Timothy Findley  
*Any Time At All and Other Stories*. M&S \$6.95

**Miriam Packer**  
*Take Me to Coney Island*. Guernica n.p.

**Suzanne Jacob**, Trans. Susanna Finnell  
*A Beach in Maine*. Guernica \$10.00

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Reviewed by Julie E. Walchli

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"I'd be in trouble later, I knew, for telling what my mother called 'a story.' She never said 'lie.' 'Don't tell stories' was how she put it," the thirteen year-old Martha tells the reader in Joyce Marshall's "Avis de Vente." Fortunately for readers of Canadian literature, the narrators in Marshall, Packer, and Jacob's stories refuse to heed this advice, and the result is a series of memorable selections dealing with relationships between parents and children, women and men, past and present.

The twelve stories Findley has thoughtfully selected for *Any Time at All and Other Stories* span forty three years of Marshall's career and include two previously unpublished pieces, "The Heights" and

"Kristiansen." The stories are written largely, although not exclusively, in the first person voice of female narrators, and the characters are most often outsiders who search fruitlessly and yet also courageously for a sense of belonging. In the five moving "Martha Stories" that open the collection, Marshall paints vivid scenes of summers in rural Quebec that are reminiscent in their depth of feeling of Margaret Laurence's Manawaka stories (Marshall herself was born in Quebec and now lives in Toronto). Martha, who is herself a writer, tells in retrospect about her childhood as an English speaker in French speaking communities. And although the stories are built around realistic, common childhood events that most readers will be able to recognize, the narrator never lets us forget that we are in the world of fiction: she is self-reflexive and often addresses the audience directly. The stories are not accurate representations of the past, but reconstructions built around unreliable memories that are constantly being recreated in Martha's mind.

Marshall's collection moves chronologically from the aftermath of World War I presented in "The Martha Stories," through the depression and World War II in "Wars," and up to the present time in "The Unknown," ending with three stories set in Norway, "In Another World." But her virtuosity lies not only in her ability to render the personal lives behind historical events in a way that makes them echo for readers in 1995, but also in her ability to shift with apparent ease from a child's perspective to a thirty-three year old Norwegian man to a ninety-one year old Montreal feminist. And it is Dr. Georgiana Dinsborough's story, in "So Many Have Died," that was among the most compelling of the collection. Along with "The Old Woman," it is perhaps the most poignant reminder of what a good short story can do. In a few pages, Marshall creates the life of one of Quebec's first female doctors, a character who is too com-

plex to be described with any single label: "I didn't live so long just to become a stereotype peppery old lady. I'm very complex. I'm Georgiana," she tells the reader. But Marshall is not content simply to tell about the past through Georgiana, and in the ending to the story the history of one pioneering Canadian woman confronts the brutal reality of patriarchy in the 1990's. The ending is classic, shocking, and lingers in the reader's mind long after s/he has put down the collection. *Any Time at All and Other Stories* is filled with Marshall's skill, evidence that she is, as Timothy Findley reminds us in his Afterword to the collection, one of Canada's finest short story writers.

In comparison, Quebecer Miriam Packer's first collection, *Take Me to Coney Island*, starts slowly, but does include some remarkable pieces. Unlike Marshall, Packer's stories revolve around one protagonist, a Jewish girl living in Montreal, Hanna Davidson, and all stories but one are told in her first person voice. The stories move back and forth in time and place, but Packer is at her best when seeking to capture the bonds between parents and children. "Cross My Heart" is a funny and moving story about the sensitive Hanna's problems in kindergarten and her mother's chutzpah in response to them; "The Death Dance" and "Circles" deal with the terminal illness and death of Hanna's mother. In these pieces, Packer uses a lyrical stream-of-consciousness to capture Hanna's attempts to understand and deal with her feelings about her mother's illness, and while the stories are full of the anguish, terror, pain, and fear a child feels when her mother is dying, Packer also weaves through death and grieving a great deal of love.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the collection is Hanna's not entirely sympathetic character: Packer's protagonist is as detached from important events as she is observant of them, sensitive and passionate in relationships and yet at the same time

stupid and naive, beautiful and also an outsider in many circumstances because she is Jewish. “Jeannine” is one of the most interesting examples of these contradictions. The story is a vivid recounting of the clashes between young girls trying desperately to fit in, and the pain and humiliation that result when fitting in is impossible. Like Marshall’s stories from her characters’ childhoods, readers will likely recognize themselves in “Jeannine.”

An interest in the effects childhood has on one’s development is perhaps the main link between Quebecer Suzanne Jacob’s *A Beach in Maine* and Marshall and Packer’s works. Jacob’s novella, told in five sections, is the story of two twenty-nine year old twins who go to a beach in Maine to mourn their mother’s death. The story is told from the perspective of the male twin in the first person, and is a lyrical but at times awkward meditation which seems to want to be a play but isn’t. The narrator attempts to come to terms not so much with his mother’s death as his relationship with his sister who exercises almost absolute control over him. In order to deal with this control, we learn, he has taken to stealing small items as a survival strategy, and has done so since he was a young boy: “despite the persistence of my sister to remove all habits from our lives,” he tells the reader, “I managed to keep one habit to this day, and that is the habit to steal.” There is great potential here, but the narrator’s character is not fully developed. The gaps that exist between events and people in this story, the deliberate silences, are frustrating rather than suggestive. Marshall, Packer, and Jacob all create characters stretching to explore complex, difficult relationships: their diverse and moving pieces deserve reading and study by a broad audience.

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## All the Stages a World

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**Guy Vanderhaeghe**

*I Had a Job I Liked. Once.* Fifth House \$10.95

**George F. Walker**

*Escape from Happiness.* Coach House \$12.95

**David Young**

*Glenn.* Coach House \$12.95

Reviewed by Jerry Wasserman

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Part of the challenge of playwriting is to utilize the limited space of the physical stage to evoke a much larger theatrical space: the social, historical, political, emotional and psychological realms of the characters. Setting and set, plot and characterization necessarily function as metaphors. All the stage’s a world. The settings of these three plays range from the semi-public interior of a police station to the inside of a characters head. The extent to which each play manages to speak of and to the world beyond itself is in large measure the extent of its dramatic success.

*I Had a Job I Liked. Once.*, Guy Vanderhaeghe’s first play, is set in a Saskatchewan RCMP detachment in the summer of 67. It opens with the town prosecutor claiming that his daughter has been sexually assaulted, and demanding that the veteran Sergeant Finestad quickly press charges against the boy. But the by-the-book sergeant refuses until he can find out the whole truth. By the end of the night, after a lengthy interrogation with flashbacks to the scenes (and seeds) of the crime, Finestad’s certainties have been shaken. Justice and law, he learns, are not necessarily synonymous. Truth cannot always be served by adhering to the book.

These are pretty conventional sentiments, propounded theatrically with a clumsy literalness. In the opening scene Finestad pulls the statute book out of a drawer, tapping the cover for emphasis. At the end he refers four times to how, [w]hen I consulted the book I found it wasn’t very helpful,

before quoting from another book—Blakes poetry, unbelievably—whose spirit seems to him truer to this case than the law books letter. In the final line Finestad, a Catholic, remarks that he is going to confession, as if we need reminding of the obvious ironic congruencies between the boys confession and his own.

The failure of key prop and plot devices to attain any metaphorical resonance substantially weakens the play. Its primary strength—not surprisingly, in light of Vanderhaeghe's prize-winning fiction—lies in the boys reluctant narrative of the nights events. His story of class conflict, filtered through the playwright's blue-collar sympathies, comes across as a 1960s prairie version of *The Hairy Ape* (complete, alas, with the girl as conventional castrating rich bitch).

George F. Walker patrols some of the same thematic territory as Vanderhaeghe but comes at the question of justice from his own offbeat, proto-feminist comic angle. Set in the kitchen of an east-end Toronto home, *Escape from Happiness* features the matriarch Nora, her three adult daughters and once-abusive husband Tom in a sequel to Walker's *Better Living* (1985). Walker rounds out the cast with characters recycled from his other two East End Plays, *Criminals in Love* and *Beautiful City*, to create a tetralogy. Like its predecessors, *Escape from Happiness* explores how power might be redistributed and life made more livable in the modern city.

Foregoing the cosmic doom and political pessimism of his early plays, Walker's recent work has moved steadily towards a comic affirmation of better living, especially through the power of women to change the way we approach traditional problems. Framing a plot concerned with drugs, pornography, domestic violence, police entrapment and mental illness, *Escape from Happiness* opens with Nora urging her son-in-law, who has been beaten up by thugs, to

get up and dance, and ends with her telling her prodigal husband to get a job that makes him happy doing little things that are useful. These are only ideas, she explains. Suggestions. You know . . . hints.

As tentative and apparently simple-minded as Nora's proposals are, they contrast starkly with the corruption and violence employed by the men in the family, by the police, and at times by Nora and her daughters themselves. That one of the police officers is a woman further blurs gender categories, but on the whole the play proposes a feminine alternative to a masculine status quo. Nora, her daughters, and their daughters represent a creative new approach to problem-solving, a woman-centred redefinition of justice, crime and punishment, with the kitchen as locus of this new value system. Self-consciously and often hilariously, Walker employs the banal props and rituals of domestic life to underscore his argument that the reconstructed family can be a corrective to the malaise of the larger social order. My family is made up of human beings, daughter Elizabeth tells the police. You're loyal to an institution. I'll visit you in the asylum some day and explain the difference.

Canadian pianist Glenn Gould was loyal only to his own art and genius, David Young argues in his play *Glenn*. Though that didn't land the brilliant, eccentric Gould in the asylum, it made him, in Young's view, extremely self-absorbed. *Glenn* initially explores the tension between the performer and the private man (resolved by Gould when he gave up public performance at the height of his fame to pursue technological perfection in the recording studio.) But Young is more interested in charting Gould's inner conflicts, conceiving the play as a psychodrama. He puts us inside Gould's head, dividing the character alliteratively (and reductively) into four personae: The Prodigy, The



Performer, the Perfectionist, and The Puritan. This archaic device, reminiscent of Robertson Davies charming but slight philosophical comedy *Eros at Breakfast* (1948), gives full priority to the solipsistic Gould at the expense of his achievements. The result is a self-indulgent portrait of the artist in conversation with himself.

On the page, the abstract nature of the dialogue makes the four Goulds virtually indistinguishable from one another, a problem likely less evident in performance. The reader also necessarily misses the sole reason why we care about Gould at all—his music. Young uses Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, a Gould favorite, to structure the play with an opening and closing aria and thirty variations, each featuring Gould's own recordings. Like the sounds of Mozart that fill the theatre in Peter Shaffers *Amadeus*, this gives the audience an objective correlative of the artistic genius that provides the plays real *raison d'être*. But not even the glorious music allows *Glenn* to transcend the limitations of its concept and the egoism of its character. The Goulds provide their own sorry epitaph: We will a world into being . . . and fill it with . . . ourselves.

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## A Sense of Wrong

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**Judith Krause**

*Half the Sky*. Coteau \$9.95

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**Linda Rogers**

*Hard Candy*. Sono Nis \$9.95

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**Louise Halfe**

*Bear Bones and Feathers*. Coteau \$9.95

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Reviewed by K. Jane Watt

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If, as one of the borrowed chapter epigraphs to Judith Krause's *Half the Sky* suggests, "A poem...begins as a lump in the throat, a sense of wrong, a homesickness, a lovesickness," then I have been dealt some lumpy material indeed. For like Krause's collec-

tion, Linda Rogers' *Hard Candy* and Louise Halfe's *Bear Bones and Feathers* articulate the pain of everyday violences to the body and soul and celebrate the richness of the word, the power of story to heal the ruptures in and from community. Halfe (also known by her Cree name, Sky Dancer) writes in her afterward entitled "Comfortable in My Bones," that

The stories inside me demanded face. They became my medicine, creating themselves in the form of poetry. These egg-bones were the voice which I have been addressing. My bare feet had felt the drum of the earth and the heartbeat of my palms. I did not fight these stories, though many times I wanted to run. I became a wolf, sniffing and searching, pawing, muzzling, examining every visible track I made or saw. I became the predator on the scent. I was the master, the slave, beholder and beheld, the voice and the song. I was the dark, the light....I will no longer be a binding sinew of stifling rules, but rather a sinew of wolf songs, clear as morning air.

While Halfe comes to a comfortable self through poetry, using her poetic fictions about those close to her to speak herself and to speak her community, Rogers has a more meditational bent that draws from, and builds on, the single moment. Rogers explores, not *comfort*, but the parameters of the *uncomfortable*, shifting from the resonances of familial love in "Palindrome" to the darker side of story and song in the eruptions of refrains from children's rhymes (and from a litany of other conventional cautions) into the sweep of family memory, into a fearful initiation into morality. In "Money in Your Mouth," the liar of schoolyard fame burns suspended in mid-air, his pants in flame, an absurd victim of his stifling clothes. Elsewhere, children wound their parents unknowingly: "Step on a crack,/ break your mother's back./ In our neighbourhood,/ all the side-

walks were broken./ We knew the howling at night was mothers/ laid on their beds of pain/ by awkward sons and daughters/ with growing feet.” Rogers’s strength is in creating a palimpsest of meaning, in layering words with ties to different registers carefully, one atop the other. In “Smells Around the Mouth,” for example, the shaping lick of a wild animal to “get rid of the smell/ and protect [her offspring] from predators” is refigured in human terms: “In some families in my neighbourhood,/ a licking meant your mother/ took a wooden spoon/ and bent you over a kitchen chair/ your bum exposed.” Although such accepted domestic violences are not practiced in her own house, the speaker reminds us of the shaping licks that marked her childhood and youth, always and necessarily freighted with the furtive burden of admonishment.

Throughout *Bear Bones and Feathers*, Louise Halfe examines the shaping licks of her own experience, from the tenderness of a lover in “Nicimos”—“Valentine’s day he gave me daffodils with/ two babies on my breast./ And I/ in turn/ gave him tangerine, plum, candy apple lips”—to the strength and knowledge of her grandmother, a prominent figure throughout the collection. In “Body Politics” a litany of advice from Mama issues forth urging the young female auditor to take pride in herself, and above all in the body she has been given. In other poems, Halfe’s licks take on the force of violence in the obscene rituals of institutions.

Halfe’s work constantly (and successfully, I think) tests the limits of the poetic, abandoning the clever turn, the mellifluous flourish in order to produce a poetry of the guts, a poetry with unexpected pockets of warmth and belonging amidst a shocking violence, all the more shocking for its ordinariness. Some of her finest poems, written in what she calls her “grassroots tongue,” are courageous in their refusal of any easy expectations about the poetic. They are informed with an anger, at times

humorous, often bitter or bittersweet, and a style that demands a careful listening precisely because of its deceptive simplicity. Halfe’s work underscores, too, the obvious pragmatic problems of translation, both of translation between languages and between mediums: it is in “Sister,” a poem about domestic and cultural violences told in a morgue over the body of a murdered woman that my inability to read Cree is most frustrating and most instructive. The violences that have been done to this woman have been done in English; the healing work, Halfe implies as she leaves behind these violences and turns to Cree, must be done in a more appropriate language. It is all carefully glossed in the back of the collection, but the nuances that make a word in a situation both serious and funny, the richness of language that comes from linguistic comfort must inevitably be put aside except for those fluent in the Cree that punctures the veneer of English throughout the collection. The discomfort of translation is registered, too, in *Bear Bones and Feathers* in a tension between the flat silence of print and the unexpected life of the oral. “Sister” strikes me not as a poem to be devoured by a bespectacled academic alone in a book-lined room, but as a poem of community, a poem to be spoken aloud and repeatedly in a busy room amid the breathing, the rustling of bodies, the pauses, the cadences of a crowd.

While Louise Halfe’s writing voice echoes astonishingly and variously with outrage, pride, shame, disgust, and wonder, Judith Krause maintains at every turn a soothing decorum, moving the reader/listener through the collection at an even, unhurried pace. Her collection, reportedly named after Mao Tse-Tung’s remark that “women carry half of heaven on their shoulders,” explores the many possibilities of women’s relationships to others, questioning burdensome expectations and duties even as she writes of the joys of connection, of the solidity of

inheritance. In "Kitchen Herbs," for example, a moment in the garden becomes a moment of personal affirmation: "You dig out the roots/ with an old spade, cradling/ as much earth as possible around/ the tender shoots./ You are moving/ part of your grandmother/ this plant, an offshoot of hers/ came with her mother from the old country./ You do not know its English name." Krause's strength is less in the blocks of prose dotting the collection than in the poetry, particularly in her meditations on control and on loss of control through aging or disease or other betrayals of the body. Her proud grandmother, "dressed in black," bent double and pulling weeds epitomizes this struggle for control over the uncontrollable, over the exigencies of time: "the curve of her back repeats/ and repeats her simple need/ to work, to be/ in charge." These are collections that represent the spectrum of poetry; Rogers's crafted literacy, Halfe's viscerality, and Krause's measured tones form a pleasing triptych. If pressed for favourites, I would cite Krause's "Death is Pulling You," a chronicle of the moment of interface between *here* and *there*, between life and death, Halfe's "The Heat of My Grandmothers," an embrace of three loves and a "beaded rainbow" of lost children, and Rogers's "Painting by Numbers," a brief glimpse into the everyday life of a painted woman immortalized by the fracture of her body onto ready-made canvas. "Picture the artist," Rogers writes, "She is a pisces, a mother/ a woman who loves other women./ She takes off her clothes/ and covers her body with paint." The metaphor of the woman artist in the final lines mimics the reading/reviewing process, forming an (open) ending more complete than one I can think of. This artist puts herself down on paper, "loving it."

Later we come up close, squeezing our eyes,  
as if they were tubes of colour too,  
the colour we colour her.

These are her lips, we say, her apples—  
her nipples and pubic hair.  
What do they mean?

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## East Coast Writing

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### Lawrence O'Toole

*Heart's Longing: Newfoundland, New York and the Distance Home.* Douglas & McIntyre \$26.95

### James Hiller and Peter Neary, eds.

*Twentieth-Century Newfoundland: Explorations.* Breakwater \$19.95

### Renate Usmiani, ed.

*Kelusultiek: Original Women's Voices of Atlantic Canada.* Institute for the Study of Women, Mount St. Vincent University \$14.95

Reviewed by Claire Wilkshire

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"This book," Lawrence O'Toole writes, "is a search for a place called Heart's Longing, a sort of search for a home. There are a number of places in Newfoundland with similar names— Heart's Content, Heart's Desire, Little Heart's Ease— but there is no actual place called Heart's Longing. It does not exist, except to say in the imagination, a mythical place of the mind." O'Toole finds in the course of his investigation that the communities which have formed him include not only the Newfoundland outpost he escaped as early as he possibly could (although this is the setting for much of the narrative), but also Toronto, where he embarked on his career as a journalist and came out as a gay man in the 1970s, and Greenwich Village in Manhattan, that other East coast island, where he currently lives.

*Heart's Longing* blends memoir with fiction, autobiography with travel writing. Although the chapters dealing with outpost life clearly have an autobiographical basis, they are often told from the point of view of characters such as nine-year-old Derm O'Dairn (of whom O'Toole writes: "[h]e is not me because I would be a less generous guide, and it is not easy for an adult to have the eyes of a child") or Jipp Parnell, who

returns home after leaving the priesthood. O'Toole warns that the characters, while based on real people, are fictional, that his view of the community is romanticized—"Question the rosier view," he cautions.

O'Toole's narrative is not quite as carefully written or edited as one might have hoped: he repeats himself, splits infinitives relentlessly, indulges in chunks of purple prose and sentimentality. Still, there is something insistently engaging about his manner of telling a story. The variety of material helps too—Newfoundland history, O'Toole's experiences as a volunteer with the St. Peter's Church AIDS programme, the Catholic Church, social mores on Fire Island, family, rebuilding a friend's *dacha* in a village north of Moscow. The strength of *Heart's Longing* lies not in its rather unoriginal implication that home is the series of communities in which one finds oneself, but in its powerful evocation of those communities' human character.

*Twentieth-Century Newfoundland: Explorations* also concerns itself with East coast communities, but it focusses more on political and economic than on social characteristics. An excellent introduction to the history of the province, this anthology collects ten historical essays and a bibliography, all of which are thorough and scholarly. The essays have been arranged in a more or less chronological manner. In the opening article James Hiller's thoughtful and articulate assessment of the political career of Sir Robert Bond (Newfoundland's premier 1900-1909) traces the popular enthusiasm for Bond's expansionist accomplishments in his first term and the disputes and poor strategy which led to his downfall in the second; in addition it provides a clear picture of the state of the colony at the time, its relations with England and the United States. The book closes with a blow-by-blow account of the constitutional complexities involved in the fall of Joey Smallwood's Liberal govern-

ment in 1971-72. In between there are essays on immigration policy, American military bases, fisheries, confederation, agriculture, tourism advertising at the turn of the century, the right-wing politics of charities in the twenties, the development of electricity. Gerhard Bassler's "'Deemed Undesirable': Newfoundland's Immigration Policy, 1900-49" deserves a special mention; it examines the rigid restrictions placed on immigration and points to a number of proposals, all rejected, to settle groups of well-educated, well-financed political refugees, including Jews and Hutterites. One can only wonder what the effects might have been of the social and economic contributions of these people, had they been introduced to a more welcoming political régime. Another interesting study of opportunities missed or mismanaged is Gordon Handcock's article on the Commission of Government's land settlement scheme, a programme designed to establish a number of sites for community agricultural development in the 1930s and '40s.

Newfoundland history studies must be a very male domain indeed: *Twentieth-Century Newfoundland* includes not a single article on women's history and not one written by a woman (although there is room for three by Peter Neary, one of the book's two editors). One hopes this oversight will be rectified in future publications of Breakwater's Newfoundland History Series, to which this volume is a valuable addition.

*Kelusultiek* brings together histories of a much more personal nature. A compilation of indigenous women's writing from Atlantic Canada, it offers a variety of genres—chiefly poetry, but also autobiographies by Shirley Mitchell and Rita Joe, Andrea Bear Nicholas's review of Wayland Drew's *Halfway Man*, Dixie Wheeler's prose meditations, stories by Sarah Anala and Helen Sylliboy, and cover art by Shirley Bear. Rita Joe is probably the best known

contributor, and her work exemplifies some of the collection's predominant themes: alcoholism, spousal abuse, the need to write, the bond between mother and child, the oppression of a people. This may sound grim, but Rita Joe's writing is shot through with a gutsy optimism, a sense of faith and determination, of love for family and friends. Some of her poems are distinguished by their casual conversational style; others feature repetition and incantatory structural devices which create a songlike effect evidenced also in the poems of linguist Katherine Sorbey, many of which appear both in English and in Mi'kmaq. *Kelusultiek* includes work by seventeen contributors, most of whom have not been published before. "Kelusultiek," writes Cecily Barrie, a member of the book's advisory board, "is an Algonquian word about speaking." Speaking and listening, indeed, are the key ideas behind this book, which creates a place for the voices of Native Atlantic women.

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## Extremities

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**Michael Winter, ed.**

*Extremities: Fiction from the Burning Rock.* Killlick  
\$14.95

**Rita Moir**

*Survival Gear.* Polestar \$14.95

Reviewed by Herb Wyile

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I have borrowed the title for this review from one of the books being reviewed because it captures something the two volumes have in common: they both come out of Canada's eastern "extremity"—Newfoundland and Nova Scotia respectively—and in their separate ways deal with extremes, both physical and psychological. The inhabitants of the fishing village of Freeport, N.S., to whom the greater part of Rita Moir's *Survival Gear* is devoted, endure in an extreme environment,

wrestling their living from the sea, and the writers of the Burning Rock Collective, as noted in the introduction to *Extremities*, "live in a bruised landscape which cultivates extreme people with extreme stories."

In some ways, the two books are reverse images: the ten writers whose stories are collected in *Extremities* are based in Newfoundland, yet their narratives for the most part—at least to the eye of one "from away"—reflect an urban, somewhat alienated, somewhat (dare I say) postmodern sensibility, while *Survival Gear*, by a writer from British Columbia, is more characteristic of the kinds of representations of rural, maritime hardship associated with writing from the East Coast. Such an ironic inversion, however, is misleading, as it says more about traditional assumptions about writing from Eastern Canada than about the books themselves, which both do much to dispel the tenacious stereotypes of idyllic or hardy pastoralism associated with the region.

It would be difficult to convey the variety and tenor of the stories in *Extremities*, but the warning on the jacket is a good starting point:

These stories may contain: trucks and leather, love in a graveyard, a lost heifer, knives that spell fuck, eleven hundred pounds of muscle, one Jesus sentence, three thousand degrees, glued castanets, a muzzle of water, a wife, a wall of cellophane, embryonic snails, a smog-masked cupid, virginity in a plastic bag, nipples in an aquarium, trails of warped DNA, a celibate man in crêpe soles.

Such an inventory suggests an exotica that the stories themselves do not quite live up to, but it serves as an appropriate signal of the distance between this collection and the Newfoundland of, say, Percy Janes, Harold Horwood or Al Pittman. Most of the stories are quirky and urbane—Lisa Moore's "Carmen Has Gonorrhoea" and Lawrence Mathews' "The Apocalypse Theme Park"—

for example—and in a number of stories there’s a certain metatextual and intertextual play, such as in Claire Wilkshire’s engaging “French Lessons.” Stories like Michael Winter’s “Two Families” expand the dramatic potential of more traditional subjects—in this case, the dynamics of living in a fishing family. Third-person narrative is largely absent from the collection, and the preference for the fragmented monologue wears after a while, but on the whole there’s a richness of language and of character that makes *Extremities* a worthwhile read.

Rita Moir’s *Survival Gear* is certainly more accessible than *Extremities*. Moir’s account—and that’s as generically specific as I am inclined to be in describing *Survival Gear*—traces her voyage from B.C. to Nova Scotia and back, with most of the narrative devoted to an intended two-week stay in Freeport which stretches out to ten months. The book is travelogue, memoir, biography, history, poetry, polemic and more, as Moir, a feminist and labor activist, describes the people she meets and the imprint which the spirit of the community leaves upon her. Her narrative is roughly continuous, but it is divided into relatively

independent segments ranging in length from a paragraph to several pages and in style from the lyricism of “I’d like to give you the weather network for your birthday” to the polemics of “We are not sentimental, because this is food” (which moves from a description of cleaning fish to a reflection on the implications of multinational agribusiness for the family farm in Canada). “Survival gear” is a recurrent image, literally referring to a suit for surviving in cold water, but more generally suggesting those defences, attitudes, experiences, which in one way or another enable us to continue on with our lives.

Moir’s prose is vivid and varied, and the narrative ranges freely in scope from the personal to the communal to the global, but her main focus remains the people of Freeport—their vitality, their love of stories, their communal cohesion. The view is an intimate one, as Moir is both outsider and insider: a visitor to a community hundreds of years old, yet quick to establish a personal connection with many of the people she describes. The result is a warm and complex portrait; to cop a phrase from *Survival Gear*, Rita Moir done Freeport good.

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## Earle Birney, 1904–1995

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Iain Higgins

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*Books, books, books.* Some thirty-five in all, alongside a fair number of still scattered letters, squibs, and essays. Taken together, and even allowing for Birney's habit of recycling and reworking, these collected and uncollected texts represent a considerable variety of creative and intellectual labour, as well as a broad range of writing: editions, editorials, literary journalism, memoirs, literary criticism, prose fiction, radio plays, and above all poetry, a half a century's worth from *David and Other Poems* in 1942 to *Last Makings* in 1991. How many still in print? "The future has the right, you know, to damn," says the Freed State of Columbia's Minister of History (*Damnation of Vancouver*), and damned if it hasn't: a scandalous and unrepresentative three: *Turvey* (1949); *Big Bird in the Bush: Selected Stories and Sketches* (1978); and *Essays on Chaucerian Irony* (1985). Time, then, for another book, a selected Birney, though not a marmoreal slab of a tome, for Birney is a far livelier and more daring poet than his typically anthologized pieces would suggest. No flower-gatherer has touched "Plastic pinkles for Gaudy Nite," for instance, whereas war poems like "The Road to Nijmegen" and "Mappemounde" are frequently plucked for show, even though they, like the pleasant *Turvey*, are nothing beside the war poems of Celan, Milosz, Rozewicz. Time too, then, for a

reassessment: why not a portable homage, say, in the manner of Birney's own gift to Malcolm Lowry, whose posthumous *Selected Poems* he edited for Ferlinghetti's Pocket Poets Series (1962)?

*Ice Cod Bell or Stone.* Birney's fifth gathering of verse (also 1962), published in his fifty-eighth year after a poetic silence of ten years, his finest single book, cannily building on his strengths as a wayward word-wright and anticipating most of his future directions: "the birth of the possible / song[s] in the rafter," as "Wind-Chimes in a Temple Ruin" has it, itself a forecast of Birney's moving love poems in old age (how small the poetic compamy whom age could not wither: Yeats, H.D., Paz, to name three). The new book was not especially well received, however, and loudly panned by Robin Skelton, amongst others: "His work is veneer and marquetry, and almost never whole wood" (the latter phrase being no doubt a tip of the axe to the reviewer's ligneous podium, *The Tamarack Review*). By way of example, Skelton cites three lines carefully excised from "Irapuato," the sixth of twelve poems in a sequence entitled "Mexico": "Toltex by Mixtex Mixtex by Aztex / Aztex by Spanishtex Speanishtex by / Mexitex by Mexitex by Mexitex by Texaco." In their local and larger context, the quoted lines are even less "superficially exciting verbal tricks" than F.R. Scott's earlier "tex"-ploits in "Saturday Sundaes"; they are in fact the veneer-violating section of a compelling lyric firecracker set off against the dead-making hand of venereal imperial

marketry. What seems to have rattled Skelton, whose objections to this side of Birney's poetics are commonplace, was not simply Birney's belligerent deafness to the Robert-Service-call of poetry that had sometimes tempted him in earlier collections ("good evocative stuff" packaged as decorous echoes of the *déjà entendu*), but also his seriously playful explorations in the matter of his medium, a poetic investigation of word-and-world taken up as early as the first book in poems like "Anglosaxon Street." Caricature (and Birney at his best is a master caricaturist) necessarily simplifies, but unless it is cheap, it does not falsify, since it probes the depths of surfaces, and Birney's own most achieved poems are typically those that are all surface, that are characterized by the inlaid impurities, the heteroglottal bricolage, of his distinctive marquetry. The back-to-basics Birney of *Ice Cod Bell or Stone* and after—a return in effect signalled in the 1962 collections's elemental title (whose "bell" names the wild harebells of "Ellesmereland")—may not be everyone's cup of anti-colonial tea, but it places him in ambition at least amongst the poets who have attempted to remake their language and its forms in ways that might be adequate to a world that contains much more than wood (a priceless material that Birney defended all his writing life).

*Ramblin' man.* Until his disabling heart attack in 1987, Birney was a ceaseless traveller, and there is scarcely a work of his that, for worse and for better, is not marked by his wanderings, which were prompted or permitted by everything from the Depression and World War II to restlessness and the Canada Council. The point of travel is departure and passage, not arrival, and so for the traveller excitement necessarily oscillates with ennui, discovery with diarrhea, ecstatic embraces with anaesthesia, apartness, and appropriation. Such was the case for Birney, such is the case in many of his poems, and such too is the case for

readers who wander with him. The anthologist's and the critic's task is tougher here, since Birney the Rambler's poems are themselves forms of errancy, hitting and missing at the same time, predictably unpredictable, unforeclosed but not always open. And sometimes the mode of framing is as important as what is actually framed by any given poetic ramble. *Near False Creek Mouth* (1964), for instance, contains more than its share of throw-away pieces, but the collection as whole also includes a set of maps that place the various Elsewheres relative to the poet's home base, reminding us that our utterances are always situated, as are our encounters with texts; Samuel Johnson's transcendent "Observation with extensive view" that would "survey mankind from China to Peru" is at best a heuristic fiction, but it is one that Birney rarely allows himself. The garrulous traveller of his poems—a Birney who now and again resembles the seatmate that Ethel Wilson's Maggie Lloyd has to endure on her busride up the Fraser canyon in *Swamp Angel*—is usually implicated in the economic, linguistic, political, and social machinery that makes his movement possible, and that implication is often Birney's explicit subject. Even where one least expects it, Birney is working out the possible consequences of motion: like some medieval maps, the slyly simple concrete poem "like an eddy," which was also published as a mobile, requires readers either to turn the text about in their hands or turn themselves about the text.

*Nadders that drawn afir hem a traas.* "Adders that drag / leave behind themselves a trace." No scholar of medieval literature, as Birney was by training, is ever dismayed by a text that has to be parsed syllable by syllable into reconstructed speech; that is the norm, as is an eyeeful earful of dialectal variation (though modern editions typically "normalize" it away). Birney's philological formation left very obvious traces

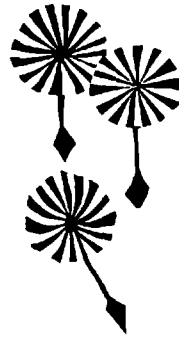


on a handful of poems, such as “Anglosaxon Street” (which works because its faux Olde English is part of the text’s significance) and “Mappemounde” (which doesn’t work because its reinvented medium, its natter of “gleewords,” is merely decorative). More profoundly, though, Birney’s poetics is a kind of modernist medievalism in the sense that his writings attempt to shape and record the spoken word as if there were no norm—or rather, as if variance were the crucial constant; in addition, these writings often ask of their readers the sort of ocular-patience-and-oral-utterance that many early English poetic transcripts require. A poem like “Sinalóa for example, whose colonized speaker twice cites “Dose goddam guide-book,” in effect insists that *Mischung*, not monolingualism, is the “natural” state of linguistic affairs, without forgetting that there is typically a power politics of tongues in contact. So too does “Billboards Build Freedom of Choice,” which neatly enacts the interpenetration of the oral and the scribal, as its caricature of a speaker attempts to parse the texts—“wasdat comin up? / PREPAID CAT? / PREPAID CATASTROPHE COVERAGE / yeah hel youkin have damnear anythin”—that fly past his narrow windo on the “FREEWAY.”

Earle. I never met the man, and I can’t remember ever having attended any of his poetry readings, so I knew him only in the way we know all but a very few writers: as a name, a reputation, a set of texts, including (because I teach Middle English literature) the lively essays on Chaucerian irony. Would I have liked to meet him? Hard to say. The recent *Life* documents his generosity to aspiring writers as well as his hostility towards his fellow professors, while burying him under a tonne of trivia and revealing (surprise) that Our Hero had feet of clay (to speak metaphorically, since the *Life’s* focus lies elsewhere). I am reminded of Milosz’s ambiguous *apologia pro vita sua*

in *A Year of the Hunter*: “Who knows if my ambition wouldn’t have been better nourished by ordinary virtues, even if it meant that I would not create a single work. Mediocrity as an ideal? Because then there are no guilty feelings about one’s own existence.” And Milosz again: “A poet [as a poet, not necessarily as a person] is measured by what is best in him, not by what is worst.”

Yes. From my privileged distance as a reader, I would see Birney as he claimed to see himself: not a great poet, but a good one. In a century when many men (and some women) have worked to perfect such inventions as nuclear weapons, gulags, thought control, and industrialized mass death, Earle Birney was, amongst other things, a necessary anachronism: a maker of moving wordthings, a few of which move still and may well continue to do so while Englishes last. “In the stretching night— / there was light” (“Vancouver Lights”).



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## Reading 1995

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W. H. New

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All surveys of this kind are selective, and what follows derives from my own reading among 1995 publications. Some books—including a few fairly high-profile books—I have not seen. Those that do appear here, however, for better or worse strike me as characteristic of the year.

Start with critical and editorial projects; they're as characteristic of the year as anything, and on the whole contestatory, competitive. Perhaps it's a sign of market economics, perhaps of Boomer/Gen-X lifestyles, perhaps of age or disappointment. I find it odd that so much contemporary critical writing at once denounces a progressive model of critical theory and debunks the aims and intentions (and, yes, the political accomplishments) of other critics, so that only the one might take over as real. This is selective progressivism. In some ways that's the point of Mavis Gallant's story "The Moslem Wife." Those who have lived through the war (whichever war) surrender the reality of it to those who reconstruct its history—memory itself being sometimes painfully accurate, sometimes altogether rosy, and sometimes worth forgetting. So is history, apparently.

So which critical writings were of interest? I would say Per Brask's collection of essays on native, queer, regional, ethnic, and other categories of theatre, in *Contemporary Issues in Canadian Drama* (Blizzard) [Blizzard Publications, in Winnipeg, also released plays by Timothy Findley and John Murrell—*The Trials of Ezra Pound* and *Cyrano de Bergerac*, respectively—a strong list for a small publisher]; and Michael Gnarowski's annotated edition of Glassco's *Memoirs of Montparnasse* (Oxford); Lorraine York's anthology *Various Atwoods* (Anansi), which collects essays on Atwood's more recent works;

David Staines's *Beyond the Provinces: Literary Canada at Century's End* (U Toronto), a passionate engagement with the history of Canadian values, particularly striking on Canadian-American relations; James Hoffman's *The Ecstasy of Resistance: A Biography of George Ryga* (ECW); and James Doyle's *The Fin de Siècle Spirit: Walter Blackburn Harte and the American/Canadian Literary Milieu of the 1890s*, which probes a hitherto cloudy corner of literary history. In editions, Sherrill E. Grace's *Sursum Corda! The Collected Letters of Malcolm Lowry*, vol. I 1926-46 (Cape/UTP) is a model of critical probity, with clear notes and careful attention to Lowry's epistolary tone. Susan Gingell, with *Pursuits Amateur and Academic* (UTP), continues with the latest volume of the Selected Prose of E.J. Pratt; this is not one of the most captivating volumes, I think—it contains occasional lectures and reviews: academic duty stuff—but the enterprise remains worthwhile. J.A. Wainwright's *A Very Large Soul* (Cormorant) selects from Margaret Laurence's letters, and reveals the novelist's generosity of spirit and her passionate social conscience. (Historians of the future, take note.) George Parker's edition of the three series of Haliburton's *The Clockmaker* in the Carleton/CEECT project represents extensive research and a substantial achievement. Another absorbing collection is Carol Morrell's *Grammar of Dissent* (Goose Lane), which brings together samples of the writings of Dionne Brand, Claire Harris, and Marlene Nourbese Philip, with very useful critical and contextualizing commentary.

In children's literature, I have just got around to reading an arresting 1993 book, Julie Lawson's historical fiction *White Jade Tiger* (Beach Holme). In the category "miscellaneous," there were several worthy books—several histories of women's work, including an important book on *Toronto's*

“*Girl Problem*” by Carolyn Strange—and various pictorial/verbal records. I would distinguish here between *Alex Colville* (a rather workmanlike catalogue of 1983–94 works, from the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts) and Rosemary Neering and Joe Thompson’s *Faces of British Columbia* (Whitecap), a fascinating documentary of the people and activities of the Pacific colony/province—from industry to afternoon tea—during the century from 1860 to 1960. Justine Brown’s excellent *All Possible Worlds* (New Star) also records B.C. history—in particular a range of Utopian experiments there, from Sointula to Metlakatla, the Doukhobours to Brother Twelve. Steve Timmins, in *French Fun* (Wiley) engagingly introduces readers to contemporary Quebec slang (*C’est trippant, numéro un, terrib’e terrib’e, super* [out of sight]). Lela Kiana Oman’s retelling of *The Epic of Qayaq* (Carleton UP)—“The Longest Story Ever told by my people”—brings into contemporary English a story cycle from the Alaskan Inupiaq, about the wanderings of a hero on the four cultural rivers, including the Yukon. Bob Hesketh and Frances Swyripa bring together several historical essays on *Edmonton* (NeWest); much data is here, but alas, little passion—urban commentary on Canada can be much more captivating (Robert Fulford’s *Accidental City* is a livelier, partly because more personal, account of the emergence of modern Toronto). I like volume 2 of Greg Gatenby’s *The Very Richness of That Past* (Knopf)—Blennerhassett to Stegner, and beyond—even more than volume 1; comments on Canada range from the analytic to the impressionistic. Margaret Atwood’s *Strange Things* (Oxford), however—a collection of sprightly-worded talks on “The Malevolent North,” ultimately espousing ecology—tends more to summarize conventional images than to make clear the *artifice* of “malevolence” in Canadian cultural history, and the values this convention served.

What else? Pierre Berton’s *My Times* (Doubleday), a claim on memory and a history lived; R.S. Mackie’s *The Wilderness Profound* (Sono Nis), a biography of the pioneer surveyor George Drabble, whose experiences come to epitomize much about Victorian life on the Gulf of Georgia; essays by Lola Lemire Tostevin (Mercury); Laurence Nowry’s fact-laden biography *Man of Mana: Marius Barbeau* (NC); the brilliant essays by Phyllis Webb, called *Nothing but Brush Strokes* (NeWest), reflections on biography and the creative process.

Among new volumes of poetry, I would single out Margaret Atwood’s *Morning in the Burned House* (M&S) and Jane Urquhart’s *The Little Flowers of Madame de Montespan* (Porcupine’s Quill) as the two that most impressed me. Urquhart’s work glimpses the world through masks, reconstructing the court of Louis XIV through the eyes of one of his mistresses. Atwood’s work repeatedly asks *what comes after*—after loss, after death, after absence; always explanations are inadequate; always the associations that the present suggests seem arbitrary or illogical or surreal. This is a book that ends on the note “incandescent”; indeed it is.

But there were several other noteworthy books. Brian Henderson’s *Year Zero* (Brick) also begins in elegy, but shifts into a recommitment to life, celebrated through the birth of the poet’s children. Lorna Crozier’s *Everything Arrives at the Light* (M&S) reflects on loss—“I am the one who comes after”—and siblings: the generation of the children, as well. Thuong Vuong-Riddick’s *Two Shores. Deux Rives* (Ronsdale) tells, in parallel texts, of her relation with her parents and her native Vietnam. I welcome the appearance of Neile Graham’s *Spells for Clear Vision* (Brick), which perhaps doesn’t exactly cohere as a book, but does reveal the presence of a strong poetic voice—one to listen for in the future. Language is at

issue in all these books; A.F. Moritz in *Mahoning* (Brick) relies on sonority, Julie Berry in *Worn Thresholds* (Brick) less indirectly on vernacular, Kwame Dawes in *Resisting the Anomie* (Goose Lane) and Pamela Mordecai in *de Man* (Sister Vision) on Caribbean idiom. Helen Humphreys' *The Perils of Geography* (Brick) wonderfully evokes experience through patterns of sound. George McWhirter's *Incubus: the dark side of the light* (Oberon) recaptures the feel of Mexican travel primarily through image. Ron Smith's *Enchantment & Other Demons* (Oolichan) explores the multiple dimensions of self, with acutely sensitive lines on isolation and family: "A new language will follow from the fractured earth/ the rising sun." Three volumes of selected poems are also welcome: those by Paulette Jiles (*Flying Lesson*, Oxford), Mary di Michele (*Stranger in You*, Oxford), and especially Robert Bringhurst (*The Calling*, M&S), which is nothing short of brilliant. Readers who do not know this splendid writer have a wonderful opportunity here to read for the first time his "medicine bundles of words"; those who are already enthusiastic will find that this reorganization of familiar works gives the poems yet more resonance.

Selections of short fiction include the always reliable Oberon series—Helwig's *Best Canadian Stories 95* and Glover and Schoemperlen's *Coming Attractions 95*—and the new Atwood/Weaver Oxford collection, which focusses on the postwar decades. Several new authors appeared on the scene—Lisa Moore, with *Degrees of Nakedness* (Mercury) is a notable voice, from Newfoundland; Melissa Hardy, with *Constant Fire* (Oberon), looks at the Cherokee "boundary"; and Mary Borsky, with *Influence of the Moon* (Porcupine's Quill), draws anecdotally on a 1950s Ukrainian-Alberta childhood; Anne Dandurand's *Small Souls Under Siege*, translated by Robert Majzels (Cormorant),

brings several of the powerful but violent *contes* (about AIDS, alcohol, abuse, and child rape) by an impressive Quebec writer into English. New books by Jeremy Fox, Carol Breneau, Rabindranath Maharaj, Robert Allen, Karen McLaughlin, Karl Jirgens, Gil Adamson, and Jennifer Mitton also demonstrated varying degrees of accomplishment, though the hand of Alice Munro and Leon Rooke hovers uncertainly over much of what is written here. There were times, too, when I desperately wanted there to have been more critical editing to have preceded publication. Leo McKay's *Like This* (Anansi) shows promise, but is burdened by plain mistakes in vocabulary—or are they typos? "You Think I Mad, Miss" is an absorbing story in Olive Senior's *Discerner of Hearts*, but it's the strongest moment in an uneven collection. Marion Douglas's *Bending at the Bow* (Press Gang) begins with an arresting premise (how does a woman start life again, after her lesbian lover dies), but the dialogue founders in wooden exchange.

This has to be a year in which it was fashionable to write about dysfunctional families or sexual experiment, perhaps as a sign of "originality." Hence Joy Kogawa's *The Rain Ascends* (Knopf), a disappointing book, turns a father into a child molester; McKay writes about the male victim of another child molester; Terry Griggs's *The Lusty Man* (Porcupine's Quill) seems malnourished rather than vital; Greg Hollingshead's *The Roaring Girl* (Somerville) seems to devise symbolic sexual incidents rather than to let them derive from the situation—but perhaps I'm missing something here: the book won the Governor-General's Award, after all. I frankly do not understand the enthusiasm that greeted Barbara Gowdy's *Mister Sandman* (Somerville); it tells of a closeted homosexual man married to a closeted lesbian woman, with a closeted out-of-wedlock daughter who's the mother of a brain-damaged child who

hears everything and makes it all turn out ok. Why is it at once clever and repellent? Not because of the lives of these characters, who in the plot (we are told) manage after various traumas to realize that their lives are normal, too, and who consequently catch at a little happiness; but because the narrative somehow smirks at the condition of their lives, making laughter (for the book is intended to be comic) not a medium of celebration, finally, but the dismissive voice of a self-congratulatory status quo.

Guy Gavriel Kay, in *The Lions of Al-Rassan* (Viking), added to his series of successful fantasies; and Hugh Hood, in *Dead Men's Watches* (Anansi), the tenth in the "New Age" series, permits Matthew, the central character, to get rid at last of his homophobia, as he nurses a friend through the last stages of AIDS—there is powerful writing here, especially in the second of the two novellas collected under the one title, where plot gives way to social critique as the medium of fiction. I enjoyed Rick Salutin's *The Age of Improv* (HarperCollins), a critique of the present, imagined through the politics of theatre in the future; and Douglas Coupland's funny *Microserfs*, which tells of the nascent love lives—and maturing—of 20-somethings hitting 30, after living mainly for their computers and their e-mail; and Larissa Lai's *When Fox Is a Thousand* (Press Gang), which interweaves Chinese folk myth (which says that foxes can turn into women) with Chinese history and with the life of a modern western woman of Chinese background. And I especially liked Thomas Wharton's first novel *Icefields*, based on early European exploration (and exploitation) of the Rocky Mountain glaciers; it tells in particular of an English doctor who—having once been trapped in a crevasse and imagining he has seen a winged figure encased in the ice (angel, perhaps?)—learns to measure the speed of ice moving in order to be able to meet the creature at the moraine. It is also a

novel about the loss of time and the recovery of value: a wonderfully imaginative book and a stylistic treat. Audrey Thomas's less successful *Coming Down From Wa* (Viking) begins brilliantly, with a mystery and an extraordinary evocation of Ghana, but somehow the solution to the mystery (perhaps it's the effect of reading Gowdy) seems oddly anticlimactic. Keath Fraser's *Popular Anatomy* (Porcupine's Quill) also races back and forth between past and future, telling intertwined stories of Vancouver, from the vantage point of several narrators, including a dead future female mayor; this is a complex work that will repay close rereading, but for the casual reader it will seem arbitrarily fragmented and more repetitive than might actually be effective.

Jack Hodgins' *The Macken Charm* (M&S) will also repay rereading. I do not understand the lack of publicity this book got in 1995 (just as I do not understand the enthusiasm for some others); perhaps it's distance from the offices of the *Globe*, but that's not a reason. Perhaps it's a failure of reading, for the book has been described "merely" as the conventional growing-up story of a heterosexual boy. It's rather more than that; it's a story about the politics and psychology of story-making, about what is popular and what is acceptable and what is marginalized—in its way, it's a metafiction about constructions of cultural history, told with humour and care. Steven Heighton's stories, too, demand rereading; "To Everything a Season" is a marvellous story, one of the most moving I have read in the last decade: this is a writer (uneven in this volume, I think) whose talent seems immense.

And then there's Timothy Findley and Rohinton Mistry. Findley's *The Piano Man's Daughter* is a fine return to a form at which Findley excels: the family saga. It tells of generations in a piano-making family, whose histories and whose creativity sometimes burst out in socially contrary ways.

Epileptic “madness” afflicts some, estranges others. Centrally, a boy seeks to know who his father is, but finds that discovering his mother—discovering the nature of creative love—is the greater quest on which he has embarked. It’s a novel that’s perhaps a bit slow to start (I would say the same about Hodgins and Mistry), and it’s fairly conventional in narrative form—i.e., it wants very much to tell a story. I happen to like that. Other readers may derive a different intellectual challenge from another kind of prose. I, however, don’t think that non-linear narrative and the psychological and social values it conveys necessarily mean that story-telling must disappear.

Consider Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* (M&S). It’s fairly plain, stylistically: this happened, then this, and here’s the explanation for that—and it goes on for 748 pages! Why do readers stay with it? Well of course some won’t. But those who do will live for awhile with a fascinating array of characters, whose urban lives in Mrs. Ghandi’s Emergency India “balance” loss with per-

sistence, desperation with practicality, despair with hopeful imagination, cruelty with love. This is scarcely a happy novel; the details of the lives of street people and a society corrupted by class rivalry and endemic bribery (India in the 1980s—or is it Canada in the 1990s?) do not permit easy resolutions. Chess—and checkmate—intervene. Safety is precarious; the law can be bought. The author has read his Yeats, his Dickens, his *Julius Caesar*. Behind his narrative also broods the *Mahabharata*, with its cyclical, intertwined tales of power and fate. “After all,” says one character, “our lives are but a sequence of accidents—a clanking chain of chance events. A string of choices, casual or deliberate, which add up to that one big calamity we call life.” Achieving the “fine balance,” in this context, is a challenge indeed, one that makes small acts of resistance seem heroic (if often self-defeating), and that turns food, shelter, and story-telling into some of the highest—and most basic—gestures of community feeling.

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