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Spectres of Modernism

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Errata for issue 208:

- In Deena Rhymes’ editorial, endnote 4 should read “Peltier is an American Indian convicted of murdering an FBI officer at Wounded Knee in 1975. The fairness of his trial has been questioned.” Current endnotes 4 and 5 should be renumbered 5 and 6.
- Dans l’article de Dominic Marion « D.A.F. de Sade et Hubert Aquin : le récit au pied du mur » toutes les références à Pasolini entre parenthèses devraient plutôt être aux *Cent vingt journées de Sodome*, de Sade. Pasolini n’est pas cité dans l’article. Le titre abrégé dans les références de *Prochain Episode* d’Hubert Aquin devrait être *Prochain*.
- Jon Paul Fiorentino’s name was misspelled as “John” in Erin Wunker’s review “Mapping and Way-making.” It was also misspelled in the table of contents.
- John Donlan’s name was misspelled as “Jon” on his poem “Out All Day.” It was also misspelled in the table of contents.

We apologize for these errors.

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Spectres of Modernism

Dean Irvine, Guest Editor

Canadian Literature's winter 1995 "Marx and Other Dialectics" issue watched over the changing of disciplinary and literary old guards—or, if you will, an old left guard. This was the same number that announced the establishment of the journal's home page (canlit.ca) and the creation of the Canadian Literature Discussion Group listserv (CANLIT-L) hosted by the National Library. It was "an hour / Of new beginnings," as F.R. Scott said in his 1934 poem "Overture." That same year observed the deaths of Earle Birney and George Woodcock. Dorothy Livesay passed away the year following. These deaths signaled the passing of a generation that put into practice the dialectics of modernism and political radicalism. With the appearance of an issue devoted to Marxism and Canadian literature, it may have seemed at the hour of their death that their generation's literary and political legacies had for the moment been granted reprieves and survived the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of European communism.

An inventory of *Canadian Literature* from the two decades following the end of the Cold War reveals that Marx and Marxism slid into precipitous decline. Was the Marx issue an anomaly, a remnant of an outmoded critical practice? Or was it, as Charity Schribner puts it, a "requiem" for the socialist political and cultural projects of the twentieth century? "Whither Marxism?" was the question posed to and addressed by Jacques Derrida in 1993, one that he answered in a series of lectures translated and published under the title *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (1993; trans. 1994). *Canadian Literature's* Marx issue directed the question to the study of the old left in Canadian literatures

and produced—perhaps predictably—ambivalent responses. With its lead article by Christian Bök, the issue sounded the death knell of Marxism as “an ideological delusion that already contains the seeds of its political defeat,” “an experiment doomed to failure,” one which is corroborated by “the era of *perestroika*, with its global abandonment of Communism” and validated by readings of texts that “end with a social vision that almost seems to confirm the political irrelevancy of Marxism in Canada” (11-12). Although this incendiary lead is followed by essays on Frederick Philip Grove’s socialism and Margaret Fairley’s advocacy for a communist literary tradition, Bök’s anticommunist rhetoric is all the same symptomatic of a literary-critical climate at the turn of the millennium in which the political projects of the old left appeared irrelevant to a discipline preoccupied with postmodernity.

Whither modernism? *Canadian Literature*’s archive is replete with back issues dedicated to the major modernists—Malcolm Lowry (Spring 1961), A.J.M. Smith (Winter 1963), E.J. Pratt (Winter, Summer 1964), Louis Dudek (Autumn 1964), A.M. Klein (Summer 1965), Earle Birney (Autumn 1966), F.R. Scott (Winter 1967), Wyndham Lewis (Winter 1968), Dorothy Livesay (Spring 1971), P.K. Page (Autumn 1971)—but it has been forty years since the last of these numbers and none of the special issues since then has specifically focused on modernism, though essays on individual modernist authors have appeared intermittently. When in his 1999 study *The Montreal Forties: Modernist Poetry in Transition* Brian Trehearne surveyed the critical reception of modernist poets from 1970 through the end of the century, he reported a broad decline in the volume and frequency of Canadian modernist studies (322 n6). While that report is corroborated by *Canadian Literature*’s backlist, it does not anticipate the past decade’s increase in critical activity coincident with the founding of the Modernist Studies Association (MSA), an international association founded in 1999 and whose annual conferences have been held in Vancouver (2004), Montreal (2009), and Victoria (2010). MSA and its conferences have been the vehicles for the so-called new modernisms, a rubric that Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz have suggested expands the purview of modernist studies in “temporal, spatial, and vertical directions” (737). Because the rubric is more accommodating of the study of “late modernism,” it makes room for Canada’s mid-century modernists; it enables alternatives to literary-historical narratives predicated upon notions of cultural belatedness—or, more drastically, the absence of cultural modernity in Canada altogether. It also allows for the possibility of comparative work on the formations of

modernism in beyond the Anglo-American axis—such as the postcolonial modernisms of Canada and Australia—without having to reproduce narratives that correlate these emergent, marginal, or peripheral modernisms with a dominant cultural centre. That said, even though the MSA and its Canadian conferences represent the work of an active community of modernist scholars in Canada, it has been uneven in its efforts to internationalize itself beyond its predominant Anglo-American interests and facilitate scholarship on Canadian modernism. While the MSA conferences in Vancouver, Montreal, and Victoria featured panels devoted to Canadian modernists and—more frequently—their connections to Anglo-American modernisms, there has been a conspicuous lacuna in the representation of modernist authors and artists from Canada in articles and reviews published in the association's affiliated journal, *Modernism/modernity* (1994-). No doubt this situation is bound to change in coming years, but it stands to reason that any expectation of international recognition of Canadian modernism needs to correspond with a renewed and sustained interest in modernist studies in Canada.

Whither new modernisms? This special issue comes out of a roundtable session at the 2009 MSA conference in Montreal, where a group of established and emerging scholars were invited to address the coincident histories of modernism and the old left in Canada. Extending from conversations initiated at the roundtable, the call for submissions for this issue sought to bring together scholars who work at the intersection of leftist and modernist studies. Contributors have been invited to produce essays that negotiate between competing cultural discourses, at once to reanimate debates between leftists and modernists of the early- to mid-twentieth century and to allow their coextensive narratives to engage in dialectical exchange. This dialectical approach seeks to address the conjunctures and contradictions of modernist and leftist cultural formations in interwar, wartime, and Cold War Canada, a dialectic that recognizes the antimodernism and social-political radicalism of the old left as mediating discourses in the formation of modernist aesthetic practices. Whatever the storied antagonisms between modernists and leftists, and however distorted the retellings by critics and historians of the late twentieth century, the essays collected here are indicative of the ways in which scholarship on literature and theatre in early- to mid-twentieth-century Canada has shifted over the past decade toward more complex conceptions of the leftist social and political orientations of modernist cultural production. This scholarly transformation has taken place in conjunction with a broader international movement to explore what Perry Anderson calls the “imagined

proximity” (34) of socialism and modernism and their alignment as complementary modes of thought that Scott believed could work through “present forms to a new and more suitable order” (“New Poems” 297).

One of the ways in which modernist studies in Canada differentiates itself from the dominant Anglo-American mainstream is its interlingual and multilingual modernisms. With recent and award-winning scholarship on francophone modernisms in Québec by Sherry Simon and Annette Hayward, as well as ongoing editorial projects affiliated with Le Centre de recherche interuniversitaire sur la littérature et la culture québécoises—notably Le Centre Anne Hébert at l’Université de Sherbrooke, Le Centre Hector-de-Saint-Denis Garneau at l’Université de Laval, and Le Centre d’archives Gaston-Miron at l’Université de Montréal—the study of *la modernité* and *les modernistes* in French Canada appears to parallel the past decade’s renaissance in modernist scholarship in English Canada. At the annual conferences of *L’Association de littératures canadiennes et québécoises/Association of Canadian and Québec Literatures*, there have been continuing efforts to organize bilingual approaches to modernist studies, but these have mainly resulted in the dissemination of discrete research streams without the co-ordination of sustainable interlingual and intercultural scholarly dialogue. Through the recently established bilingual Canadian Writers Research Collaboratory/*Le Collaboratoire scientifique des écrits du Canada*, there are still other possibilities emerging for collaboration between anglophone and francophone modernist scholars working across languages in a multilingual digital environment. To this end, modernist studies in Canada and Québec is positioned to transform itself from a state of linguistic separatism to one of interlingual and intercultural exchange. If, as part of an ongoing project to which this special issue contributes, scholars work to articulate circuits of communication and translation across languages, we may begin to bridge the untranslated gaps between francophone and anglophone modernist studies in Canada and Québec and, in doing so, recapture the cosmopolitan and multilingual formations that characterize both the historical formations of cultural modernism as a global phenomenon and the transnational discipline of the new-modernist studies.

It no longer suffices to say that postmodernism killed modernism or that the fall of European communism ushered in the death of Marxism. This kind of end-of-history thinking about aesthetic and cultural formations and their relation to leftist politics and ideology is far more deterministic than the most blunt instruments of so-called vulgar Marxism. Rather, these deaths of modernism and the old left commemorate the ways in which they come

back to haunt us, as Derrida says of Marxism, as the eternal return of the revenant in the work of mourning. These spectres of modernism and the old left cannot be exorcized by modes of critical thought that attempt to propel the field of literary studies in Canada forward by regarding its outmoded histories and political affiliations as skeletons to be kept closeted. Given the past decade's widespread interest in the neo-Marxist and post-Marxist critical theory and philosophy of Alain Badiou, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Frederic Jameson, Jacques Rancière, and Slavoj Žižek, it seems that rumours of the left's death may have been greatly exaggerated. With the appearance of titles such as Owen Hartley's *Millitant Modernism* (2008) in which he posits a return to a leftist modernism along the lines of the Soviet Proletkult of the 1920s, and with the publication of James Doyle's *Progressive Heritage: The Evolution of a Politically Radical Tradition in Canada* (2002) and Candida Rifkind's *Comrades and Critics: Women, Literature, and the Left in 1930s Canada* (2009), the critical reaction against declarations of the left's death at the end of the Cold War has gathered significant momentum over the past decade. Let this special issue declare itself in solidarity with the modernist and leftist ghosts of Canadian literature and international politics. If "it's only by our lack of ghosts / we're haunted," let us say with Birney that after decades of declaring one or the other dead, the spectres of Marx and of modernism have returned to remind us how to mourn them.

I would like to thank the MacMillan Center at Yale University, where I am the Bicentennial Canadian Studies Visiting Professor for 2011-12, for support for this and other projects. DI

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Authorship, Left Modernism, and Communist Power in *Eight Men Speak* A Reflection

Theatrical Women and Party Men

In *Stage Left*, her 1981 memoir of the workers' theatre troupe that she founded in the 1930s, Toby Gordon Ryan provides a circuitous and careful account that avoids, and at times erases, details of the operational relationship of her theatre troupe and the command organs of the underground Communist Party under the leadership of its imprisoned General Secretary, Tim Buck. One of those elisions concerns the play that subsequent commentators have identified as the most significant production of the Workers' Theatre, *Eight Men Speak*.¹ In one of the more curious episodes in her memoir, Toby Gordon Ryan refers to the play as "a high point" and "a great accomplishment," but says almost nothing about it (43). Instead she provides an account of the play by her husband, Oscar Ryan, the instigator and one of the authors of the play, and then includes brief remembrances from two of the other authors, Frank Love and Edward Cecil-Smith (43-46).

At first glance there is nothing remarkable about this moment of deferral in the logic of the book, because it is a scrapbook of recollections and testimonies in which many people are quoted at length. But in this surrogated account of *Eight Men Speak* Toby Gordon Ryan replays one of the critical but unnoticed features of the collision of theatrical modernism and the authority of the Communist Party apparatus, in which the voices of radical women were silenced and their artistic work contained by doctrinal and, invariably, masculinist power. Ryan says nothing of her own involvement in the play as performer, co-director, and theatrical mentor, and barely mentions the fourth co-author, Mildred Goldberg. This complicates the already vexatious

question of authorship of *Eight Men Speak* with what can be hypothesized as a crisis of radical modernism, political instrumentality, and ideological control. It was a crisis that positioned modernist theatrical women in the discipline of the underground Communist Party apparatus, with the result that the radical theatrical innovations of the play were delegitimized, its dramaturgy decomposed into politically useful components and the women who founded the Workers' Theatre either subordinated to the emergent aesthetic disciplinary regime of the Party (as was the case with Toby Gordon Ryan) or squeezed out (as was the case with Jim Watts). These are strong claims, and they go against the apparent evidence of the historical record, including Ryan's autobiographical testimony.

Eight Men Speak has only been published twice: in the original 1934 pamphlet edition by the Progressive Arts Club and in Robin Endres and Richard Wright's 1976 anthology of agitprop plays published by New Hogtown Press. To this day, ownership of the play is obscure, in part because at least one of the authors wrote under a pseudonym (Frank Love, writing as H. Francis), another dropped out of public record (Goldberg), and another left the Communist Party in apparent renunciation (Cecil-Smith).² The fourth, Oscar Ryan, who was closely affiliated with the leadership of the Communist Party long thereafter, authorized the republication and asserted control over performance permissions until his death in 1991.³ Given this history, it is understandable that while the existence of the play may be known to many, it has not been widely read. Nor is its history well known, beyond the fact of its notorious banning.

The first mention of *Eight Men Speak* appeared in brief publicity notices, like this one from the *Toronto Daily Star* on November 25, 1933:

With settings designed by the artists group, Progressive Arts Club, the six act play, *Eight Men Speak*, now in its sixth week of rehearsal, promises to be an unusual dramatic production, the first of its kind written and produced in Canada.

The play, a dramatization of life in Kingston penitentiary, is replete with rapid action, keen humor and powerful dramatic climaxes. Opening in the garden of the warden, the audience is taken into Tim Buck's cell, several courtroom scenes, a newspaper office, a streetcar, a cabaret, a home, a whipping scene and others. The play will be staged on Monday, December 4, at the Standard, Dundas and Spadina. (5)

The 1500 people who turned out for the one and only performance of *Eight Men Speak* at the Standard Theatre were not for the most part there out of a love for theatre, or even for the promised whipping scene. The show was a climactic event in the very busy public campaign launched three

months earlier, in September 1933, by the Canadian Labor Defence League (CLDL), the Canadian section of the International Red Aid, and one of the numerous interlinked organizations mobilized by the underground party. The campaign was a national agitation for the release of Tim Buck and seven other prominent communists and the repeal of the draconian Section 98 of the Criminal Code under which they had been convicted for unlawful association in 1931. During a notorious riot in Kingston Penitentiary in October 1932, shots had been fired into Buck's cell in what appeared to be an assassination attempt by prison guards. In the escalating public debate, the CLDL, under the very public leadership of its General Secretary, the Rev. A.E. Smith, staged meetings and congresses across the country in a massive campaign against Section 98. The riot precipitated a chain of events that would lead to the production and subsequent banning of *Eight Men Speak*, Smith's own sedition trial for remarks made while denouncing the police censorship of the play, a mass campaign that generated over 400,000 signatures and the eventual release of the Eight. What drew the audience, remembered by Oscar Ryan as "tense and exceptionally responsive," to the Standard Theatre was the fact that the play was in effect a co-production by the Workers' Theatre of the Progressive Arts Club and the CLDL leadership, including senior Communist Party members (qtd. in Ryan, *Stage Left* 44). It was a party rally in theatrical disguise, taking place under police surveillance and the open threat of the censorship it triggered. We now know from minutes of the Board of Police Commissioners that the decision to have the play banned had been made while it was still in rehearsal (Toronto Police). That decision was ratified in the interval between the performance and the ban, during which time a transcript and police notes on the people involved landed on the Prime Minister's desk. His secretary wrote to his Toronto political lieutenant that "Mr. Bennett has read the file and thinks that appropriate action should be taken through the Attorney General of the Province to protect society against these attacks" (Millar to Matthews, 2 Jan. 1934).

Eight Men Speak was a critical stage in a series of events that marked the high point of Communist prestige in Canada. It brought onto the stage an avatar—a talismanic embodiment—of the imprisoned leader, and framed him in a scenario that reversed the polarity of the trial that had convicted him. No more than 1500 people saw the play, but because they did, the ensuing judicial actions and activist responses culminated a year later in a mass rally that brought the newly released Tim Buck onto the stage of Maple Leaf Gardens before a crowd of 17,000. Seen in this perspective, *Eight Men Speak*

was the first act in a year-long performance that multiplied popular support for the outlawed Communist Party. Never before or since has a theatrical production played so instrumental a role in a Canadian political crisis.

During the 1931 trial of Tim Buck, Edward Cecil-Smith and Oscar Ryan had sat in the press seats as reporters, Cecil-Smith for the party newspaper *The Worker*, and Ryan as editor of the CLDL magazine, *Labor Defender*. Ryan was also Publicity Director of the CLDL (which undertook the legal defence of the accused), and was involved in the League's "Workers' Jury" that watched the trial and issued a verdict of not guilty in a widely distributed pamphlet. In the social uproar that followed the riot in Kingston Penitentiary and the shots fired into Buck's cell, Ryan proposed another take on the Workers' Jury. This time, with the help of the Workers' Theatre, they would stage a "mock trial" and put the unknown guard who fired the shots on trial in a Workers' Court on the boards of the Standard Theatre, a mainly Yiddish-language playhouse on Spadina Avenue, in the centre of the garment district (Ryan, *Stage Left* 44).

Oscar Ryan's overlapping roles were typical of the Communist Party's underground organization. In 1929 he had been the representative of the Young Communist League on the Party's Political Committee (Polcom, in the telegraphic apparatchik-speak of the day). In that capacity he had been instrumental in the machinations, described by Ian Angus as a coup, that installed a radical left Stalinist faction in the leadership in 1929 (Ryan, *Stage Left* 224). That was the Canadian moment of the international move to the revolutionary militant stance that Stalin called the Third Period of communism, in a declaration of class war. Ryan was a gifted polemicist and writer: a novelist, biographer of Buck, fluent pamphleteer, and later one of the longest-serving drama critics in Canadian newspapers, writing for *The Canadian Tribune* until 1987. His jobs as a reporter and a publicist for two different organizations were in fact one job with two letterheads. His third job from that same office was to organize radical youth in the cultural sphere, and in that capacity he was the instigator of the Progressive Arts Club that sponsored the Workers' Experimental Theatre and the cultural magazine *Masses*, for which he wrote the inaugural editorial.⁴ As a contributor, Ryan sometimes took the pen name Maurice Granite. Insiders would recognize the hardness implied by the name as a tribute to Stalin's "Steel." (This also provides a bridge to his later pseudonym, Martin Stone.) When Ryan spoke in the Progressive Arts Club, he did so with the full force of the central Party leadership.

The Progressive Arts Club (PAC) drew a mixed membership of working-class and student intellectuals, a combination made possible by the fact that the University of Toronto abutted the central district of left radicalism, and was an easy walking distance from the Standard Theatre. Among the students who came to the PAC were Dorothy Livesay, Earl Birney (briefly), Stanley Ryerson, and Jean Watts, a former medical student and émigré from bourgeois wealth who had taken to calling herself Jim. From the other side of the street came Avrom Yanovsky, then at the brink of a distinguished artistic life; Frank Love, a young electrician; and Toby Gordon, a young working-class woman who had recently returned from studying theatre at the left-wing Yiddish theatre company Artef in New York.

Toby Gordon was the only member of the club that had any formal theatre training, and the only one who had direct spectatorial experience of the new modernist practices of revolutionary agitprop. These are crucial facts in the subsequent development of the play because they position her as the theatre specialist with experience of modernist performance and theatrical production. Her time in New York corresponded with the high point of the Workers' Laboratory Theatre, whose name echoed in the troupe she founded in Toronto for the PAC, the Workers' Experimental Theatre. The Workers' Laboratory Theatre, and in particular its mobile agitprop Shock Troupe, was one of the anchors of the workers' theatre movement in the United States. In cooperation with Prolet-Buhne, the émigré German agitprop troupe led by John Bonn (Hans Bohn), the Workers' Laboratory Theatre published and distributed the mimeographed magazine *Workers' Theatre* which functioned as a regulatory mechanism for the movement and spoke with the authority of the cultural organs of the Communist International. Artef was the third leg of this organizational tripod, and while studying there Toby Gordon was in the midst of the radical theatre movement in its heyday. She says very little about it in her memoir, but she brought to the PAC the New York model of highly drilled and uniformed agitprop style and familiarity with its characteristic forms of rapid mobility, mass recitation, iconic theatrical cartoon, and what John Bonn called "the flashlight effect," referring to the use of moving lights and fast blackouts to build dialectical montage sequences on stage (8). As Toby Gordon Ryan describes in her memoir, she returned to Toronto in 1932 determined to do similar work, and it is clear from her memoir and interviews that she was particularly enthralled by the high degree of theatrical discipline that Prolet-Buhne manifested in performance (*Stage Left* 22).

Love, Livesay, and Ryerson were aspiring writers and all three wrote agitprop for the Workers' Experimental Theatre when it was formed in 1932. Although Livesay and Ryerson would both go on to literary fame (in very different ways), Love was the more successful writer of agitprop, perhaps because he was the least invested in literature. As the only proletarian writer in the troupe, he may have been advanced by Oscar Ryan on the basis of the success of his first attempt at agitprop, *Looking Forward*, on the troupe's eastern Ontario tour in the summer of 1932. Love himself states that he was "assigned" to write *Eight Men Speak* by Oscar Ryan (qtd. in Baetz 41), and that when he was stuck, Cecil-Smith offered to help him. Why did Ryan choose Love and not Ryerson or Livesay? Certainly Love's class background gave the project proletarian credibility. By the time of *Eight Men Speak*, Birney had left the group and Livesay had moved to Montreal; even if Livesay had stayed, the poeticized, individualist writing that comes through in her agitprop writing was antithetical to Oscar Ryan's pile-driver style of proletarian prose (which was comparable to the voice of his American counterpart, Mike Gold). The writers who went on to have literary careers seem to have distanced themselves from Oscar Ryan fairly quickly. He may well have been the model for the harsh, dogmatic, and authoritarian proletarian intellectual who demolishes the young protagonist in the dramatic sketch of a meeting of the "Social Problems Club" in Birney's *Down the Long Table* (69-86).

Oscar Ryan and Ed Cecil-Smith provided the ideological leadership and Party oversight of the Progressive Arts Club, but its theatrical creative centre was the alliance of Toby Gordon and Jim Watts. Described by Larry Hannant as a "female gender maverick," Jim Watts was a catalytic figure whose charisma and energy dazzled many who worked with her (161). Her mixture of androgyny, zeal, and creativity made a profound impression on both Toby Gordon and Dorothy Livesay; for both, Watts appears to have modeled a new kind of feminist sexuality and social autonomy (Livesay 21; Ryan, *Stage Left* 33). Her wealth and class background gave her access and cultural power, but she also appears to have had a very forceful character. It was after a heated debate with her that Earle Birney ended his brief experiment with the Communist Party and turned to Trotskyism instead (Davey 9); later he caricatured her savagely as Kay, the sexually predatory Stalinist in *Down the Long Table*. Watts was later one of the few Canadian women to serve in the Spanish Civil War, first as a correspondent for the Communist paper *The Daily Clarion*, and then as a member of the International Brigade, serving

with Norman Bethune's mobile blood transfusion team and a British medical unit. Her career exemplifies the stratum of women's cultural and political work that made the radical left movement possible in the 1930s, and which has been analyzed in detail by Candida Rifkind.

Jim Watts' leadership role as producer and director in the emergent Workers' Experimental Theatre diminished as the activities of the group neared the inner circle of the Party, particularly around *Eight Men Speak*. She continued to be its main source of financial support, and she supplied the automobile that enabled the troupe to achieve the mobility that agitprop requires. As the troupe expanded and developed artistry in the year before the production of *Eight Men Speak*, it quietly dropped the word "experimental" from its name; by the summer of 1932 its programs and posters carried the name "Workers' Theatre." What began as a club of students with modernist artistic leanings and working intellectuals had become something more instrumental, at the historical moment when the member organizations of the Communist International were retreating from the language of proletarian modernism in cultural discourse in favour of the rehabilitated national cultural traditions and realist modes of the emergent Popular Front.⁵

The sleight-of-hand transition from Workers' Experimental Theatre to Workers' Theatre marks the increasing subordination of the troupe to the instrumental interests of the Party, and the literal subordination of artistic women to apparatus men. Although Jim Watts started off as the director of *Eight Men Speak*, her name is excluded from the four listed in the program as directors (Oscar Ryan, Toby Gordon, Cecil-Smith, and Cecil Greenwold, who played the role of the Attorney General). Oscar Ryan states in Toby Gordon Ryan's memoir that "Jim Watts directed the early rehearsals and, when the load became too big, turned over the job to me but continued as assistant" (44).

This is a conveniently simple gloss, which may be true but must be incomplete. Ryan doesn't actually define what he means by too big a load, nor does he explain why he was the one to whom Jim Watts turned, or what he means by "assistant," nor does he explain why her name was not included among those who had participated in the directing of play—which by his own statement she had. Watts was answerable to Ryan, in his capacities as the representative of the CLDL, as a senior Party official to whom ideological deference would have been required, as a co-author of the play, and as witness to the original trial and friend to Buck. It is possible that she found it difficult to sustain directorial authority in rehearsal. The play needed more actors than the Workers' Theatre could provide, and recruited men from the

Unemployed Council. In the meeting of two social worlds—of unemployed working-class men and politically engaged students—it is credible that the gender dynamics made it difficult for Watts to maintain control. (The history of Canadian theatre reveals many examples of male actors refusing the authority of female directors.) Yet other women exerted power on the project: Toby Gordon directed some sequences, and Lillian Cecil-Smith was the stage manager for the production. Watts remained involved in the production as an actor but only in one minor part, as a parody of a bourgeois society woman—in effect, of her own social origins. Whatever the reason for the replacement, the effect remains the same: the theatrically experienced bourgeois radical woman stepped aside for the male working-class revolutionary leader.

Toby Gordon and Jim Watts were the creative and organizational team that had made the Workers' Theatre a success. For them it was a full-time, unpaid activity, but it was the two men employed by Party organizations—Oscar Ryan and Ed Cecil-Smith—who became the public voice of the troupe and who controlled its repertoire. As Publicity Director of the CLDL, Ryan encouraged the troupe and facilitated its touring schedule; as a journalist (although he preferred the term “newspaperman” as more working-class), Cecil-Smith was the troupe's propagandist and public defender.⁶ Both Ryan and Cecil-Smith wrote for the troupe; neither Gordon nor Watts did (or if they did, their work never reached the stage). As the Workers' Theatre became more useful to the Party, and as it became complicit in the cult of personality around Tim Buck, it came under the direct control of (male) Party officials, who superseded the theatrical women who had built it and directed its artistic growth. That the women involved acceded to this is understandable, given the centrality of personal relationships and the grip of the discipline that was a core value in Communist Party culture. The question left is how masculinist disciplinarity and the subordination of theatrically inventive women shaped the modernist theatricality of *Eight Men Speak* in performance.

Coalescent Dramaturgy

Eight Men Speak may be the clearest example in Canada of the brief moment when artistic and political radicalisms aligned in a vision of an artistic practice mobilized by proletarian modernism. It is also one of the earliest North American examples of radical modernist dramaturgy. It predates by almost three years the more famous Living Newspapers of the Federal

Theatre Project in the United States and is roughly contemporary with the Workers' Laboratory Theatre's first version of *Newsboy*, which WLT member Al Saxe described in *New Theatre* (as Workers' Theatre was renamed in 1934) as "a new form" and "[o]ne of the most pliable, dynamic theatre of action forms which has yet appeared" (289). Saxe's theory that the rapid shifting of light, character, and tempo enacted the dialectics of the historical moment—"the feverish tempo of industrialization gone mad"—argued in effect that radical dramaturgy was a discovery of material principles rather than a received archive of genealogical forms (290). This was a position that acknowledged but dispelled the emergent narrative that located the North American workers' theatre practice in a genealogy of European theatrical modernism derived from Vsevolod Meyerhold and Erwin Piscator.

In *Newsboy* and *Eight Men Speak*, we can identify techniques and tropes that virtually all histories of modern theatre ascribe to European revolutionary modernists, particularly Meyerhold and Piscator. Their pioneering work in the 1920s popularized the theatricalist techniques of montage, projections, polyphony, mechanism, and compositional *mise-en-scène*, but they did not invent these techniques; rather, they applied them to the institutional theatre conditions of their respective metropolitan cultures in Moscow and Berlin. In a sense, they transformed spectatorial practices in an established theatre profession by fusing revolutionary politics, radical content, and new theatricalist performance techniques by which *mise-en-scène* became the primary conduit of meaning in performance. These techniques cannot be attributed to any one source because they were synchronic responses to the two major technological developments that produced modernist theatre practice over a generation: electric light and its consequence, cinema. Minute control over stage and house lighting made it possible to use it to develop scenography, and gave playwrights the instruments to break the causality of time and space. Instant blackouts, pinpoint spotlighting, and projection capacity, which all fragmented narrative linearity, had become the composite vocabulary of expressionism by the end of the nineteenth century.

By the time of *Eight Men Speak*, the techniques of the modernist *mise-en-scène* had been well established in New York and London and had circulated in Canada at Hart House Theatre, in the Little Theatre movement, as well as in the "symphonic expressionism" of Herman Voaden (Toby Gordon's high school English teacher).⁷ It was not the suite of techniques as such that leftists identified as radical, but rather their capacity to enact the historical dynamics of working-class experience, and their utility.

Radical theatremakers saw in these techniques a means of release from the scenographic playhouse, and discovered that the dramaturgical forms that had been made possible by electric light could be adapted to new contexts without it. This was the realization that extracted theatrical modernism from the playhouse—the “stationary” stage—and literally mobilized it in the practice of agitprop. In Toronto, the Workers’ Experimental Theatre began as a mobile agitprop troupe and only began to reincorporate its dramaturgy with its electrical sources on the stage with *Eight Men Speak*.

With its innovative structure, narrative use of interruptive theatrical lighting, and quick, dynamic blackout scenes, *Eight Men Speak* is one of the first Canadian examples of the modernist theatre in which the director functions as the author or conductor of the performance text. As a general principle, the play follows a montage structure in which scenes are presented through rhythmic and staging contradictions. Transitions tend to be abrupt and contradictory rather than smooth elisions. The play makes liberal use of blackouts, tightly focused and moving spotlights, gestic props (such as pop-up masks in a jury box), abrupt sound effects (such as the banging of a gavel) and tableaux. The surviving photograph of the final tableau is particularly interesting in this regard because its choreographic arrangement indicates a stylized physicality reminiscent of Soviet formalist performance.⁸

Eight Men Speak is billed as a play in six acts, but the acts are fairly short. Neither the script nor the program makes any mention of an intermission. (The play appeared in print months after the production and cannot be taken as unmediated evidence of what actually transpired on stage.) The play begins satirically, with the corrupt representatives of the governing classes (the prison warden, a reverend, a torch singer) in a garden party as they receive the news of the riot. Caught in the converging gazes of the audience and the Party, the satire initiates the argument of the play by disallowing the moral and political legitimacy of the state. From this initial point of satire—which also serves of course to warm up the house—the play moves through an emotional register that concludes in triumphant anger. When looked at as an orchestration of emotional responses, we find a clear range from self-congratulation (in the Red Scare parody of Act Two, quoted below) to melodramatic sentimentality (when Buck reads a letter from his daughter in his cell), to passionate anger in the careful rhythms of the monologues and mass chants of the imprisoned Eight.

The polyphonic effect is carefully timed and fully exploits contemporary notions of experimental performance—as in the mass recitation in the dark

that begins the second act and the use of lighting to isolate, move, and then unify the dramatic fugue later in that act. In a fugue structure, we are shown a series of blackout scenes, which are then reprised in shorter segments until they are brought together in an intensified choral climax. That moment is short enough to quote in its entirety to demonstrate the theatrical and dramatic effect:

During this scene the spot from the projection room weaves up and down across the entire stage, revealing from right stage to left: Newspaper office, Street Car, Cabaret and the Old Man's Room. The voices are shrill and follow quickly.

EDITOR: Tim Buck riot leader!

MAN IN CABARET: Buck said kill the screws.

WOMAN IN CABARET: Those Russians.

YOUNG MAN IN STREET CAR: Com-yunists!

RADIO: Buck's complicity.

(The next set of voices follows immediately. They are louder and faster than the first set, almost overlapping each other.)

MAN IN CABARET: Buck said kill the screws!

EDITOR: Tim Buck riot leader.

YOUNG MAN IN STREET CAR: Com-yunists!

WOMAN IN CABARET: Those Russians.

RADIO: Buck's complicity.

The next set of voices are shouted simultaneously and are much louder. Each line is repeated three times and the chorus ends with "Buck's complicity".

EDITOR: Tim Buck riot leader.

MAN IN CABARET: Buck said kill the screws!

WOMAN IN CABARET: Those Russians!

YOUNG MAN IN STREET CAR: Com-yunists!

RADIO: Buck's complicity

As the last "Buck's complicity" dies away, the Old Man's voice can be heard.

OLD MAN (very hysterically): Quick, Elizabeth! (16)

At this point, the curtain drops, and when it reopens the scene has shifted to the trial of Tim Buck. Here documentary extracts from the trial record are framed in grotesque parody and what seems to be the first use of puppetry—or actor-puppet interaction—in Canadian political interventionist theatre:

Immediately the Mountie lifts the lid of the Jury Box, up pop SIX JURORS. These six Jurors are all clad in black and are visible only from the waist up. Each Juror wears an identical mask—that of a stodgy, vacant looking face. Each waves white gloves. When the lid is lifted, the six heads pop up with hands lifted. (17)

With scenes like this, *Eight Men Speak* is remarkably similar to the kinds of solutions radical theatre makers would invent in the counter-culture collective creations a generation later. The play demonstrates a clever scenic imagination, yet the production had no trained designers, and a one-night

stand on the stage of the Standard Theatre could permit only quickly built and easily changed set pieces.

As produced, *Eight Men Speak* was an accretion of images and situations that coalesced into dramatic form over the two-month rehearsal period. From the decision to stage a workers' court (as confirmed by both Love and Oscar Ryan), it is easy enough to trace the development of the play into the innovative anthology form that was subsequently critiqued as flawed in the leftist press and which Oscar and Toby Ryan themselves later renounced, but which has attracted the admiration of subsequent generations of critics and theatre activists. Ryan's purpose was utilitarian rather than cultural, but he was open to theatrical experimentation. *Eight Men Speak* began as a collaborative exercise in which the four authors each undertook to write a section of the play. This may seem to account for the play's drastic switches in styles and tone between the sections, but in fact it does not. Oscar Ryan exercised tight control over the process; if the play was "a confusion of styles" leading to "uneven development of the dramatic idea, confusion of conflicts, and lack of political clarity," as judged by the American magazine *New Theatre* (Ferris 30), or "patchy, hit and miss" and "very bad vaudeville," as judged by *The Varsity* (5 Dec. 1933), it was because Ryan had agreed to it. Later in his life, Ryan stated that the play was artless and lacking in unity because the authors were young, inexperienced, and working on a tight deadline.⁹ But retrospectively, from a point where decentred theatricalism has become conventionalized, the play is in fact artful and theatrically clever, and it is not a reach to assume that the authors and the audience of the day thought so as well.

Cecil-Smith notes in his preface to the play that it was developed in the space of two months (which itself establishes an interesting precedent for the normal practice of collective creation in Canada). Love later described the process of authorship:

I was assigned to write the play and there was a girl, Mildred Goldberg, and she wasn't a writer and I don't think she ever became one, but she was well-educated, better than I was. . . . Well, I plotted the play and it was a simple enough plot. We just put the government on trial. Well we worked on it together, but I assigned her to the mass chant, so that was all she had to do with it. I wrote the prosecution, and she wrote the mass chant.

Then Oscar [Ryan] began hollering for the play. He wanted to put it on, you see. And of course, it wasn't ready. And I told him, I didn't know how long it would take because I didn't know whether I could finish it or not. I had never written a play, you know, and so it was all guess work.

But anyway, it happened somehow that Ed Smith said that if I would give it to him he'd help me with it. So, he took it then and he wrote the defense. And as far as I was concerned that was the best part of the play, because that's where he brought out the situation. (qtd. in Baetz 40-41)

We also know that Goldberg wrote the mass recitation that comprises Act Four because it was published under her name in *Masses* (Goldberg). Authorship of the satiric first act is unclear, but its cartoon characterization of the bourgeoisie and the rhythm of its dialogue, with brisk tempo and slangy humour, are very similar to Oscar Ryan's agitprop *Unity*, produced in the previous year. In the writing process, Ryan was the one who looked for places in the script to intensify its theatrical effects; as he later wrote, "We felt it needed intensity, color, conflict, theatricality. We added blackouts and mass recitations and some light humorous elements" (qtd. in Ryan, *Stage Left* 44). Love also noted that Ryan and Cecil-Smith worked together closely (qtd. in Baetz 45). It is reasonable to assume that they wrote the sequences in Act Three that represent the original trial of Tim Buck because they had been in the courtroom, but the brief blackout mass chant of the miners killed by the RCMP at Esteven that interrupts the act bears a strong rhythmic resemblance to Act Four and may have been written by Goldberg.

It is the second act, with its fugue structure and spotlight dramaturgy, that poses a question of authorship. This is the primary point in the play where dramatic textuality is distributed into *mise-en-scène* and the point where all the elements of theatrical production must be conducted and choreographed. The scene is conceived as a theatrical action rather than dramatic narrative and is the one point of the play that calls for skilled direction and theatrical experience. Nothing in the previous work of the Workers' Theatre had required or achieved such a degree of theatrical proficiency. The only members of the troupe who had the theatrical experience of this dramaturgy were Toby Gordon, who had seen it in New York, and Jim Watts, who had travelled in Europe and, according to Toby Gordon, "had a fair knowledge of what was going on" (Ryan, Interview 21). Whether they had a hand in the actual writing of the sequence cannot be determined, but they were the only members of the troupe who had the theatrical experience to shape it. By this time too, Oscar Ryan and Toby Gordon had joined together as life partners, which meant that openly or not, he was in a position to draw on her expertise. The details may never be known, but the fact of Toby Gordon's theatrical training suggests that she played an instrumental role in the collaborative authorship of the *mise-en-scène*.

We know from the program that Toby Gordon—the only professionally trained actor in the cast—did not appear on the stage until her role as the CLDL prosecutor in Act Five, and we know that she was one of the credited directors. This makes it a plausible conclusion that she directed Act Two, which assigns her authorship of the most recognizably modernist sequences of the play—sequences that are more accurately described as built rather than written.

The authorship of *Eight Men Speak* has been described as collective, but the term must be qualified in terms of its later usage to describe the collaborative processes that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s (Rifkind 138). The tradition of collective creation that emerged a generation later was built upon an assumption of consensual process, egalitarian decision-making, and distributed authority. The creative process of *Eight Men Speak* was one in which centralized authority assigned tasks, compiled results, and defined objectives. It modelled the decision processes of the Communist Party and adhered to its disciplinary procedures. In that sense, *Eight Men Speak* might be considered a bureau-play, not unlike the plays of the Living Newspaper Unit of the Federal Theatre Project. Given that its components were subject to approval up the hierarchy, we are left with the question of why Oscar Ryan initially approved the decentred “collage” structure that he would later renounce (Ryan, Interview 28).

Ryan may have approved of the play’s unusual structure because his utilitarian purpose was to mount a workers’ rebuttal of the justice system, and to that end the issue of dramaturgical form simply was not important. Tactically, matters of aesthetic principle did not matter in the political moment. It is possible that the authors did not at first see the play as a coherent unified drama at all. The initial idea was to have a workers’ court with a prosecution and a defence. The Workers’ Theatre had been developing its capacity to perform mass recitations, and it would have made good theatrical sense to begin the performance that way. But to make the show into a good night out, it needed to be more than a few short scenes—particularly since the staging of *Eight Men Speak* was a widely advertised climactic event in the CLDL campaign. I agree with Rifkind’s analysis that sees the play as a “modernist staging” combined with “a three-act socialist documentary” (138), but I suggest that it was even less structured than that comment implies. I suspect it coalesced as a play out of its separate components, growing incrementally until it was sufficiently fleshed out to stand as an evening’s entertainment. What began as a paratheatrical mock trial became an agitprop frame that grew a dramatic skin. In that sense,

Eight Men Speak is an archive of performance methods that recapitulates the history of left theatre and takes the audience in stages through parody, agitprop, expressionism, melodrama, and documentary.

It also recapitulates the history of Canadian Stalinism. Noting the absence of feminist consciousness in the play, Rifkind has made the important point that it “stages leftist organizing in ways that document the containment of femininity across multiple ideological positions” (145). The masculinist leadership pathologized the Party as an organic body, gendered by rhetorics of militarism and combat and regulated by the iron discipline that was always a point of revolutionary pride. Women were relegated to support roles, and although some made it to the highest ranks of the Party, they were excluded from operational command. The creative process of *Eight Men Speak* suggests how that pathology worked to suppress women’s radical artistic work. Following the ban on the play, there were several instances in which sections were performed in public. The most significant was the performance of the Workers’ Court scenes at Hygea Hall on January 17, 1934; it was at that meeting that A.E. Smith stated that Prime Minister Bennett had ordered Buck murdered, for which claim he was arrested for sedition. In the aftermath of the ban, the play’s lack of dramaturgical unity was its most useful condition for Ryan and Cecil-Smith, because it could be decomposed and restaged as needed at rallies. They had neither investment nor interest in the play as an aesthetic structure; for them it was a theatrical pamphlet. But as Toby Gordon Ryan describes in her memoir, the women involved had entered into the process with artistic aspirations to create a radical theatre art; and, after the performance of *Eight Men Speak*, began discussions on how to “advance social theatre” (*Stage Left* 47). As they acceded to the discipline that displaced them from creative leadership, they surrendered artistic ambition to the necessities of the mission. We cannot know if that surrender accounts for the elision in Ryan’s memoir, but her silence around the experience of *Eight Men Speak* invites the thought.

That suggestion finds some support in the aftermath of the play. The public aftermath—of the CLDL campaign, the aborted Winnipeg production, the release of the prisoners, and the repeal of Section 98—is well known. The theatrical aftermath is less familiar. The Ryans moved to Winnipeg, and Jim Watts (along with Lon Lonson, who had acted in the play and whom she later married) did her part to advance the art by moving to New York to study at the New Theatre League School under Elia Kazan. When Toby Ryan and Jim Watts rejoined forces in 1935 in Toronto, they founded the Theatre of

Action to take leftist theatre to a level of professionalism in repertoire and production, and, in Toby Gordon Ryan's words, "to enrich and grow" (*Stage Left* 47). It was Watts who secured the troupe's office space and directed its inaugural production of *Waiting for Lefty* in February 1936. Shortly thereafter, however, she left the troupe. Toby Gordon Ryan does not explain why Watts left, but in the summer of 1936 David Pressman arrived from New York to teach at the company's summer school and stayed for the next two years as Theatre of Action's director. He received payment for doing the work that Watts had been doing for no remuneration.

Watt's departure, so soon after studying at a top left-wing theatre school, may have had to do with her uncompromising radicalism, which did not adapt well to the new spirit of ideological compromise and mainstream appeal in the Popular Front. There is evidence of this in a program for an evening of five short plays in March 1936, three of which Watts directed. They were billed as "one-act plays" but at least some of them were in fact Third Period agitprops, including the only Toronto production of *Newsboy*, directed by Watts (Theatre of Action). These were the last of the Communist agitprops staged in Toronto, the last iteration of the radical theatrical modernism that had been superseded by the realist dramaturgy of the Popular Front and Watts' last efforts in the theatre. Her ideological zeal—evidenced by her insistence on producing revolutionary agitprop even after the Party had pointed cultural work to the mainstream—soon found other expressions. Before a year had passed, she was in Spain with press credentials from the *Daily Clarion*.¹⁰

Once again, radical theatrical modernism was displaced by ideological contingency, and once again a radical theatrical woman was replaced by a professional man. This time, however, Toby Gordon Ryan was on the side of the apparatus. Her own work in the Theatre of Action over the next seven years was oriented towards craft, pedagogy, and disciplinary mastery, although she subordinated herself in an organizational rather than creative role. When she reformed the troupe as the Play Actors after the war, she enacted the final stage of the Party refutation of radical modernism by pioneering socialist realism in Toronto.¹¹

NOTES

- 1 I myself am one of the critics who have made that claim, in various writings. This essay is subtitled "A Reflection" because it addresses and builds on analyses that I have developed in a sequence of articles on the history of the Workers' Theatre and the radical left theatre

movements of the 1930s. See my articles “Qualified,” “Performance,” and “Comintern.” This essay draws on material that will be integrated into a critical edition of *Eight Men Speak*, in preparation for University of Ottawa Press as part of the Editing Modernism in Canada series.

- 2 Frank Love was still alive in 1988 when he gave an interview to a University of Guelph student, Elaine Baetz, who used it in her MA thesis on the representation of the working class in the play. At that time he was retired from his career as an electrician. Her quotations from that interview are all that remain of it. Edward Cecil-Smith left the Communist Party under circumstances that remain obscure, after serving as political officer and later commanding officer of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion in the Spanish Civil War. After the Second World War he worked as a managing editor for a publisher of trades magazines.
- 3 In 1983, Popular Projects Society, a popular theatre in Halifax, mounted *Eight Men Speak* with permission from Oscar Ryan. He and Toby Ryan attended the performance and gave a public talk about it. In 2001, I was contacted by a group in Vancouver who wanted background information for their production of *Eight Men Speak*. When I asked how they obtained rights to the play, they informed me that the (rump) Communist Party had given permission. As a Party office had initially proposed the play and supervised it through the CLDL, a case might be made for proprietary right. But at no point in 1933 did the Party claim that right, and the historical continuity between the Communist Party of 1933 and the party that bears that name today is tenuous at best.
- 4 There is no documentary record that Oscar Ryan started the PAC, but the conclusion that he did is reinforced by his leadership role in its various activities, his control over its public voice, and his editorial direction of *Masses*. The Winnipeg PAC was founded in 1934, shortly after the Ryans, by then a couple, relocated there.
- 5 For an analysis of the means by which the international revolutionary theatre movement undertook the ideological shift from militant agitprop to socialist realism, see Filewod, “Qualified.”
- 6 I am indebted to Genevieve Cecil-Smith for sharing family information about Ed Cecil-Smith.
- 7 In his theatre in the Toronto Central High School of Commerce (where Toby Gordon had been one of his students), Herman Voaden explored the techniques of a scenographic modernism that blended lighting, music, spatial mass and shadow, and poetic acting to create what he called a “symphonic expressionism” capable of theatricalizing the Canadian landscape. See Wagner *A Vision* and *The Worlds of Herman Voaden*.
- 8 The single surviving photograph of *Eight Men Speak* in performance has been reproduced in my article “Performance.” It can also be seen online at “Communist Performativities: The Communist Party of Canada 1933-1938” (www.uoguelph.ca/workerstheatre).
- 9 For a discussion of the renunciation of the aesthetic values of the play, see Filewod “Comintern.”
- 10 For an examination of Watt’s activities in Spain, see Hannant.
- 11 I examine the history of radical left theatre in the decade following the war in my article “Performing” and in my book *Committing*. Toby Gordon Ryan’s work in the Workers’ Theatre, Theatre of Action, Toronto Labor Theatre, and Play Actors can be understood as a twenty-five-year continuous project of left theatre work that traces the larger history of ideological and aesthetic shifts in Communist cultural practice. Her long career as a radical theatre worker has to this point been entirely unacknowledged by theatre historians, who have tended to lock her into the historical moment of the 1930s.

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Mean Street

Don't worry about me. Your shark isn't getting any smaller or slower. How long do you think he'll circle until he gets bored? Say it with your eyes, son, the words mean little around here, everybody's writing them down in tiny script on any scraps of paper they can find. "Soon there won't be trees enough for all this verbiage," announces a local poet much loved by the government but largely unread by the populace. They know nothing of poetry, he comforts himself in thinking. They wouldn't know an anapest if it hit them between the eyes. As it stands the bifocals shatter and leave him groping in the street vulnerable to all the malice a city can engender around a single weakness. No, don't touch him now, he's had enough. They've even lifted his watch unless he never wore one to begin with. Quiet your thoughts for a moment. Not as easy as it seems. First you have to live for a long time and you have to suffer, needless to say. Everybody suffers, but you have to be open to it, and when it comes you have to ride it like a pony, get to know it, and then try to remember the pain years later, which isn't easy. The circumstances show up like a brief silent film. The actors grimace and carry on but without a soundtrack something is missing. The pain seems less genuine, less earned. If you could see the heart exposed and watch it pulse with anguish, or explode as hearts will do, perhaps that would convince, but hear one sigh from him, one gulp, and you'll think, "I don't feel his pain, strictly speaking, but I feel *its* honesty."

“The art of making artists”

Canadian Modernism, F.R. Scott, and the New Deal

In his contribution to *On F.R. Scott*, a 1983 volume of essays that celebrates Scott's life and work, Louis Dudek writes of a 1941 lecture that Scott gave at the Museum of Fine Arts in Montreal. Dudek remembers that Scott's talk featured slides of American art made possible under the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP), a New Deal initiative that provided government funding to artists in need of work. After leading his audience through a catalogue of state-funded visual art, Scott turned to his listeners and, according to Dudek, said something to the effect of “Would these fine paintings be here if we did not have this government sponsored project? See what can be done!” (31). It is likely that Scott had a great deal more to say about the American funding initiatives and the artwork that such sponsorship produced. Nevertheless, Dudek's summary is important because he describes Scott's account of the New Deal system as enthusiastic, and suggests that such a “government sponsored project” offered for Scott and for his fellow modernists not only a story of American success, but also an important model for Canadian possibilities.

Only one year earlier, in 1940, a selection of American artwork funded by the same New Deal initiative toured Canadian museums. The exhibition, which featured sketches for 149 of the murals sponsored by the PWAP, appeared at galleries across Canada, including the National Gallery of Ottawa, the Art Gallery of Toronto, and the Art Association of Montreal. The Canadian press reported that public reaction to the murals was enthusiastic, and also made it clear that public interest was sparked, not only by the art pieces themselves, but also by the system of state funding that had

sponsored the murals' production. Graham McInnes of *Saturday Night*, for example, "hope[d] . . . that the showing [would] stimulate our own Federal government to give thought to a project along similar lines," and an article in the *Ottawa Citizen* claimed that the exhibition showed "what can be done . . . when artists of a country are given an opportunity to disclose their talent under government sponsorship" (qtd. in Brison 139). Jeffrey Brison's *Rockefeller, Carnegie, and Canada: American Philanthropy and the Arts and Letters in Canada* (2005) documents Canadian reaction to the American model, and he argues that Federal One was "the shining example of state support for the arts" for Canadians of the early 1940s (138).

Despite the enthusiasm evoked by the model at the time, the influence of America's New Deal on Canadian artists and audiences seems to have been all but forgotten in readings of Canadian modernism. On the few occasions that the New Deal's Canadian impact has been considered, it has been a simplified and redacted version of the program that has been understood to have translated to the Canadian context. Brison, for example, suggests that the Canadian response to the New Deal ignored the complexity of the project, and that Canadians, in their eagerness to embrace a model of co-operation between the artist and the state, idealized Federal One, the program to fund writers, artists, musicians, and playwrights (138-40). Brison's argument coincides with Michael Szalay's claim, in *New Deal Modernism* (2000), that while Americans understood the complications and complex trade-offs of the New Deal, the program "remained powerfully [coherent] abroad" (274). Despite these claims to unified presentation and wholesale acceptance, the New Deal provided a complicated model for Canadian artists, who recognized that the framework presented both substantial benefits and real dangers to the artist in need of work. A reconsideration of Canadian modernism with New Deal tensions in mind demonstrates that Canadian artists were acutely aware of the inevitable ideological conflict that surfaces when artists must attempt to achieve an impossible balance between personal commitments, both artistic and political, and government-imposed regulations. The work of F.R. Scott, in particular, highlights the ambiguities of the New Deal proposal; reading Scott in relation to the New Deal provides fresh insight on both the artistic concerns of the time and the multiple influences that would come to shape Canada's commitment to government-sponsored art.

His position as an influential political and artistic figure makes Scott a useful lens through which to view the questions and complications of

Canada's New Deal modernism. Although Scott considered himself a poet first and foremost, his full-time practice as a constitutional lawyer in Quebec made him one of the foremost legal experts in Canada. Indeed, for his work in that realm, he has been called an "advocate of civil liberties and architect of modern Canadian thought on human rights and fundamental freedoms" (Tarnopolsky 133), and he is remembered for his opposition to Premier Maurice Duplessis' Padlock Law of 1937, for his advocacy for religious freedom and free speech, and for his defence of the constitutionalization of human rights. All of this work has been carefully documented by Sandra Djwa in her biographical history of Scott, *The Politics of the Imagination* (1987), and by Robert May in his 2003 dissertation, "'Make this Your Canada': F.R. Scott and the Poetics of Social Justice in Canada, 1922-1982." Both Djwa and May relate the details of Scott's life, charting his legal and political careers and drawing attention to his numerous publications in both fields. These studies convincingly argue that a theme runs through Scott's work and life: as both Djwa's and May's titles indicate, Scott attempted throughout his life to reconcile his political and artistic callings, which were "ineluctably bound up in each other" (May, "Make" 40). Because of his conviction that art must reflect the circumstances of its day, Scott provides a useful starting point for a consideration of the impact of the New Deal on Canadian poets.

Even before the sharp downturn in the fall of 1929 that marked the beginning of the Depression, Canadian artists felt themselves pulled between their ideological convictions and the pressures of the market. In "Wanted: Canadian Criticism" (1928), A.J.M. Smith discusses the dilemma that Canadian writers, and especially those writers who wanted to use their work to voice political convictions, seemed to face: they could either remain true to their beliefs and starve, or abandon their ideals and write work that would sell. The choice between artistic commitment and material survival is, according to Smith, a result of a misinterpretation of the value of art. Modern society collapses the distinction "between commerce and art," and the resulting "confusion" may tempt Canadian writers "to effect a compromise" (600). As Smith warns, the artist who chooses to maintain his political commitment often "finds himself without an audience, or at least without an audience that will support him" (600). Smith's diagnosis of the artist's condition proved to be even more applicable just one year later, as Canada's Depression-era artists worked to prove their relevance to a public that thought itself to be without the money or leisure time necessary for art appreciation.

While the New Deal—and especially Federal One—had begun to address the difficult position of the American artist, the program did not fully mend the disjunction that Smith observed between the desire for artistic freedom and the necessity of a liveable income. In attempting to bridge this gap, in fact, Federal One initiatives highlighted the difficult questions that arise from artistic sponsorship. What did it mean, for example, for an artist to be unemployed? As Harold Rosenberg, the American artist and art editor of the New Deal-commissioned *American Guide Series*, explained, “It seemed easy to raise painting to the level of a profession when members of most professions had nothing to do” (197). But finding employment for out-of-work artists raised complicated questions about definitions: how was an artist’s labour to be valued? What made for a working artist? Should an artist be compensated for his working hours, or for a finished project? What permitted a citizen to classify herself as an artist? Would artistic merit or an artist’s need determine employability? The question of aesthetic standards quickly grew complicated. If only a certain class of artist was to be employed, who was fit to judge the quality of the finished work? Such questions led to a radical rethinking of the purpose and value of art in the modern nation.

Szalay argues that these and other complications that arise with the New Deal model surface in the aesthetics of American writing of the time. In removing the element of chance from artistic success by paying artists for their time rather than for their finished product, Federal One encouraged artists to adopt “new ways of conceiving literary labour” (Szalay 5). The redefinition of artistic labour shifted the emphasis from product to process and worked to blur the boundary between artist and audience. This shift appealed to the leftist- and socialist-leaning artists of the era, who were sympathetic to the plight of the workers because it allowed them to identify themselves with the proletariat, having also sacrificed control over the product of their labour. Of course, as Szalay argues, offering artists a wage for their work also meant that Federal One employees had an interest in maintaining the capitalist system and in avoiding any work that could be construed as leaning too far to the left. It was as if the New Deal’s arts administration was able to take the difficulties that the project initially encountered—the questions of who would qualify as an artist and what makes for good art—and make these complications work to Federal One’s advantage in a manner that both contained and appeased the artists on its payroll.

Because the Depression had distanced much of the public from the world of art, the New Deal aimed to reconceptualize not only artistic labour, but

also art appreciation, reconnecting the public to its art and reaffirming the place of art in everyday America. New Deal artists would transform what it meant to consume art, eradicating the necessity of ownership and thereby removing artistic creation from the commercial realm. Such a rethinking would both shelter art from the rise and fall of the economy and would work to generalize the power of the artist to the community at large. The ideals of this reconfiguration were best achieved through the public mural, the form that came to provide the New Deal's metaphor of ideal artistic production. The murals, twenty-five hundred of which were funded by the PWAP, became a community effort rather than an individual's product, and were removed from concerns of private ownership. Murals were painted on the walls of post offices, schools, and hospitals throughout the US—public locations that were meant to make art conspicuous—freeing it from the confines of the gallery and placing it in the realm of the everyday.

The local community was encouraged to become involved in mural production: artists submitted proposals for how a space might be used, and community members had the opportunity to comment on the sketch and offer suggestions for improvement, most of which concerned the work's relationship to its context.¹ Jane Sherron DeHart, writing about the legacy of the American mural project, suggests that the government's goal in endorsing the mural format was to rethink entirely the interaction between artists and audiences. The mural, DeHart explains, was artistic democracy at its best, since the public space of production "provided unexpected opportunities for [community] participation as onlookers queried painters about subject matter and technique, volunteered criticism and suggestions, and thus turned the production of a mural into a community endeavour" (323). Ideally, the community as a whole would take pride in the work, and the demarcation between artist and community would be further blurred. In revaluing artistic contribution, the artists—and the system—redefined both production and consumption.

Such a model of communication and consensus was the ideal, but the process of seeking community consent did not always run smoothly. Even when the community approved, the state could intervene to censor any project. Just how radical state-funded art could be was one of the main tensions of the era. The controversy over Diego Rivera's *Man at the Crossroads*, commissioned by Nelson Rockefeller for the Rockefeller Center in New York in 1933, would have been fresh in the minds of the PWAP muralists working in the mid-1930s. Between the approval of his sketch

and the mural's execution, Rivera made a now legendary change: a figure whose face was concealed in the original plan was transformed in the nearly finished mural to a clearly visible portrait of Vladimir Lenin (Marnham 256). The clash of ideologies was too great to stand. Rockefeller paid Rivera's fee in full, but he prevented him from finishing his project; soon after, Rockefeller had the mural destroyed. Rivera's story was to colour Federal One funding from its very beginnings. In announcing the program, Roosevelt insisted that the government would never endorse "a lot of young enthusiasts painting Lenin's head on the Justice building" (qtd. in Mankin 77). The government would maintain final control over state-sponsored art. Federal One artists were continually made aware of the source of their income, and they knew by example the risks of contravening the government's—or the American public's—accepted ideals. Artists of the day would have been well aware of the power of the state or community to pre-empt their visions.² Artists who attempted to use their art to express revolutionary political and ideological convictions were often censored by the same economic system that had provided them with space to work in the first place.

The era's very public attempts to establish the value and boundaries of artistic labour provide new perspective on Scott's 1935 poem, "Mural." Placing "Mural" within its social moment—reading it alongside Scott's interests in social, economic, and artistic reform, and remembering his investment in Federal One—gives new significance to a poem that gestures even in its title to the necessary connection between artistic product and community response. In a note to the poem, Scott writes, "This is as near as I can get to a credible Utopia." Critics have long debated how to read Scott's statement. Some take him at his word, arguing that "Mural" represents Scott's dream for a socialist and egalitarian future. Along these lines, Wanda Campbell suggests that "Mural" is "Scott's private proposal for an alternative society" (3). According to this perspective, "Mural" is the poetic correlative of Scott's political work of the same year, *Social Planning for Canada* (1935), which would form the basic platform of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation. Other critics, including Frank Watt, insist that Scott's note must be read satirically, and that "Mural" is a "mocking vision," "closer to the negative Utopias of Huxley and Orwell than to any actual world we might choose to live in" (62). The debate's longevity testifies to what Stephen Scobie calls Scott's "profoundly ambiguous" stance (314): "Mural" lends support to both arguments, since the ideal and the real are continually contrasted. Rather than a fault of the poem, such uncertainty is key: Scott's poetic

portrait of a future society pulled in conflicting directions parallels his qualified optimism for the PWAP. He builds his poem on the symbol of the public mural, which by 1935 had come to represent both artistic democracy in action and the censorial power of the state.

“Mural” presents overlapping visual images of the future in comparison with scenes of the present, with a continual focus on some of the most basic elements of daily life, including birth, nourishment, and work, and with an attention to the everyday that parallels the focus of so many New Deal muralists. Like other murals, including Rivera’s *Man at the Crossroads*, “Mural” presents possibilities for the daily life of the future. These possibilities, introduced consistently with the word “when,” suggest that humanity’s needs will be satisfied efficiently in the new system, without the oppression and subjugation that was once such a familiar aspect of everyday life; each of these advancements, however, comes at a cost. A switch to mechanized vegetarianism, for example, in which food is produced “fresh and clean / From some unbreakable machine” (5-6), results in happier animals, but it also risks humanity’s disconnection from the natural world. Such “dialled feast[s]” (51) are both clean and convenient, but their achievement is ambiguous: is the attainment of a “conscience smooth as metal plate” (53) something to be celebrated or mourned?

The world that Scott represents in “Mural” seems to have banished oppression, but it has simultaneously gained a mechanistic and dehumanized quality that exists in tension with the statements of improvement. Procreation itself has been made more efficient, and conception and money are connected—“sperm sold in cubes” (22). Had this society been Scott’s true Utopia, it would have moved beyond the bounds of capitalism, so this connection suggests that there is something tainted in the birth of this new world. Like the farmers’ fields, which will be exchanged for “crops . . . raised in metal trays / Beneath the ultra-violet rays” (8-9), children of the future will grow in a sterile setting: in an assembly-line production, the “Paternal sperm” is combined with “ova [that] swell in Huxleyan tubes” (22, 21), an allusion that must surely signal the hubris of attempts to regulate biology.³ Once hatched, the “babies nuzzle buna taps / As sucklings now the unsterile paps” (23-24).⁴ Society is harvesting not only “wormless fruits and vintage wines” (12) but also children from the “cool assembly-lines” (11). The poem’s speaker does not comment on these details, but he instead lists them one after another in a catalogue that supports the divergent critical interpretations.

Like other inconveniences of the past, inequality makes a brief appearance in the new world to mark the progress of the present state. "[P]overty" enters the depiction only to allow the speaker to clarify that the word has lost all meaning (43-44).⁵ Despite the avowed disconnect from the previous era, "Mural" includes traces of injustice that remain legible in elements that carry over from the old system: parents are presented with "choices" of "coloured skin" (36, 35) for their unborn children, which hints at the end of racism, but the reduction of race to aesthetics carries a disturbing suggestion of eugenics, gesturing, perhaps, to the Sexual Sterilization Acts of Alberta (1928) and British Columbia (1933) (see McWhirter and Weijer). As much as the defeat of racism, such "choices" might signal a reorientation of the system so that no one is confronted with issues of injustice, a far more ambiguous prospect.

The future society that Scott imagines in "Mural" has at its centre a remnant of an earlier time. The "gentle, low, electric hum" (38), a sound that is neither wholly positive nor negative,⁶ permeates the "Eden air" (37). The "electric hum" is the sound of the "Apotheosis of the Wheel" (39), or the exaltation of technology to the level of deity, a dangerous prospect among a citizenry that has already been attributed with a "bloodless background" (55) and "stainless state" (54), phrases that signal both technological advancement and a mechanized, less-than-human quality.⁷

Scobie calls the Wheel couplet the poem's "most direct and unambiguous denunciation" (318), but even here, "Mural" refuses such certainty. Because its sound is a "lingering echo of the strife / That crushed the old pre-technic life" (41-42), the Wheel serves to remind citizens of the contrast between their past and present. Like the "grey storehouse" (85) at the heart of Archibald Lampman's "Land of Pallas," the Wheel reminds citizens that things were once worse. Of course, the Wheel "cannot think and cannot feel" (40), and the repetition of the negative "cannot" brings a condemnatory tone to the line, but even a more pessimistic reading of the Wheel must admit that, because its sound is now an "echo," it lacks the strength it once had. It remains unclear whether the concluding reference to the looming "colossal commonweal" (58) is worth the sacrifices its pursuit has necessitated, or whether the "Wheel"—echoed, significantly, in "commonweal"—will again crush its society's inhabitants.⁸

Both Campbell and Scobie have noted the "ambiguity at the heart of [Scott's] verse" between "the satiric target and the Utopian ideal" (Campbell 1). In "Mural" and elsewhere, Scott presents "contrasting meanings in their most

concise forms” (Scobie 314) and leaves his reader to determine which vision he supports and which he condemns. At times, as in “Social Notes I” (1932) and “Social Notes II” (1935), for example, Scott’s strategy is to present details of the present day and allow their shortcomings to speak for themselves, “tacitly suggest[ing] a more socially just alternative” (May, “F.R. Scott” 35). In “Mural,” Scott’s catalogue has a more complicated effect, thanks to the “totally admirable concept[s]” placed alongside his darker visions (Scobie 318). While the ambiguity of “Mural” can be appreciated for its own sake, in that the indeterminacy challenges readers to consider the elements of their ideal society, it is difficult to place Scott’s projected social order on the side of either Utopia or dystopia, and this difficulty is part of the poem’s strategy.

The poem’s form adds to its ambiguity: both the Wheel’s “gentle, low, electric hum” (38) and the earlier “mechanic drone” (14) suggest a consistent and regularized background noise to the new society. Scott’s rhyme and rhythm could be said to echo this “mechanic drone.” His relatively regular iambic tetrametre, rhyming couplets, and anaphoric use of both “when” and “and” give the poem a predictability that mirrors the unheeded warning that the other noises should have provided to residents. Such regularity, when combined with the warnings of unchecked technological devotion, might suggest the dangers of the mechanization of art, particularly in 1935, when artistic labour was being entirely reconceived. Campbell rightly notes that “[d]espite the poem’s title, the position of art in this new society is never made clear” (8): while the responsibilities of the artist are not explicitly addressed, the poem presents one possible model for artistic engagement, demonstrating the sorts of protest possible under a censored system. The regularized form of “Mural” suggests the possibility of art that conforms to societal expectations but nevertheless manages to convey criticism.

The future depicted in “Mural” both celebrates and calls into question the nature of progress, a tentative warning that can be linked to Scott’s socialist writings of the time and, especially, to “The New Gradualism” (1936): here, Scott calls for a careful and qualified move to socialism, but also warns that too much compromise could be more dangerous than none, since compromise “must lead on steadily toward the planned and socialized economy, or it will be a mere lull before the fascist storm” (13).⁹ The same warning extends to the artist of the day. The implicit caution in “Mural” anticipates the concern that Scott will later make clear: there are inevitable dangers, both to society and to its art, in recruiting artists as the spokespeople of government policy. At the same time, a close reading of

“Mural” demonstrates the necessity of making strategic use of the existing system, however imperfect, to voice artist’s concerns and criticisms. The ultimate effect of recruiting artists to produce on the state’s behalf remains ambiguous: the project has significant potential, but it simultaneously risks co-opting voices that would otherwise push society to revolution.

Others, too, were searching for a Canadian parallel to Federal One, and some were more wholly optimistic than Scott about the American model. The Kingston Conference of 1941 brought together artists inspired by the example of New Deal, who met “to form a permanent association of Canadian artists and to consider how to establish a financially beneficial relationship with the state” (Brison 143). André Biéler, one of the conference organizers, suggests in the Preface to the conference’s published proceedings that the gathering was planned for “the study and discussion of the position of the artist in our society . . . and the welfare of art in Canada” (v), and that Canada would do well “to look to the United States” and to its Federal One program, which has permitted a “great advance in the happy relation of the artists to their society” (v). Among the attendees of this conference was Marian Dale Scott, who was two years later commissioned to create her own public mural for the McGill School of Medicine. She wrote about this experience in *The Canadian Forum*, echoing the New Deal belief in the need to recognize the artist’s connection to the community:

I, like so many painters of today, was feeling disturbed and inadequate in the isolation of the studio. No doubt the war is partly responsible for this desire to leave the studios, the ivory towers. But perhaps the real cause is even wider and deeper. Perhaps it is all part of the struggling death of the old era, the birth of the new. Since the industrial revolution the artist has been exceptionally isolated. His work has been mainly ignored or misunderstood by his society, and when bought, it has been mainly as luxury goods. . . . But today there are many signs of a change of attitude by both society and the artist. There are many indications that society is recognising the need of the arts as a part of creative living. And there are signs everywhere that the artist wants again to be integrated with the moving forces of his age. (19)

The call to move down from the “ivory towers” and into the streets is echoed in the pages of *Preview* and *First Statement*. No doubt such insistence on connection is primarily a result of the tumultuous times, but it must also be traced to the New Deal’s commitment to the erasure of boundaries between artist and audience. Writers of the era often expressed the desire to minimize the distance between artist and audience and so democratize and collectivize art, an aspiration that finds its form in the documentary and social-realist

work of the period. This impulse is reflected in the tendency towards literary amalgamation, as evidenced, for example, in the country's numerous little magazines.

Canada's own failed "New Deal," as Prime Minister R.B. Bennett's 1935 proposed reform measures came to be known, was clearly a response to the American model. During five radio speeches to the nation, Bennett laid out a rough outline of his vision for national change, which aimed to pull Canadians out of the Depression through "a uniform minimum wage and a uniform maximum work week" (2.14), as well as unemployment insurance, health insurance, and reform to old age pensions. Nine months after this address, in October 1935, Bennett lost the federal election to William Lyon Mackenzie King and the Liberal Party, and in January 1937, most of Bennett's more substantial reform measures were declared by Canada's Privy Council to be matters of provincial rather than national jurisdiction and were thus overturned. In a 1937 article reviewing the Privy Council's decision, Scott called the outcome proof of the "welter of confusion and stupidity" ("Privy Council" 238) into which the Canadian constitution had sunk. He explains that the British North America Act guarantees that national legislation take precedence over provincial jurisdiction in case of "abnormal circumstance," and he regrets that he lacks the space to explore fully "why the judicial mentality does not consider the world economic depression to be an 'abnormal circumstance'" (237). He argues that reforms to Canada's economy would have benefitted the nation not only during its most difficult times, but also every day, since such changes would have led to a more balanced and fair state.

Canada had not followed Roosevelt's model for recovery, but Scott's anger over missed opportunities did not prevent him from advocating change and a recrafting of the state that would incorporate the Canadian artist. Even after the Depression had ended and after Federal One's official demise, Scott campaigned with the Canadian Writers Committee (CWC) for a system of secure and permanent government funding for artists. Significantly, however, the CWC made the case for funding "without state control" (Djwa 262): having witnessed the complications of the American system and the divided loyalties of artists conflicted between working for reform and securing an income,¹⁰ Scott pressed for artistic freedom. In a report submitted to the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, or the Massey-Lévesque Commission, in 1950, Scott and the CWC warn of the dangers of neglecting Canadian writers, since "the flood of American periodicals shipped into this country, the large number of radio programs

fed in from the United States and the Niagara of American advertising” threaten to drown out Canadian voices: “The fault is not America’s but ours” (2). The solution, the CWC claimed, is “the development of a little Canadian independence,” which must at this point mean both of the nation from American influences and of the artist from government control: the artist must “earn a living from her work,” but “care must be taken that subsidization does not stifle artistic freedom” (3). The American New Deal prioritized finding local solutions; the same nationalism is present in the CWC submission to the Massey-Lévesque Commission. Notably, it was the American system that motivated the proposal for funding in the first place, and it was the dangers evident in the American system that partially prompted the warning about independence. It was both the promise and the threat of the American model that led to the solution found in the formation of the Canada Council in 1957, which provides funding at arm’s length from government.

Scott called on the government to allow artists the space to advocate change and all citizens the space to engage with the arts: participation in one’s culture, Scott insisted with his fellow members of the League for Social Reconstruction in *Social Planning for Canada* (1935), should be a human right. Although capitalism considers culture “a luxury to be acquired or indulged in by a privileged class,” a fair society will understand culture “as a quality of life, intrinsic in a society, of which all individuals will normally partake” (35). He repeatedly voiced his belief in participatory democracy, and he relied on an artistic metaphor to make his point. The call to each citizen to consider herself an artist with the power to reshape society finds direct expression in Scott’s “The State as a Work of Art,” a lecture delivered in 1950 at McGill as part of the Department of Architecture’s “Search for Beauty” series. Here, Scott insists that society is a work of art, crafted and capable of being recrafted, and that each citizen can and must contribute to society’s redesign. The great power of the law lies in its potential to be redrafted, revised, and improved; and it is this adaptability that allows for the possibility of building a “beautiful social order” (12). Scott’s lecture centres itself on such potential:

If everything man makes and builds is a language, I fear that we Canadians have so far spoken more in prose than in poetry. Yet we can create a beautiful social language though our daily work of making and building a society, and in this sense the social order is a work of art and we ourselves are the artists. (9)

Scott’s use of the first-person plural frames his lecture as an invitation to change, and it reconfirms his belief that a community in which each

member is empowered as an artist is most likely to craft a fair, balanced, and just society.

Scott's chief example of a "beautiful social order" ("State" 12) is the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), the 1933 New Deal project that provided both cheaper electricity and much-needed employment to communities living in poverty. Scott's admiration for the project is clear. He asks, "Is this not something more than just good government and good economics? Is it not more than social justice? Is it not also beautiful in the aesthetic sense of the word?" (14). The TVA, he suggests, extended beyond balance and the idea of fair as equitable, towards fair as beautiful. Scott was aware that his adversaries would be quick to dismiss the idea of the beautiful as forever in the eye of the beholder—how can a society shape itself according to the beautiful if its members cannot agree on the parameters of beauty?—and he is democratic in his solution. "Maybe all we need," he suggests, "is more artists with awakened social consciousness to unveil for us the beauty that may lie hidden under social forms" (10). He argues that a society that encourages each member to search out the beautiful and to transform her life and the life of her community accordingly moves beyond fair as just and toward fair as beautiful. Scott ends his lecture with this hope:

Politics is the art of making artists. It is the art of developing in society the laws and institutions which will best bring out the creative spirit which lives in greater or less degree in every one of us. The right politics sets as its aim the maximum development of every individual. Free the artist in us, and the beauty of society will look after itself. (17)¹¹

In a formulation that answers multiple overlapping concerns, including Smith's 1928 complaint of uninterested audiences, the New Deal's attempts to free the definition of art from the limitations of ownership, and his own political attempts to broaden democratic participation, Scott suggests that extending beauty will mean encouraging more people to see with the eyes of the artist. The liberated individual will act in the best interests of the collective, and the society that results will be the Utopia that "Mural" gestures to but cannot quite imagine: the world of artists free to create and regenerate a fair community.

On 16 February 1933, the day he titles as "Day of news of attempt on Roosevelt's life," Scott records his response on hearing the news. His outrage coalesces not around Roosevelt in particular, but instead around the "flagrant injustice" of the discrepancy between rich and poor in Canada and beyond. Such inequality is bound to lead to "a growth of assassination,"

since "desperate men will be goaded beyond endurance, and will throw away their lives in a gesture of defiance and complaint" (qtd. in Djwa 117). What was necessary, Scott argued, was "a supreme act of sympathy and justice" (117), a reformulation that would provide each citizen with the room to be heard. The attempt on Roosevelt's life prompted such a reaction because, although he had yet to take office, Roosevelt represented the possibility of hope. Roosevelt's campaign pledge of a New Deal for the American people promised an equitable redistribution, and, as Djwa suggests, "seemed to prove the state could provide social justice" (118). Even Roosevelt, however, even the New Deal, would not be enough. Scott's work, critical and creative, insists that a fair society cannot wait for government permission to provide for all, since the need is immediate. Artists must be central to this revolution, but their contribution cannot be scripted in advance, nor can they become puppets for the state in return for a living wage. Scott's conviction would change the possibilities for Canadian artists.

NOTES

- 1 I am grateful to Dean Irvine and David Bentley, who read earlier versions of this paper and offered generous and valuable criticism. Thanks also to *Canadian Literature's* anonymous readers, whose reports provided numerous helpful suggestions.
For examples of such community response, see the notes included in *Exhibition of Mural Designs for Federal Buildings*. Community reaction generally concerned details of flora and fauna that needed to be adjusted to better suit the local character, but sometimes, public participation took a more serious and censorious nature. The editors of this catalogue reassured audiences that community disagreement "rather than discouraging the American artist reassures him of the interest which the general public is taking in the art going into its federal buildings. He is at last in touch with the people" (25).
- 2 Ben Shahn, a Federal One muralist who had worked as Rivera's assistant on *Man at the Crossroads*, later faced a similar censorship scandal in his own work. Shahn's *Resources of America* (1938-39), a mural for the Bronx Central Post Office, included content that Bronx Reverend Ignatius W. Cox labelled in a Sunday sermon as "Irreligion in Art" (Linden 252). The community demanded that the work be changed before Shahn's commission be paid. Shahn objected to Cox's attack, but "in the interest of finishing his mural, Shahn acquiesced" (253). In a 1939 proposal for the St. Louis post office, Shahn contrasted American ideals to the country's increasingly narrow immigration policies; the government-appointed judging panel rejected the proposal, citing the work's "political distractions" (256).
- 3 As both Scobie and Campbell have noted, the allusions to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) are numerous: here, Scott draws on the novel's Fertilizing Room and Hatcheries. That the "carefree lovers shall . . . tune-in coloured symphonies / To prick their elongated bliss" (47-50) is another allusion to Huxley, this time to the feelies of the *Brave New World*.
- 4 In 1935, "buna taps" would have represented the latest scientific advancement in synthetic rubber. Buna was a 1933 German development named for its main chemicals (butadiene and natrium), and its development was tied to Germany's project of self-sufficiency. Thus "buna,"

- like Scott's other technological references in "Mural," signals both the potential benefits and the dangers of scientific advancement. For more on the history of buna, see Howard.
- 5 That even the meanings of the words marking inequality have been lost recalls William Morris' *News From Nowhere* (1890), where William Guest finds that the inhabitants of the future society he visits do not understand the meaning of the coins he pulls from his pockets: they have lost the system that the symbols represented, leaving the objects meaningless.
 - 6 That the hum is "electric" alludes, again, to *Brave New World*, where the hatcheries are powered by "[t]he hum of the electric motor" (12).
 - 7 The influence of Scott's work on *Social Planning For Canada* (1935) is clear: the editors of this investigation began by querying the world's "faith in progress" (4) and argues that "the 19th and 20th centuries disregarded the obvious social consequences of an aggressively advancing industrialism" (5).
 - 8 Beyond echoing the poem's earlier warnings of destruction, "commonweal" signals its link to Scott's true ideal, since *Commonweal* was the name of the journal produced by the Socialist League in Britain from 1885-1895. William Morris served as *Commonweal's* editor from its inception until 1890, the same year that *News from Nowhere* was originally published in the journal (Cary 175, 209). "Wheel" also invokes its homophone, "weal": a wound, a raised scar. Finally, it is worth noting that Scott's rhyme (zeal / commonweal) had earlier appeared in E.J. Pratt's "The Great Feud" (1926). Here, the "female anthropoidal ape" (247) offers "rousing martial speeches" (93) to encourage her fellow mammals to defend their territory against the creatures of the sea: it was her encouragement that "Kept up to fever heat their zeal / For the imperilled commonweal" (94-95). In this instance, the creatures' "zeal" led to their destruction and to the end of the commonweal, an outcome that lends credence to the suggestion that Scott's final lines in "Mural" serve as a warning.
 - 9 Scott's famous satires, including "WLMK" (1954), show that he realized the dangers of unprincipled compromise.
 - 10 Having lived and worked in the United States while funded by a Guggenheim fellowship from 1940 to 1941, Scott would have witnessed some of these battles at first hand.
 - 11 Such belief in the amelioratory potential of artistic expression is reminiscent of William Morris's artistic theories, which are themselves deeply influenced by John Ruskin.

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The Witch's Motivation

It is the first take of my disappearing act—
twenty feet off-camera, the star lolls, waiting,
for it to be over, yawning into her waiting—
all while MGM's army mobilizes around her bright mouth,
and set designers battle with the giant tendrils of a plastic forest
(to better frame her newly dyed crown).
A blast from the director's megaphone cannot make her flinch—
after all, *the shoes, Margaret, have been stolen from you,*
is a direction aimed only at a witch's motivation.
So I advance in my blackened body to the camera, and imagine
I am in my classroom in Rye, NY, and the star is my student.
Her remote voice solves math equations and coos to be excused.
It is clear I do not like her (this, my motivation), just as it is clear
her dressing room is the one dotted with auspicious gold stars—
such stars reserved for only the best students, to chart and
boast their glorious, public progress. And I, an old girl from
the west, should care little for such vain plotting.
Another take, the director charges, and I fear I'll be burned
to my rancorous bone. But I get into position,
to descend into sulphur—and the star yawns again—
my ugliness, motivation, so stultifying, from so great a divide.

Modernity in Practice

A Comparative View of the Cultural Dynamics of Modernist Literary Production in Australia and Canada

The recent tide of interest in postcolonial modernisms—encompassing work by scholars including Sara Blair, Susan Stamford Friedman, Simon Gikandi, and Andreas Huyssen, and volumes such as Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel’s *Geomodernisms* and Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker’s *Geographies of Modernism*—has led to renewed interest in modernism’s “placedness.” To scholars of Canadian literature and postcolonial studies, the value of exploring how writers have articulated the tensions of modernity in particular national contexts is usually self-evident. However, prior to the mid-2000s, the geographical reach of Anglo-American modernist studies rarely extended beyond the borders of Europe and the United States. As modernist scholarship has moved beyond Anglo-American literature, the benefits of a comparative approach to modernist studies is coming into focus. As Glenn Willmott observes, modernism’s very contentiousness as a category “has been re-understood as a part of the many-voiced dialogue and many-historied dialectic proper to its interpretive power” (7).

One way of opening up this dialectic to scrutiny is to investigate the points of correspondence and divergence across different histories and geographies, in order to throw some light on the relationship between modernist subjectivities and their “locational and ideological (dis) affiliations” (Sarker 473). One of the most significant of such affiliations among Anglophone writers of the twentieth century is nationalism, a force whose influence can be felt across a range of colonial and postcolonial cultural products. The point I argue is that in order for modernist experimentation to become a viable mode of literary expression in Anglophone contexts beyond Britain and the United States, it

needed to find ways to articulate itself through the vocabulary and preoccupations of cultural nationalism. Correspondingly, cultural nationalists needed to find in modernist forms and styles appropriate vehicles for the expression of nationalism, if they were to make use of a mode whose complexities risked obscuring textual meaning and ideological messages.

As with “modernism” itself, “nationalism” is an unstable term which has signified differently to different constituencies at different times. Jody Berland offers a helpful way of viewing these two concepts as frameworks within which a range of actors—artists, writers, critics, administrators, politicians and others—“grappled with changing relationships between culture, space, time, and identity” (14), with the resulting alliances and antagonisms acting as significant shaping forces on twentieth-century lives. As the writers and artists whose work registered the effects of these changing relationships were often politically left-leaning, many points of connection can be found between modernist experimentation on the one hand, and socialism, communism, and feminism on the other. The ideological resonances between the distinct political projects of nationalism and these other “isms” can be observed in a number of ways in Canadian literature. Caren Irr argues that mass culture, socialist culture, and national culture are interdependent and help to define one another. She notes that the fostering of Canadian literary culture was a priority for those on the left more generally, invested as they were in formulating a national resistance to the influence of mass culture from the US. Indeed, the left-wing Canadian magazines of the 1930s—the *Canadian Forum*, *Masses*, and *New Frontier*—all had a nationalist orientation (182–83, 191). In probing the interactions between nationalist and modernist thought, then, this paper will also gesture towards places where they overlap with leftist political affiliations.

Scholars seeking to understand how twentieth-century texts engage with the upheavals and contradictions of modernity are increasingly turning their attention to a wide range of forms from across the spectrum of literary innovation, from the elite to the popular, and from naturalism to expressionism, in which the socio-cultural effects of modernity can be observed (Sarker 472; Rifkind, *Comrades* 14), rather than restricting themselves to texts with the formal and stylistic traits of Anglo-American canonical modernist writing. This approach to conceptualizing modernism is captured by Charles Altieri, who observes that its impulse to “dramatize intense refusals of received conventions” accompanies a demand that “this negative be transformed into a positive assertion capable in principle of

handling the problems demanding such innovation” (67). Altieri’s formulation offers a way of understanding the project of cultural nationalists in former colonial nations—intent on dramatizing their rejection of the received conventions of literature from the Anglo-American centres of cultural and political influence—as at the same time akin to the project of modernist writers in those same metropolitan centres. In Australia, writers experienced a similar set of pressures to those operating in Canada, including cultural nationalism, the difficulties involved in getting a book published within one’s own borders, and the looming presence of a canon of literary works—British and, increasingly, American—whose reference points were located elsewhere. A comparison of Canadian and Australian literary modernism, then, makes sense and indeed is timely, since the last decade has seen a considerable interest in modernism among scholars of Australian literature.¹ This work, along with scholarship in cognate fields such as art history, architecture, and area studies, has explored the ways in which writers and artists can be understood as giving expression to the encounter with modernity, not as mainstream literary criticism for many years represented it—with reference points that were largely Anglo- and Euro-American—but rather modernity in its postcolonial specificity, including its inextricable links with the project of articulating the nation and various associated leftist political goals.

Canadian writers of the early- and mid-twentieth century whose stylistic, formal, and technical innovations have been linked to modernist aesthetics were also frequently involved with left-wing politics and grassroots democratic movements. Dorothy Livesay was an active member of the Communist Party and later the New Democratic Party (NDP). F.R. Scott was affiliated with several groups oriented towards Fabian socialism, and was a founding member of the CCF, the precursor to the NDP. A.M. Klein stood for office in Montreal under the banner of the CCF (Dudek 11). Other poets’ alignment with left-wing politics, while less formal, is revealed in their work, for example A.J.M. Smith’s poems from the 1930s. Candida Rifkind has detailed aspects of the convergence between avant-garde theatre and working-class politics in the 1930s, seeing the aesthetic diversity of this theatre as “part of a broader culture of performativity in 1930s socialism characterized by . . . ephemeral and ‘relative performances’ of political sociability” (“Modernism’s Red Stage” 181). A 1931 article by Scott provides an evocative illustration of the symbolic resonance between these categories. In this article, Scott uses modernism as a metaphor for a force whose revitalising effects had achieved

for art what socialism could achieve for society, namely the creation of a “new and more suitable order”:

It is generally thought that the modernist is utterly opposed to the writing of poetry in established forms—that he would abolish eternally all rhythm, rhyme, metre, and the other 39 Articles of orthodox verse, leaving nothing by his own aberrations for the use of posterity. This attitude corresponds very nearly, and with as little show of intelligence, to the view of the Red, Socialist, Communist, or Bolshevik . . . which is still held by the better-to-do sections of Canadian society—the view that he is a man whose sole aims are bombs, blood, and burglary, or possible riot, rebellion, and rape. Whereas the truth is that the modernist poet, like the socialist, has thought through present forms to a new and more suitable order. He is not concerned with destroying, but with creating . . . The modernist poet frequently uses accepted forms, and only discards them when he discovers that they are unsuited to what he has to say. Then he creates a new form, groomed to his thought. (“New Poems” 338)

In Australia, by contrast, there was no such seamless metaphorical connection to be drawn between radical politics and accepted aesthetics. There was, rather, entrenched and explicit opposition between writers who were characterized as the “radical nationalists,” and those thought of as modernists. Writers including Miles Franklin, Katharine Susannah Prichard, James Devaney, Marjorie Barnard, and others in the circle surrounding Vance and Nettie Palmer had strong affiliations to leftist political groups and saw it as a crucial part of their task as writers to articulate and promote an explicitly Australian national poetics. Those who were attracted to new aesthetic movements issuing from Europe, including the poets Christopher Brennan and Judith Wright and the novelists Christina Stead and Patrick White, were on the outside of radical nationalist circles. To those in the nationalist camp, modernist artistic techniques were inescapably inflected with overtones of British cultural imperialism, and their use perceived as cravenly derivative and politically suspect (see McQueen 33-35). Modernists tended either to be ignored or derided by cultural nationalists, even if their personal politics and their texts demonstrated a sympathy for outsiders and marginalised figures, as is the case in the work of Stead, White, and Wright.²

The antithetical relation between modernism and nationalism in Australian literary discourse is illustrated by *The Darkening Ecliptic*, the suite of hoax poems assembled in 1944 by the young poets James McAuley and Harold Stewart under the guise of a fictional modernist poet, “Ern Malley.” When McAuley and Stewart sent the poems to the avant-garde journal *Angry Penguins* in the attempt to discredit its editor, Max Harris, and thus modernism more generally, they seeded the texts with references to

European culture, languages and the classical world—"Albion," "Mytilene," "Traumdeutung," "Adonai," "Hyperion," "Thaisa," "Nero," "The Tigris," and "Venice" ("Malley")—alongside a handful of references to Australian locations ("Princess St," "Footscray," and "Melbourne"). Indeed, the title poem, "Dürer: Innsbruck, 1495" (later revealed to have been a genuine poetic effort of McAuley's) addresses the difficulty of escaping European models and traditions in one's own creative work. Tracking the changing critical responses to the Malley poems illustrates how their significance has shifted from triumphant proof of modernism's putative lack of artistic value and semiotic coherence—its "emperor's new clothes" quality—to cultural artefacts that are themselves remarkable for their avant-garde quality and their prefiguring of postmodernist techniques such as bricolage (Atherton 154). As Kirkpatrick observes, "these days more people see at least some artistic value in the poems than do not" (221). Certainly the poems and the narrative of the hoax have themselves become catalysts for expressions of Australian cultural nationalism, for example Sidney Nolan's assertion that the juxtaposition of European surrealism with the Australian landscape was crucial for his Ned Kelly series of paintings (Rundle n.pag.). What is interesting for my argument here is that as far as I have been able to determine, critical responses to the Malley affair do not generally pick up on the possibility that McAuley and Stewart were using the eurocentricity of the hoax poems to express a critique of modernism.

The virulence of the boundary-marking about what constituted acceptably nationalist writing meant that those Australian writers associated with cultural nationalism not only denigrated others who experimented with new techniques, but also excluded themselves from having their own literary innovations understood in light of Euro-American modernist experimentation elsewhere. It is clear, in retrospect, that Australian nationalist writers were engaged in much the same project of finding new directions and fresh idioms for their national literature as were their Canadian counterparts, who possessed similar political and nationalist sympathies, but for whom modernism was not a morass to be avoided but rather something to be embraced. As David Carter argues, Australian responses to modernity were "expressed through a set of radical polarizations" (160), and, crucially, what the polarization of the rhetoric around the modernism/nationalism divide in Australia obscures are the commonalities between the two camps, and the ways in which figures who were strongly associated with nationalism were also engaging with modernism. For example, Nettie Palmer reported on and reviewed key modernist texts

and authors—in 1928, for instance, writing articles on Katharine Mansfield, Marcel Proust, Rebecca West, D.H. Lawrence, and several on Virginia Woolf—including one that discussed modernity in the novel—thereby acting as a mediator of key Euro-American modernists to other Australian writers (Jordan, “Written” 94; “Elusive” 140). Robert Dixon is another critic who makes the case that Palmer’s writings were more cosmopolitan than is often acknowledged, pointing out that in her criticism she situated Australian writing in the context of world literary space (“Home” 13-14). Eleanor Dark demonstrated something of the difficulty writers had in navigating the tension between modernist and nationalist sympathies; as her biographer puts it, Dark sought stylistic and formal ways to bridge the gap “between the innovations of European modernist writing and the conventions of popular writing, and between an urban women’s consciousness and concerns about national identity and national culture” (Brooks 147; qtd. in Dixon “Australian Fiction” 244). In other ways, the Australian context shows that it was not easy to prise apart radical politics and radical aesthetics in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s. Carter makes the case that the little magazine *Strife* illustrates the way in which “the various realisms promoted by the left in Australia can be considered as attempts to describe a radical, contemporary, oppositional aesthetic” (161). Prichard’s novel *Coonardoo* is one example of this, as its portrayal of Aboriginal living conditions and the exploitation of Aboriginal women by white men produced an outraged public reaction (Woollacott 187, 251). The case of *Coonardoo* is also interesting because even as it fulfils a core nationalist tenet—choosing an Australian setting and Australian subject matter—it simultaneously troubles a central element of white settler nationalism: the near-invisibility of Aboriginal peoples within narratives of the construction of the nation.

What the comparison with Australian literature brings to light with particular clarity, then, is how crucial it was to the flowering of Canadian modernism in its various permutations that it was able to work in tandem with the range of agendas associated with cultural nationalism. The question arises, then: why were poets and writers able to hitch their various leftist and nationalist wagons to modernism and the various sub-movements gathered under that term, such as imagism and surrealism, with relative ease in Canada but not in Australia? One hypothesis is that in Canada, there was already a model of how to be both Canadian and modern in the visual arts: the Group of Seven. Their influence on the first generation of Canadian poets can be seen in the titles and subject matter of poems such as A.J.M.

Smith's "The Lonely Land: Group of Seven," published in 1926 in the *McGill Fortnightly Review* and "Prayer," published in 1925 in the *Literary Supplement to the McGill Daily*, in which Smith explores the merging of modernist form with palpably Canadian subject matter. Bertram Brooker was another figure directly influenced by members of the Group of Seven, some of whom gave him personal encouragement in his forays into modern art and literature (Betts xxiv-xxv). Canadian writers and visual artists alike, then, were able to choose from the diverse array of styles and techniques associated with modernist innovation to both express and contest their understanding of the nation, whereas as we have seen, in Australia rhetoric surrounding the two categories was usually sharply polarized. "The Antipodean Manifesto," a polemic written to accompany a 1959 art exhibition, offers one example of this: rejecting the "bland and pretentious mysteries" of "*tachistes*, action painters, geometric abstractionists, abstract expressionists and their innumerable band of camp followers" (Blackman et al. 695), its authors declared that the proper vehicle for shaping and stimulating the growth of Australian culture was figurative art, as opposed to abstract and expressionist art (Stephen et al. 22).

A second hypothesis is that Canada's geographical proximity to the United States was crucial in making it a more hospitable environment for experimental writing, not only in providing aesthetic models and examples of how existing literary conventions might be ruptured, but also in disturbing the equivalence between modernism and British literature that so stymied nationalist writers in Australia. Taking the visual arts as a comparator bears this out. In contrast to literature, modernist art was by no means figured in Australia as issuing primarily from the British Isles; rather, it was understood as a movement whose proponents came from across Europe. The young artists—many of them women—who went to study abroad travelled to countries across Europe, rather than Britain alone (Woollacott 8). With its more nationally diffuse character, then, modernism in the visual arts did not seem to represent a misplaced Anglophilic conservatism in the same way as modernist literature did. Contributing to this was the fact that for many Australian critics and writers, literature was limited to the English language, so it could not be considered in its pan-European incarnation as easily as the visual arts or architecture.

In light of this second hypothesis, then, it is worth considering the extent to which writers in the two countries were familiar with literary developments in the United States. In Canada, there was a high level of

awareness among writers in the early decades of the twentieth century, with evidence ranging from the ephemeral—the coloured prints from *The Dial* hanging on the wall of the room in which, in 1926, Scott, Smith, and Leon Edel read modernist literature to each other and attempted to reproduce it themselves (Djwa 221)—to the more substantial. Alan Crawley provides one example of the latter, with his continual efforts to foster connections between *Contemporary Verse* and little magazines in the United States by exchanging issues with them and by submitting work from Canadian poets to publications including *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, as he did for Anne Wilkinson in 1948 (McCullagh 35). *Poetry*, in fact, proved a particularly important outlet for Canadian poets of the 1920s and 30s, publishing around fifty poems by identifiably Canadian poets including Louise Morey Bowman, Leo Kennedy, A.M. Klein, Raymond Knister, Martha Ostenso, Florence Randal Livesay, W.W.E. Ross, Constance Lindsay Skinner, and A.J.M. Smith in the years from 1912 to 1936 (James Doyle, n.p.). The relative paucity of modernist periodicals in Canada during these decades meant that the increased publication opportunities available to Canadian writers through their geographical proximity to the United States and its little magazines offered a crucial material advantage that was not available to the majority of their Australian counterparts. In later decades the connections with American avant-garde writing became even stronger, something seen for example in the associations between the *Tish* group and the Black Mountain poets in the 1960s.

In Australia, by contrast, literature and criticism of the early twentieth century looked largely inward; when writers did look outward, they were focussed on differentiating themselves from English cultural production and the “yellow peril” of Asia (Vickery 77). Thus, examples of American transactions and influence abound in Canadian literary history, but they are much scarcer in Australian literature. Two examples of Australia-US connections are the decade Christina Stead spent living there, and Patrick White’s success with American publishers and the book-buying public. White and Stead, however, were already marked as suspiciously cosmopolitan by the cultural nationalists, as they had both travelled extensively in Europe as well as the US by the time they came into prominence as writers, and both had set a number of novels in countries other than Australia. In some respects, then, they help to prove the point I am making: even though a significant proportion of their work is suffused with Australian content—for example the novels *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*,

For Love Alone, *The Tree of Man*, and *Voss*—they were coded as modernist in part because they were *not* members of the group of cultural nationalists, and their modernist inclinations were marked by their cosmopolitanism and references to cultures other than Australia.

Debates about the category of the “cosmopolitan,” especially as it was held in opposition to the “native,” are instructive in shedding light on some of the differences in the way the tension between modernism and nationalism played out in the two locations. The tension between the native and the cosmopolitan has been theorized by Pascale Casanova in terms of the rivalry between a national or popular conception of literature versus an autonomous view that seeks to rise above the concerns specific to a particular context (108). It is a dynamic familiar to scholars of both Canadian and Australian literatures, and one which emerges with some insistence in relation to the development of modernism. In Cynthia Sugars’ view, the dichotomy informed Canadian literary theory from its beginnings, emerging in the work of nineteenth-century cultural critics, and articulated most famously by A.J.M. Smith in the preface and table of contents of *The Book of Canadian Poetry* (1943), in which he divided the poets in the anthology into the categories of the native and the cosmopolitan (119-20). In Australia the same binary was at work, but without the benefit of a declaration such as Smith’s which might have fostered more explicit discussion about the values at stake and the process of division itself. Instead, the debate proceeded at a more submerged level, often taking the form of jibes and *ad hominem* attacks. For example, Dixon has shown how as late as 1956, Miles Franklin’s strongly nationalist preferences manifested themselves in *Laughter, Not for a Cage* as scorn for Christina Stead and her use of reference points outside Australia in the novel *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*, whose characters Franklin deemed “introspective self-expositors touched with the brush of the coteries of the Latin Quarter, or Greenwich Village, or Bloomsbury” (“Home or Away” 16). Franklin’s rejection of modernist stylistic developments, it seems, was at least partially motivated by her refusal to accept the cultural authority of Paris, New York, and London, and a critique of deference to European standards that Franklin saw as issuing from “misguided academics” (Dixon “Australian Fiction” 252-53). In another context, the little magazine *Vision* (1923-24) also played a part in entrenching the nationalist/cosmopolitan divide. In its attempt to create an Australian Renaissance through a vitalist aesthetic oriented towards Europe, it nailed its anti-nationalist colours firmly to the mast with an article in the first issue proclaiming, “It is a short-sighted

Nationalism that can be proud only of verse about shearers and horses, and measures the reality of a work by its local references” (Lindsay qtd. in Kirkpatrick 214). As Kirkpatrick explains, while *Vision* did not embrace modernist experimentation, it resembled avant-garde little magazines elsewhere around the globe in its dismissal of cultural nationalism, its contempt for the popular and vernacular, and its critical reaction to the malaise following the First World War (214-15). If Jack Lindsay and others in the circle around *Vision* were looking back towards Europe in the search for a lost—and imaginary—golden age of myth, and the radical nationalists were looking forward to Australia, this left little ideological space in which modernism could flourish.

These and other examples suggest that as the debate in Australia proceeded polemically, there were few opportunities for its proponents to notice how unhelpfully polarized the terms of the debate had become. One effect of this opposition was to conflate and collapse particular terms: epithets such as “expatriate-minded” and “cosmopolitan” were used interchangeably by nationalists including P.R. Stephensen and Vance and Nettie Palmer (Dixon “Australian Fiction” 235), with the implication that the act of engaging with aesthetic and stylistic innovations originating from outside Australia was tantamount to abandoning one’s own country. Sugars captures the reductiveness of this opposition when she glosses the position to which the native/cosmopolitan distinction boils down: “If occupying the register of the cosmopolitan erases the native from view, to be *only* native is also to be invisible to the rest of the world” (120, emphasis in original). Casanova also remarks on the inadequacy of conceptualizing the division as a binary, preferring the idea of a continuum, given that “the many forms of antagonism to which domination gives rise prevent a linear hierarchy from establishing itself” (83). In Canada, by contrast, there appears to have been a greater level of nuance present in discussions around the binary in literary circles. Dean Irvine remarks on the freedom of opinion that characterized the debate, as seen in the pages of the *Canadian Forum* (217-18), while Irene Gammel argues that influences from Europe and the United States at this time were stimulating for the nation’s literary development, rather than the occasion for defensiveness (247). Earle Birney provides an illustration of how the two orientations could be considered together, commenting in 1946 in relation to the post-war cultural climate in Canada that “the most cosmopolitan service a Canadian poet can do is to make himself such a clear and memorable and passionate interpreter of Canadians themselves, in the language of Canada,

that the world will accept him as a mature voice, and be the reader for that to accept Canada as a mature nation” (qtd. in Howells 304).

What the Australian comparison suggests is that in Canada, the fact that writers and critics had the vocabulary, and the opportunity, to contest the native/cosmopolitan division was significant, in that it deprived the opposition of some of its force. This is not to say, of course, that its presence within literary criticism was without negative effects: Sugars details some of the ways it has troubled Canadian literary developments, observing for example that strands of postcolonial critical discourse have had the effect of shifting evaluative weight from one pole to the other (124-33). My contention here, however, is that in Australia, the critics marshalled on either side were caught up unhelpfully in binary oppositions without the kind of vehicles for debate and deconstruction that existed in the Canadian literary environment, and that this had the effect of further entrenching the political divisions between the two camps. In the Australian context, it is clear in retrospect that if nationalist writing and the stylistic features of European literature were seen as mutually exclusive possibilities within literary discourse—and critical battle lines drawn such that one could only be on one side or the other—it is inevitable that modernism would fall on the non-nationalist side. However, in the Canadian debates, we can see modernism being sustained as a legitimate literary possibility through the process of contestation. To take but two examples, Livesay’s relegation to the category of the “native” in Smith’s initial edition of *The Book of Canadian Poetry* provided the occasion for her to contest both this characterization of herself and to critique what she saw as the specious premises and colonialist mentality on which Smith had built his argument, while John Sutherland took the opportunity in 1947 to assemble the anthology *Other Canadians*, which critiqued and provided an alternative to Smith’s evaluative schema. The two national contexts illustrate Carter’s point—made in relation to Australian literature but equally applicable to Canada—that the idea of the “modern” needs to be understood as a site on which conceptual and ideological oppositions are played out (159).

Another hypothesis that would explain the disparity between the reception of modernism in the two nations emerges in relation to internationalism. Both literary and political writing from this period demonstrate how closely Canadian intellectuals of the period followed and were influenced by ideas circulating beyond their national borders. Livesay found in the writing of C. Day Lewis, Stephen Spender, W.H. Auden, and Louis MacNeice—whom she

discovered in a New Jersey bookstore—“revolutionary poetry but full of lyricism and personal passion” with “nothing like it in America or Canada . . . it threw Eliot aside and proclaimed a brave new world” (153). A glance at Scott’s writing in the *Canadian Forum* shows how attentive he was to international political developments, with articles including a discussion of the revival of socialist parties in different nations around the world and the significance of this for Canada (“The New Gradualism”), a report on his trip to the USSR which both praises and critiques the way communism is working there (“Impressions”), a comparison of Canada’s decision to outlaw communism in contrast to the positions taken by other nations (“Communists”), and a raft of other articles in which Scott situates Canada and its political situation in relation to other countries. While Canadian writers were familiar with international developments on both the political and aesthetic fronts, their Australian counterparts appear to have been open to the latter but much less so to the former. Australian writers on the left certainly drew inspiration from international political struggles to inform both their political and their nationalist agendas, with Dixon noting that in the 1930s, communism was one of the central intellectual formations through which Australian literature was connected to international literary space (“Australian Fiction” 241-42). Australian women who participated in feminist and left-wing political activism also found in these movements a way to connect to global concerns: the winding-down of European imperialism, the rise of fascism and communism, and co-operative endeavours such as suffrage and pacifist organizing (Bonnie Kime Scott, “Introduction” 7). The novelist Jean Devanny is an example of this, as her encounters with new currents of thought came largely through her exposure to political ideas such as socialism and suffragism (Ferrier 191). This is not to say, of course, that international influences were absent in the aesthetic realm; the difference is clearly a matter of degree. Carson argues, for instance, that in the work of Christina Stead and Eleanor Dark the transnational acts as a barometer for the encounter with modernity, demonstrating the increasing complication of modern lives “by the transmission of new cultural, political and social conventions that swirled around the world” (229), and certainly other writers also focalized their exploration of what it meant to be modern through an international perspective. However, taken broadly, international and transnational exposure did not fertilize Australian modernist experimentation in literature to the same extent as it did Australian political thought, and it is possible to interpret this as another factor leading to the disparities between modernist developments in the two countries.

Caution is needed in comparative studies when searching for the causes of cultural differences amidst the complexities of wider demographic, economic, linguistic, ethnic, and geopolitical patterns, which themselves have diverse histories and contested causal relationships to each other. For that reason, the hypotheses I have adduced here relate largely to epiphenomena, rather than larger social and cultural forces. It is however possible to put forward some broader hypotheses about the shape and direction of the two nations, and how this influenced their responses to modernism. One of these is that Australia was settled by a population that included a higher proportion of Irish Catholics, a demographic far less likely to view British or European influences in a positive light than the Anglophone settlers who first arrived in Canada: British Loyalists fleeing the United States and a significant number of Protestant Scots.³

Doyle and Winkiel observe that modernist texts evince a palpable self-consciousness about their relationship to other texts, giving “a sense of speaking from outside or inside or both at once, of orienting toward and away from the metropole, of existing somewhere between belonging and dispersion” (4). I have sought in this paper to flesh out a few of the geocultural specificities of this self-consciousness as it manifests itself in Canadian and Australian literature, two countries whose historical and colonial configurations are still largely invisible within geomodernist scholarship even as it begins to focus attention on the range of contexts around the globe in which different variants of modernism evolved. One of the most powerful elements inflecting modernism as it manifests itself in these two national literatures is an ambivalence between the desire, on the one hand, to try experimental techniques garnering praise and respect from taste-forming institutions in metropolitan centres of culture such as publishers (Faber), little magazines (*Blast*, *The Dial*, *Poetry* and others) and the academy, and the need, on the other hand, to differentiate oneself and one’s creative output from the work of those in the very same metropolitan centres.

This ambivalence is of course limited neither to modernism nor to Canada or Australia: it can be found in other contexts with fraught relationships to centres of cultural and political power.⁴ What they share is that they all are, in Sugars’ phrase, “historically condemned never to be the initiating locus of the terms of evaluation” (120). It is also not necessary to be a nation producing literature in English—or indeed in any European language in which modernist developments occurred—to feel the force of this exclusion. The modernist imperative to be at the forefront of cultural change in effect

automatically excluded those outside the Anglophone nexus of the US and Europe and condemned their nations to languish in the past.

What these literary contexts suggest is that an examination of the connections and the discrepancies between modernisms in different locations is a scholarly task worth undertaking. For Doyle and Winkiel, the value of probing these interconnections lies in their power to break open the concept into the category of geomodernism, which takes a locational approach to authors' engagements with the cultural and political dimensions of global modernity (3). Indeed, examining modernism in these two countries through the lens of nationalist commitment makes it clear that, in fact, nationalist writers in Australia—and also in Canada—were rupturing conventions in ways analogous to canonical Anglo-American modernists, albeit in ways not usually thought of as modernist by critics. Prichard, as we have seen, challenged representational conventions with her portrayal of Aboriginal people in *Coonardoo* (1929), an intervention Terry Goldie sees as a significant shift (54). Some decades earlier, Miles Franklin portrayed a proto-feminist heroine in *My Brilliant Career* (1901), using her to articulate the frustrations and limitations that the Australian bush placed upon women who were almost entirely erased from masculinist mythmaking about approved and “authentic” Australian identities. Both Franklin and Prichard can be seen as participating in what Doyle and Winkiel identify as a shared project for many white women modernists: exploring “the non-normative phenomenology of disenfranchised experiences” (13). Irvine makes a parallel case in relation to the emergence of women in key sites of Canadian cultural production such as little magazines, where the increasing prominence of women's modernisms represents “critical ruptures and sites of critique within the histories of dominant, masculinist cultures” that form the core of literary-historical narratives of dissonance and crisis (19). Looking at this kind of experimentation in this light allows critics to understand it as literature on which the tensions of specifically *Australian* and *Canadian* modernities can be seen to register. While not wanting to subsume such work under the category of a hegemonic modernism in order to make it signify, it is still worth finding places where these kinds of representational innovations connect with parallel formations occurring during the same period in the imperial centres of culture. The interventions of the Australian writers in relation, say, to gender politics, can then be seen as breaking new ground in similar ways as did the left-wing Canadian modernists. As Woollacott observes, some of the most prominent Australian

women writers of the period were also notable for their engagements with political modernity: Prichard being a founding member of the Communist Party of Australia, Stead moving in radical leftist circles in the 1920s and 30s, and Franklin writing about the plight of the domestic servant (214). Sometimes the engagement with modernity took the form of gender politics, as is the case with Eleanor Dark's 1938 novel *Waterway*, which explores the roles afforded women through actual or potential marriages, as well as critiquing economic and class privilege (Bonnie Kime Scott "First Drafts" 21). Elsewhere in geomodernist and global modernist studies, scholars are reconsidering writers and intellectuals in the Anglophone world outside Britain and the United States in this light.⁵

One of the tasks for scholars of modernist studies attentive to its manifestations beyond the borders of the Anglo-American canon is to continue crossing back and forth across linguistic and national boundaries, so as to re-envision "the circuits within which capitalist modernity has placed us" (Doyle and Winkiel 14). If it is as difficult for critics and historians as it is for authors and readers to step outside these circuits, the process of comparative analysis does offer the possibility of more easily grasping the historical contingencies which have shaped such circuits, and thereby discovering in their points of overlap and divergence how these differently emplaced modernities have the power to transform our understanding of modernism's heterogeneity as it is articulated around the globe.

NOTES

- 1 The "Australian Vernacular Modernities" conference at the University of Queensland in 2006 gave rise to Dixon and Kelly's 2008 collection *Impact of the Modern*, while a special issue of the journal *Hecate* from 2009 on "Women Writers/Artists and Travelling Modernisms" gathered papers from the 2009 conference of the same name, also at the University of Queensland. More recent conferences have taken place which have focused on specific genres or individual authors, for example "Cinema, Modernity and Modernism" at the University of New South Wales and "Patrick White: Modernist Impact/Critical Futures" at the University of London, both in 2010.
- 2 Although Australian literary history has accorded the radical nationalist writers a prominent place in the development of Australian literature of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, this prominence and prestige is retrospective and was not something most of these writers experienced in their lifetime. While some won awards and enjoyed success, their position was precarious when compared to critics in university departments whose sole interest lay in British literature, and who were openly dismissive of Australian literature. What today seems like dominance, was then experienced as marginality, and what can look like

contemptuous bombast by a group of dominant writers is probably better understood as a series of defensive manoeuvres which helped to affirm the identity of a group who keenly felt their own marginality and exclusion from sites of cultural authority.

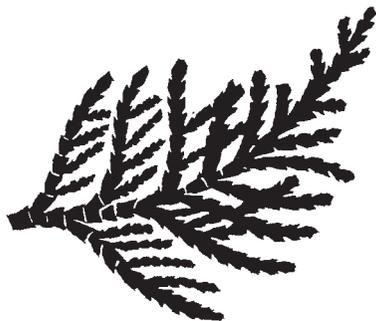
- 3 My thanks to Margery Fee for this suggestion.
- 4 Chang demonstrates how in Chinese literature, for example, nationalist and modernist affiliations were able to mesh together more successfully, but in a very different context: that of an overarching framework of economic modernisation and a gradual shift away from a state-controlled political sphere. She argues that one of the motivating forces behind Chinese cultural agents' interest in modernism was a nationalist desire to see Chinese aesthetic sensibilities modernize, and she makes the case that modernist aesthetics also provided a vocabulary for Chinese liberal intellectuals to challenge state control of cultural discourses (138-39).
- 5 Anna Snaith, for example, has argued that Sarojini Naidu, an Indian poet who was the first woman to become President of the Indian National Congress, needs to be seen as a pivotal figure within Indian modernity for her work advancing the causes of feminism and Indian nationalism, despite the fact that her poetry is fairly conventional (n.p.). It is not that Naidu should be shoehorned into a category of which she is not quite worthy. Rather, it is that her work for Indian independence should be understood as every bit as valid a response to what Marshall Berman terms "the maelstrom of modern life" (16) as the probing of the unconscious, the fragmentation of perspective, and the breakdown of language seen in the work of canonical modernist writers.

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Into Which Worlds Could Fall

I got this want so hot, sister,
could melt the copper rivets of your jeans.
A want so wanton it could
prove the claims on the condom box.
This itchy, hanker-want contains all the ass
in the world as a pool, water.

This want so raw would rot
the teeth of Toronto street kids,
snap their last guitar string
and with it any last pretence
to bohemianism by choice.

Listen, I got a want so low-brow
could make a marketing exec
vomit in his mochaccino.
So vast, this want, it's negotiating
its own Wal-Mart warehouse,
litigating already against
the forklift operators' union.

Brother, this want wants what he's got,
but not in the sense "the same as."
It's got dibs on what he doesn't yet have:
I'll take some of that. All of that.
This Cain-want confiscated
my brother's wants, took a fat
magic marker to the grocery
and Christmas lists.

I taxied this hot-tar want
to the next town and scraped my boot
on a rock. Now at a good clip
on the road home, my sole
stuck fast to the gas pedal,
I finally grasp the verses:
He who puts his faith
in Big Oil shall not want.

Littérature et politique au Québec pendant la première moitié du vingtième siècle

Prolégomènes

La question des rapports entre le modernisme et la « vieille gauche » au Canada au cours de la première moitié du vingtième siècle, sur laquelle porte le présent dossier, est certainement une problématique qui mérite réflexion. J'ai en effet souvent été intriguée, au cours de mes recherches sur les milieux littéraires québécois de cette période, par l'importance et surtout la complexité du rapport entre littérature et politique, en particulier en ce qui concerne les écrivains qu'on classe aujourd'hui parmi les pionniers du modernisme littéraire au Québec.

L'affirmation de Dean Irvine, dans l'appel d'articles pour ce numéro, laissant entendre qu'il existe une approche dialectique « qui reconnaît l'anti-modernisme et le radicalisme sociopolitique de la vieille gauche comme constituant des discours qui auraient joué un rôle médiateur dans la formation des pratiques et de l'esthétique modernistes¹ » m'a néanmoins étonnée. Rassurée jusqu'à un certain point en le voyant ajouter que « l'érudition récente sur la littérature, le théâtre, et l'art visuel de la première moitié du vingtième siècle au Canada a évolué au cours de la dernière décennie vers une conception plus complexe des orientations sociales et politiques gauchistes de la production culturelle moderniste² », il m'est venu l'idée de partir de mes travaux sur la période, qui ont donné lieu notamment à un volume sur *La querelle du régionalisme au Québec (1904-1931): Vers l'autonomisation de la littérature québécoise*, pour réfléchir à la problématique présentée et passer en revue l'orientation politique d'un certain nombre d'écrivains modernistes québécois de l'époque en espérant ainsi apporter une modeste contribution au débat.

Précisons que j'ai longtemps eu tendance, quant à moi—peut-être à cause de ma formation en littérature française—, à associer les mouvements littéraires modernistes ou d'avant-garde avec des tendances gauchistes. Les surréalistes, par exemple, ont souvent été tentés de s'associer avec le parti communiste, et certains (dont Aragon est sans doute le cas le plus célèbre) en sont même devenus membres et s'en sont faits les apologistes.

C'est sans doute à cause de ce présupposé—ou de cette idée préconçue, si l'on préfère—que j'ai souvent été mystifiée par la complexité des tendances politiques dont faisaient preuve les jeunes écrivains québécois qu'on traitait d'« exotiques » ou de « francisçons » vers l'époque de la Première Guerre mondiale parce qu'ils favorisaient la littérature moderne et désiraient écrire comme le faisaient leurs contemporains en France. Comme l'on sait, ce parti pris a même donné lieu à une importante querelle littéraire qui, surtout autour de la Première Guerre, finira par diviser la scène littéraire québécoise en deux camps bien tranchés : les régionalistes et les « exotiques ». Ces derniers seront même considérés par certains comme des traîtres à la patrie à cause de leur refus du programme régionaliste (de tendance traditionaliste et catholique) et leur opposition à l'idée que l'Art devait « servir » les intérêts nationaux.

Dans ce sens-là, on pourrait dire, en simplifiant considérablement, qu'il s'agissait d'un conflit entre ceux qui luttaient pour l'autonomie culturelle voire, à long terme, politique, de ce qu'on appelait à l'époque le Canada français, et ceux qui préconisaient l'autonomie artistique ou ce que Pierre Bourdieu appelle « l'autonomisation de l'Art ». Et il est vrai que les théories de Bourdieu sur le champ artistique et littéraire européen—où, à partir du milieu du dix-neuvième siècle, les artistes, et notamment les écrivains d'avant-garde, se flattaient de travailler en dehors de toute idéologie et de faire de « l'Art pour l'Art »—vont à l'encontre de toute tendance à automatiquement associer l'avant-garde à des tendances gauchisantes et permettent de mieux comprendre la vision du monde qui exerçait une influence si importante sur les « exotiques » québécois.³

En même temps, la littérature peut-elle être totalement étrangère à la politique, aux idéologies ou discours qui dominent ou se font concurrence dans la société où vit l'auteur? Certains écrivains voudraient le croire, et il existe indubitablement des œuvres qui réussissent à s'éloigner de considérations politiques plus que d'autres. Est-il vraiment possible, cependant, pour un écrivain de s'en détacher totalement, surtout dans le contexte québécois? Il m'est avis que la querelle entre les régionalistes et les tenants de la modernité qu'on traitait alors d'« exotiques » indique que ce n'est pas le cas.

En effet, cette querelle entre les régionalistes et les « exotiques » constitue un cas particulièrement révélateur en ce qui concerne les rapports entre la littérature et la politique car il s'agit en dernière analyse d'un conflit portant autant sur l'avenir politique du Canada français que sur la liberté artistique et le modernisme. Un conflit aux implications politiques, donc, qu'on le veuille ou non. De plus, comme le signale Fernande Roy dans son *Histoire des idéologies au Québec aux XIX^e et XX^e siècles*, toute idéologie québécoise, quelle que soit son orientation politique, repose sur un fonds nationaliste, et pas seulement la tendance conservatrice de droite comme on voudrait parfois le croire. C'est particulièrement vrai, d'ailleurs, à l'époque qui nous intéresse ici. Ainsi, si les « exotiques » n'acceptent pas la vision du monde traditionnelle des régionalistes, ils espèrent clairement apporter une contribution importante à la littérature canadienne-française (ou québécoise, comme on dirait aujourd'hui) par des œuvres plus modernes, plus ouvertes sur le monde.

Pour bien comprendre la complexité de la situation à laquelle se trouvaient confrontés ces jeunes écrivains, il est important de connaître le contexte québécois du début du vingtième siècle.

Contexte de l'époque

Après quelques années d'un optimisme relatif où l'on vit la victoire politique de Wilfrid Laurier et l'essor de l'École littéraire de Montréal, la période qui suit 1900 au Québec semble se caractériser par un repli idéologique dans presque tous les domaines. Tout se passe comme si l'élite intellectuelle de la province entrait dans le vingtième siècle à reculons.

En effet, le renouveau nationaliste qui prend ses forces à partir de 1900, d'essence surtout négative, survient à la suite du conflit de la Loi navale et de la confrontation entre francophones et anglophones du Canada au sujet de la guerre des Boers en 1899. Henri Bourassa, farouche adversaire de l'impérialisme britannique, devient alors le chef nationaliste des Canadiens français (pour être ensuite supplanté par l'abbé Lionel Groulx vers l'époque de la Première Guerre), tandis que Laurier perd peu à peu de son ascendant et meurt finalement désillusionné après avoir vu son pays divisé par la Première Guerre mondiale et la crise de la conscription de 1917. Par surcroît, une méfiance nouvelle se manifeste à l'égard de la France, la mère patrie culturelle, en raison des lois sur la séparation des Églises et de l'État, de l'établissement d'une école publique laïque ainsi que de la montée de l'anticléricalisme et de l'immoralité qui accompagnent cette période de la Troisième République.

Les dangers représentés par l'Angleterre et la France pâlisent cependant en comparaison de ceux que le Canadien français vit à l'intérieur même du Canada : le début du siècle, avec l'urbanisation rapide, l'industrialisation menée surtout par des compagnies anglaises, les difficultés que rencontre un peu partout la défense de la langue française et l'immigration massive qui transforme souvent l'ouvrier canadien-français nouvellement arrivé en ville en une sorte d'« immigrant de l'intérieur », constitue une des époques où le danger d'assimilation du peuple québécois fut on ne peut plus réel. En proie à un véritable « choc du futur », le Québec montre alors une nette tendance à se replier sur lui-même et à se raccrocher aux traditions du passé, en renforçant en particulier l'idéologie agriculturiste, messianique et anti-étatiste qui avait déjà cours pendant la deuxième moitié du dix-neuvième siècle.

Cette volonté de repli, à un moment où la société québécoise vit une période de transformation sociale et économique profonde, engendra une sorte de schizophrénie collective : « Le Québec se résume dans deux traits antithétiques : fixité idéologique au sommet; remous économiques et sociaux à la base. La période qui accordera ses faveurs à Henri Bourassa et à l'abbé Lionel Groulx passera aussi de l'euphorie ruraliste à la fondation de la Confédération des travailleurs catholiques du Canada » (Dumont 13).

Les écrivains et les critiques d'alors, comme tous leurs compatriotes, ne pouvaient qu'être affectés par les contradictions et les bouleversements qui secouaient leur société et, en tant que membres de la petite élite instruite qui se consacrait à la réflexion sur l'avenir de ce peuple, ils se devaient de chercher des solutions, de suggérer une ligne de conduite ou de témoigner de la situation, même inconsciemment, afin d'éviter une disparition collective appréhendée.

La querelle des régionalistes et des « exotiques »

C'est dans ce contexte qu'il faut comprendre le discours en faveur de la « nationalisation de la littérature canadienne » prononcé par l'abbé Camille Roy en décembre 1904, au moment même où l'on vient d'assister à la publication des *Soirées du Château de Ramezay*, fruit des efforts éclectiques de l'École littéraire de Montréal, et à la révélation des poèmes du jeune Émile Nelligan présentés par la remarquable préface-critique de Louis Dantin. Malheureusement, cette École littéraire de Montréal, qui se distinguait par son ouverture d'esprit, a temporairement cessé d'exister, ayant succombé aux dissensions de ses membres. Nelligan, que l'on considère aujourd'hui comme le premier poète moderne du Québec, se trouve dans un asile d'aliénés, et le

grand critique qu'est Louis Dantin, qui se signale aussi par son modernisme, a défroqué et s'est exilé aux États-Unis. Un certain vide se fait sentir . . .

C'est en général dans le discours de Camille Roy qu'on retrace les débuts d'un mouvement régionaliste québécois qui vise l'autonomie d'une « littérature nationale » fidèle à ce qu'on percevait comme le « génie » canadien-français. Ses chefs de file, parmi lesquels se signale Adjutor Rivard, prônaient le plus souvent ce qui constituait les trois idéologies dominantes de la fin du dix-neuvième siècle, mais surtout l'agriculturisme, que l'historien Michel Brunet définit comme étant « avant tout une façon générale de penser, une philosophie de la vie qui idéalise le passé, condamne le présent et se méfie de l'ordre social moderne. C'est un refus de l'âge industriel contemporain qui s'inspire d'une conception statique de la société » (119). En littérature, la doctrine nationaliste et régionaliste s'accompagne d'une méfiance (voire d'une condamnation) de la littérature française moderne, vue comme le produit d'une France laïcisée. En revanche, on tend à prendre comme modèle les régionalistes français, et à voir le mouvement canadien-français comme faisant partie du mouvement régionaliste français, le Québec étant en quelque sorte une « province de la France⁴ ». Plus tard, cependant, d'autres chefs de file (dont Lionel Groulx, en particulier) voudront un régionalisme plus détaché de la France.

On conçoit facilement que cette tendance vers un monolithisme intellectuel n'ait pu se faire sans rencontrer de résistance. Si l'on fait abstraction de Nelligan, dont la poésie constitue une des influences que Camille Roy voulait combattre en lançant son programme de « nationalisation », le mouvement de résistance commencera par un groupe de quatre jeunes étudiants de l'Université Laval de Montréal, Guillaume Lahaise [pseudo. Guy Delahaye], Paul Morin, René Chopin et Marcel Dugas, auxquels s'ajouteront plus tard Olivar Asselin, les directeurs de la revue avant-gardiste *Le Nigog* fondée en 1918 (Robert de Roquebrune, Léo-Pol Morin et Fernand Préfontaine), Berthelot Brunet et—de façon particulièrement spectaculaire—Victor Barbeau. Cette résistance atteindra son point culminant vers 1918-1920, lorsque la querelle entre les régionalistes et les « exotiques » éclatera finalement en guerre ouverte, sans doute en grande partie à cause de l'intervention de la revue d'avant-garde *Le Nigog*. Le feu d'artifice qui en résulta produisit néanmoins chez la plupart des participants un choc salutaire dont les effets se feront graduellement sentir par la suite.

Il est communément admis que la période qui suit 1920 ait vu l'essor du régionalisme triomphant et l'exil de la plupart des « exotiques », et qu'il

faillie attendre jusqu'à la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, voire jusqu'au *Refus global* de 1948, pour assister à une véritable réaction des milieux artistiques contre les contraintes de l'ancien Québec traditionaliste, ultra-catholique et régionaliste.

Une telle vision ne rend pas vraiment compte de la réalité. L'explosion de la querelle vers 1918-1920 provoquera une remise en question chez beaucoup de participants, qui voudront ensuite se distancier d'un tel extrémisme. Nombreux sont ceux qui se dédiront par la suite, soit dans leurs écrits soit par leurs choix esthétiques. La proposition d'un « canadianisme intégral » qui s'ouvrirait au contexte nord-américain et entraînerait peut-être même l'utilisation d'une langue québécoise, position endossée en 1931 par Albert Pelletier et Alfred DesRochers notamment, créera également un effet de scandale chez bon nombre de critiques autrefois dans des camps opposés, ce qui contribuera à un recul par rapport aux anciennes prises de position. En outre, les jeunes écrivains des années trente oseront enfreindre bon nombre des tabous imposés auparavant par cette critique littéraire d'une orthodoxie religieuse et morale pointilleuse qui prônait le classicisme et voyait d'un mauvais œil non seulement le symbolisme et la plupart des mouvements poétiques modernes, mais aussi (peut-être même surtout) le réalisme.⁵ Des œuvres telles que *Trente arpents* (1938) de Ringuet (un roman réaliste, œuvre d'un ancien sympathisant des « exotiques ») et le recueil poétique *Regards et jeux dans l'espace* (1937) de Saint-Denys Garneau, tout comme le journal de combat *Le Jour* fondé par Jean-Charles Harvey la même année, annoncent une nouvelle ère en littérature québécoise—une ère qui, après une courte explosion de romans réalistes vers 1945 et le tant commenté *Refus global* de 1948, ne montrera cependant ses fruits véritables qu'à partir de 1960 et la fameuse Révolution tranquille.

Le modernisme et la gauche

La querelle du régionalisme qui a éclaté au Québec indique assez clairement que la perspective des « exotiques », leur ouverture aux tendances contemporaines et au monde extérieur, impliquait—qu'il le veuillent ou non—une prise de position idéologique. Mais s'agit-il d'une position de gauche? Quel lien peut-on faire, dans leur cas, entre le modernisme et la gauche, voire la « vieille gauche »?

Précisons que le concept d'une « Old Left » dont il est tant question dans ce dossier de *Canadian Literature* est surtout courant dans le monde anglo-saxon (les États-Unis, le Canada anglais et la Grande Bretagne),⁶ où l'on tend

à définir la « Old Left »—par opposition à la « New Left », essentiellement une forme d'activisme social de tendance marxiste qui aura cours dans les années 1960 et 1970—comme la gauche plutôt léniniste, trotskyste ou staliniste associée au parti communiste, au mouvement ouvrier, et à la conscience de classe telle qu'on la connaissait jusque dans les années 1950.⁷ Dans le contexte canadien, on associe en général cette Vieille gauche au parti communiste et au CCF (Cooperative Commonwealth Federation—Farmer, Labour, Socialist).

Au moment où, vers 1907-1910, ces quatre jeunes étudiants de l'Université Laval de Montréal, Lahaise [Delahaye], Morin, Chopin, et Dugas, font leur apparition sur la scène littéraire québécoise, il n'existait pas encore, bien entendu, de Parti communiste au Québec. Il y avait cependant le Parti ouvrier, fondé à Montréal en 1899, dont un des chefs, Joseph Ainey, sera candidat aux élections partielles dans le comté de Sainte-Marie en 1906, et ensuite élu membre de la Commission de contrôle de la ville de Montréal en 1910, poste qu'il occupera jusqu'en 1918, moment où il briguera, mais sans succès, le poste de maire contre Médéric Martin. Alphonse Verville sera également élu député ouvrier de la circonscription de Maisonneuve au niveau fédéral de 1906 à 1921. Il existait d'autres organisations, dont la Ligue de l'Enseignement, l'aile gauche du Parti libéral du Québec dirigée par Godfroy Langlois,⁸ des loges maçonniques, telles l'Émancipation ainsi que Force et courage, qui poursuivaient plusieurs des mêmes objectifs que le Parti ouvrier, dont en particulier la réforme de l'éducation au Québec.⁹

Ce n'est qu'en 1927 que sera créée une section canadienne-française du Parti communiste du Canada (fondé en 1921). Son histoire sera assez houleuse, comme on sait, surtout avec la promulgation de la loi du cadenas par Maurice Duplessis en 1937 « pour protéger la province contre la propagande communiste » (loi qui sera déclarée anticonstitutionnelle en 1957).¹⁰ C'est néanmoins un candidat du Québec, Fred Rose, qui sera le seul député communiste canadien à siéger à la Chambre des Communes à Ottawa, ayant réussi à se faire élire à deux reprises (1943 et 1945) dans le comté de Montréal-Cartier.¹¹ Quant au CCF, fondé à Calgary en 1932, il aura évidemment beaucoup plus de succès, et fera élire des députés au niveau fédéral et dans plusieurs provinces. Il aura aussi une influence importante au niveau de la politique fédérale puisque le Parti libéral adoptera à plusieurs reprises les aspects les plus populaires du programme social et économique proposé par le CCF. Ce dernier connaîtra cependant peu de succès au Québec.¹²

L'orientation politique des « exotiques »

Il est assez difficile, en fin de compte, de faire des généralisations en ce qui concerne l'orientation politique des quatre étudiants de l'Université Laval de Montréal qui, par leurs écrits, optent clairement dès 1907-1908 pour une littérature moderniste fort éloignée du régionalisme. Après quelques petites tentatives pour défendre leur œuvre ou celle de leurs amis, Morin et Chopin semblent bien avoir adopté une attitude apolitique assez proche en fait de la conception bourdieusienne des artistes modernistes du champ de production restreinte, lesquels seraient récalcitrants à toute influence idéologique, qu'elle soit politique ou religieuse.¹³ Morin tend à adopter une attitude nettement élitiste alors que Chopin, dont la vie personnelle est peu connue, optera pour la vie tranquille du notaire et l'habitus de la tour d'ivoire.¹⁴ Ce que je qualifie d'apolitisme—parce que je n'ai rien trouvé qui indique quelque prise de position politique que ce soit de leur part—n'est pourtant pas perçu comme tel par le public québécois de l'époque. En effet, leur poésie de facture moderne suffit apparemment pour faire comprendre qu'ils ne partagent nullement la vision du monde nationaliste et traditionaliste, voire agriculturiste, que prônait le camp régionaliste. Leur option en faveur des tendances littéraires modernes entraînera par conséquent toute une série d'attaques ou de moqueries destinées à communiquer le message qu'une telle esthétique équivalait à une forme de mépris, sinon de trahison, de leurs compatriotes canadiens-français.¹⁵

En revanche, on ne saurait accuser d'apolitisme ni Dugas (un des principaux porte-parole des « exotiques »), ni Guillaume Lahaise (pseudo. Delahaye)—du moins au début de sa carrière—, ni Dantin (qui, sans faire partie des « exotiques », a certainement joué un rôle important dans l'accès du Québec au modernisme, au début du siècle, et dont la préface à la poésie de Nelligan a exercé une influence importante sur les quatre étudiants en question).

Pour ce qui est de Lahaise, tout d'abord, il semble bien qu'au moment où il était étudiant en médecine à l'Université Laval de Montréal, il comptait parmi ses amis un autre étudiant du nom d'Antoine Sylbert, qui fut un des fondateurs, en 1908, d'une revue de tendance socialiste voire anarchiste du nom de *L'Aube des temps meilleurs*.¹⁶ En plus de prêcher la paix mondiale, le féminisme, et l'instruction universelle, le premier article du premier numéro, « L'Anarchie », attaquait directement l'Église catholique en affirmant que l'éducation n'est pas synonyme de « monopole des clergés s'engraissant de l'abrutissement générale [sic], en n'enseignant que juste ce qu'il leur plaît »

(Lebon), pour ensuite faire le lien entre l'anarchie et les principes enseignés par Jésus-Christ. On y reproduisait également un texte de Théodore Roosevelt niant l'importance des allégeances religieuses en politique, une idée plutôt anathème dans le Québec de 1908. *L'Aube* publie par ailleurs un « Programme socialiste » préconisant une République coopérative, et donne des nouvelles du mouvement syndical international, du Parti ouvrier et du « camarade Jos. Ainey¹⁷ ». Dans le même numéro, un petit article du « Rev. P. Driot » dénonce des injustices et énumère des exemples de censure au Québec. Dans le deuxième numéro, on trouve un article d'A. Saint-Martin soutenant que l'harmonie entre les deux « races » au Canada équivaut à la disparition des Canadiens français, et un feuilleton d'Émile Zola, auteur à l'Index. Bref, il s'agit d'une publication fort osée pour l'époque et son existence éphémère (je n'en ai trouvé que deux numéros) découle sans doute de sa nature révolutionnaire. Dans une société où le principal de l'École Polytechnique réprimandait ses élèves pour avoir appuyé Henri Bourassa en signant une pétition contre le bill de la marine (Dugas, « Estudiantina »), il va sans dire que les idées de *L'Aube* n'avaient rien pour rehausser la réputation d'un jeune étudiant. C'est sans doute pour cette raison, d'ailleurs, que les quatre amis qu'on connaîtra plus tard sous l'épithète péjorative d'« exotiques » publient dans *Le Nationaliste* du 22 novembre 1908 une dénégration formelle de toute allégeance à la revue en question :

Afin de faire cesser la rumeur qui a couru dans les cercles universitaires et d'ailleurs, et vu l'esprit de la nouvelle revue *L'Aube*, nous affirmons que nous sommes absolument étrangers à cette feuille, tant pour la direction que pour la collaboration. Un malentendu quant aux tendances de ce journal fut la cause de la publication dans ses colonnes d'un sonnet de M. Morin. (Henri Dugas, Guillaume La Haise, René Chopin, Paul Morin)

Il reste que Morin avait publié non seulement un sonnet dans la revue en question, mais aussi une annonce pour des « Affiches artistiques de tout genre¹⁸ ». De plus, Delahaye (Lahaise), dans la note biographique qu'il fournit pour *L'Anthologie des poètes canadiens* (1920) de Jules Fournier, inclut Antoine Sylbert parmi ses amis écrivains de l'Université Laval de Montréal et se fait une gloire d'avoir participé à l'aventure de *L'Aube*.¹⁹

C'est ce même Lahaise, sous son pseudonyme de Guy Delahaye, qui publiera en avril 1909 un recueil de poésie très moderniste pour l'époque, *Les Phases*, qui causera un mini-scandale dans les milieux littéraires montréalais, surtout lorsque Albert Lozeau, poète qui jouissait alors de beaucoup de capital symbolique dans les milieux littéraires québécois, qualifie l'œuvre

d'incompréhensible et décrit la doctrine poétique de l'auteur comme un « début d'aliénation mentale ». Lozeau attribue d'ailleurs les défauts de l'œuvre à la mauvaise influence d'auteurs modernes comme Verlaine, « Viélé-Griffin [*sic*], René Gill [*sic*], Rollinat, [et] d'autres » (1). L'invention verbale pourtant assez restreinte du recueil donnera également lieu à de nombreux pastiches que publie avec un plaisir évident *Le Nationaliste*, et qui, par leur exagération de cet aspect des *Phases*, mettent en évidence le côté pré-surréaliste de cet auteur, une tendance qui se manifestera beaucoup plus clairement en 1912 lors de la publication de *Mignonne allons voir si la rose*.²⁰ Plus tard, devenu médecin, Lahaise veillera de son mieux sur le bien-être d'Émile Nelligan, son ancienne idole, interné à Saint-Jean-de-Dieu, mais il reniera apparemment ses deux recueils modernistes et, devenu mystique, ne publiera plus qu'une sorte de Chemin de la croix, *L'unique voie à l'unique but*, en 1934, ainsi qu'un dernier poème, *De profundis*, en 1941.

L'évolution politique de Dugas—un des principaux porte-parole des « exotiques », défenseur impénitent de Verlaine et de la poésie symboliste au Québec, en plus d'être un des premiers Québécois à pratiquer de façon systématique la poésie en prose—est beaucoup plus complexe. Même s'il a toujours été un fervent défenseur du modernisme littéraire dès ses premiers écrits, il affiche, en tant que jeune étudiant collaborant de façon assidue au *Nationaliste* d'Olivar Asselin, un nationalisme assez militant, nettement anti-pacifiste et, surtout, en ce qui concerne le théâtre (car il s'improvise aussi critique théâtral), plutôt moralisateur. Lors de son premier séjour à Paris à partir de 1910, cependant, il évolue de façon étonnante, et lorsqu'il revient à Montréal au début de la Première Guerre mondiale, non content d'attaquer ouvertement ceux qui prônent le régionalisme au Québec, il s'affiche aussi comme résolument pacifiste et grand admirateur de Jean Jaurès, qu'il qualifie de « prince » de l'histoire contemporaine (*Versions* 81) :

La Révolution continue, Mesdames, Messieurs. . . Elle monte des vigoureuses pages de Romain Rolland et de Georges Pioch. Elle est dans la géole [*sic*] de Karl Liebknecht, de Rosa Luxembourg, de Clara Zetkin, de Mehring, qui, garrotés d'entraves, sauvent les libertés de l'avenir. (*Versions* 83, 86)²¹

Cette liste de noms cités avec tant d'admiration est d'une remarquable cohérence. Jaurès, fondateur du quotidien *L'Humanité* et co-fondateur du Parti socialiste français, s'est illustré par son pacifisme et son opposition au déclenchement de la Première Guerre mondiale, ce qui entraînera son assassinat par un étudiant nationaliste en 1914. Rolland (1866-1944), prix Nobel de littérature en 1915, était lui aussi un pacifiste reconnu pendant et

après la Première Guerre mondiale. Pioch (1873-1953), d'abord suppléant au Comité directeur du Parti communiste avant d'en être exclu en 1923, deviendra secrétaire général de l'Union sociale-communiste, puis, en 1931, président de la Ligue internationale des combattants de la paix. Liebknecht (1871-1919) est un communiste révolutionnaire allemand, membre du Parti social-démocrate d'Allemagne (SPD), qui, après avoir emprisonné et exclu du SPD à cause de son opposition à la Première Guerre mondiale, sera un des fondateurs avec Luxemburg de la Ligue spartakiste puis du Parti communiste d'Allemagne (KPD). Quant à Luxemburg (1871-1919), exclue elle aussi du SPD à la suite de son opposition à la Première Guerre mondiale, et un des fondateurs de la Ligue spartakiste, elle sera assassinée en janvier 1919 lors de la répression de la Révolte spartakiste de Berlin pendant la Révolution allemande. Zetkin (1857-1944), enseignante, journaliste, femme politique marxiste et féministe allemande, fera partie de l'aile gauche du SPD, puis de l'USPD (pacifistes), de la Ligue spartakiste, et finalement du parti communiste d'Allemagne (KPD) dont elle sera députée au Reichstag durant la République de Weimar, de 1920 à 1933. Franz Mehring (1846-1919), essayiste, homme politique et historien allemand, lui aussi opposé à la guerre, sera très actif dans la Ligue spartakiste et l'un des fondateurs du Parti communiste d'Allemagne le 1^{er} janvier 1919; il meurt le 29 janvier 1919, malade et déprimé par l'assassinat de son amie Luxemburg.

Au moment de rédiger la conférence qui sera publiée sous le titre *Versions* (1917), donc, Dugas fait preuve d'un modernisme qui s'accompagne clairement de sympathies pour la gauche. Lors de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, en revanche, lorsqu'il doit de nouveau quitter Paris pour revenir à Montréal, son penchant nettement moderniste (il sera un des premiers à reconnaître l'importance de la poésie d'Alain Grandbois et de Saint-Denys Garneau) ne l'empêche pas de militer en faveur de la guerre,²² d'afficher de nouveau son nationalisme, et même de réaffirmer ses convictions religieuses.²³ Le cas de Dugas semble donc indiquer que les prises de position politiques d'un écrivain ont autant sinon plus à voir avec le milieu qu'il fréquente et les événements mondiaux dont il prend connaissance qu'avec ses tendances littéraires.

Louis Dantin

Il ne faudrait pas ignorer non plus l'itinéraire de Louis Dantin (Eugène Seers, de son vrai nom, 1865-1945), qui fut à l'origine, comme on l'a vu, de la publication du recueil de poèmes d'Émile Nelligan en 1904. Son parcours tout à fait original le mènera d'abord en Europe, où il décide (à l'âge de

dix-huit ans) d'entrer chez les Pères du Saint-Sacrement, pour ensuite devenir, en peu de temps, directeur de la revue de la congrégation, supérieur et maître des novices de la maison de Bruxelles (en 1891, à l'âge de vingt-cinq ans), puis assistant général et supérieur de la maison de Paris (1893). Tombé amoureux d'une jeune fille belge mineure, il essaie alors de quitter la communauté, mais accepte finalement, devant diverses formes de pression et les menaces de reniement de son père, de rester dans la maison des Pères du Saint-Sacrement de Montréal (où il lance une revue, *Le Petit Messager du Saint-Sacrement*, et participe peu, semble-t-il, à la vie religieuse). Il quittera la communauté le 25 février 1903 et partira pour les États-Unis en compagnie d'une femme mariée, Clothilde Lacroix, avant d'avoir terminé le travail d'impression du recueil de Nelligan qu'il accomplissait plus ou moins subrepticement dans l'atelier où il publiait la revue. Il s'installera ensuite à Boston (Cambridge), où un an plus tard lui et Clothilde auront un enfant, un garçon, dont il deviendra le tuteur légal lorsque Clothilde le quittera pour un autre homme quatre ans plus tard. Devenu compositeur-typographe aux presses de l'Université Harvard, il restera aux États-Unis jusqu'à sa mort, peut-être à cause d'une promesse faite à sa famille, ou bien parce qu'il savait que ses idées seraient peu acceptables dans le climat conservateur qui régnait au Québec. Encore en 1938, alors que Louvigny de Montigny l'enjoignait à revenir vivre au Québec, il s'exprime de la façon suivante :

Quel attrait (sauf celui d'amitiés précieuses) pourrait-on concevoir à un Québec voué aux plus tyranniques et aux plus sottes intolérances, occupé à barrer d'obstacles toutes les avenues d'un meilleur avenir? Vous y êtes vous-mêmes comme tous les esprits libres, exilé, étranger plus que je ne le suis à Boston. (Reproduit dans Franco 1, 94)

Il reste que, en dépit de son éloignement géographique, Dantin a joué un rôle important, en tant que critique littéraire et conseiller d'un grand nombre d'écrivains, pour encourager l'essor du modernisme au Québec.

Cet être fascinant accompagnait son parti pris en faveur du modernisme littéraire d'un penchant très clair pour le socialisme et le communisme, même si c'est un aspect auquel les critiques se sont peu intéressés jusqu'ici. Diverses références dans sa volumineuse correspondance permettent de l'affirmer sans hésitation. En réponse à Alfred DesRochers, par exemple, qui s'interrogeait timidement au sujet du socialisme devant le désastre économique de la Crise, il fait preuve d'une conviction inébranlable en encourageant son jeune ami à ne pas se perdre dans les subtilités et à se rendre tout simplement à l'évidence du bien-fondé d'un tel rêve : « Rêves

poétiques ou rêves socialistes, c'est après tout, le même idéal, qui vous fait chercher quelque chose au-dessus de la matière brute et des institutions brutales » (Lettre du 28 avril 1933, citée dans Hayward « Les hauts », 34). Il réussit à convaincre DesRochers, mais se sent ensuite obligé de le décourager quand son ami, plein de fougue et inconscient des risques, projette de fonder une feuille socialiste au Québec.

De la même façon, Dantin n'hésite pas à arrêter de collaborer à certains périodiques lorsqu'on essaie de le censurer ou lorsqu'il n'est pas d'accord avec la politique trop conservatrice ou trop timorée de la direction. Il ose également critiquer publiquement les idées politiques de certains de ses compatriotes québécois, comme en témoigne son compte rendu du livre de Jean Bruchési,²⁴ *Aux marches de l'Europe*, publié en 1933 :

On ne sait pas ce qu'il dira d'Hitler, mais pour être logique, il devrait lui dresser un dais à côté de Mussolini. Car Hitler n'est-il pas en train de sauver l'Allemagne des communistes et des Juifs? Or M. Bruchési n'aime guère les Juifs et il abhorre les communistes. Le « bolchévisme » est pour lui une obsession, un cauchemar; il voit sa trace partout; il voit Moscou dirigeant de loin tous les prolétaires mécontents . . . M. Bruchési prêche la guerre sainte au soviétisme : il veut que tous les peuples l'extirpent de leur sol, lui opposent un « front unique ». L'Allemagne commence bien : elle met hors-la-loi d'un seul coup cinq millions de communistes, les bat, les interne dans des camps, leur impose les travaux forcés. Vive Hitler!

Ces lignes peuvent exagérer les opinions de M. Bruchési, mais éclairent, je crois, ses tendances. (Reproduit dans Francoli II, 645)

Certaines œuvres de Dantin, comme sa « La plainte du chômeur », où il fustige les méfaits du système capitaliste, indiquent clairement son penchant pour la gauche.²⁵ Mais fut-il membre du Parti communiste? C'est peu probable, vu qu'il écrit dans les lettres à son fils qu'il se croit peu en danger lorsqu'on l'oblige en 1940, même si les États-Unis ne sont pas encore entrés dans la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, de fournir, en tant que « *alien* », ses empreintes digitales.²⁶

Les années trente

Comme on l'aura peut-être remarqué, les renseignements que nous possédons pour l'instant au sujet de l'orientation politique de Dantin proviennent surtout des années 1930. Il est donc difficile de déterminer le début de son penchant en faveur des mouvements de gauche, même si l'on peut soupçonner que cette sympathie date de beaucoup plus tôt. Ce qui est certain, par contre, c'est que la Crise économique des années 1930 amènera beaucoup d'écrivains à s'interroger au sujet du système capitaliste et à

envisager de façon plus favorable le socialisme ou le communisme. Alfred DesRochers en constitue un bon exemple.

Malheureusement, vu l'opprobre qui pesait sur de telles tendances politiques, c'est souvent uniquement grâce à la lecture de la correspondance de ces écrivains qu'il est possible de connaître leurs véritables opinions, et beaucoup de recherches restent donc à faire à ce sujet. Il faudrait regarder du côté de Jean-Charles Harvey, par exemple, bien connu pour ses prises de position contestataires, et aussi de Jean Narrache. Ce dernier, après avoir publié un premier recueil de poésie intimiste en alexandrins, *Les Signes sur le sable* (1922), en signant Émile Coderre, choisira, lors de la Crise, de donner la parole, dans leur langage à eux, aux ouvriers et aux démunis de la société. On pourrait peut-être discuter quant à savoir si cette poésie était vraiment moderniste, mais elle était incontestablement d'une originalité éclatante dans le Québec de l'époque.

Il y a aussi Albert Laberge, le premier écrivain québécois à faire une œuvre non seulement réaliste, mais naturaliste à la Zola. Auteur d'un roman anti-terroir en 1918 (*La Scouine*), il publie dans les années 1930 des recueils de nouvelles qui témoignent éloquemment de sa préoccupation pour le sort cruel qui s'acharne souvent sur les moins nantis de la société. Mais il publiait ces volumes à une soixantaine d'exemplaires, à compte d'auteur, qu'il distribuait aux amis plutôt que de s'exposer aux foudres d'une critique québécoise encore hostile à cette esthétique littéraire. Laberge a également encouragé et soutenu beaucoup d'écrivains de l'époque dont les tendances modernistes se heurtaient souvent à de l'incompréhension.²⁷ Sa correspondance nous dira peut-être si ce parti pris en faveur du modernisme s'accompagnait d'un penchant vers la gauche comme semblent l'annoncer ses nouvelles.

Les Automatistes

Il ne faut pas oublier non plus, dans le cas du Québec, les Automatistes et leur *Refus global*, manifeste de tendance surréaliste qu'on perçoit généralement comme emblématique de l'affirmation du modernisme québécois.²⁸ Il est certain que le groupe s'intéressait aux idées de gauche et que, comme le constate Jean Ethier-Blais, « en 1948, le slogan "changer la vie," la révolte libératrice, l'amalgame marxisme-surréalisme-automatisme, toute cette panoplie qui ornait les conversations du milieu borduasien franchit le seuil du réel [avec *Refus global*]» (37). Le Parti ouvrier progressiste, d'allégeance communiste, aurait voulu que les deux groupes se rapprochent,²⁹ et Ethier-Blais laisse entendre que Claude Gauvreau

« qui concevait volontiers les problèmes en termes politiques, . . . la droite et la gauche » (31), était un de ceux qui y adhérait le plus volontiers, ayant même collaboré au journal communiste *Combat* (39).³⁰ Jean-Paul Mousseau ressentait apparemment lui aussi beaucoup de sympathie envers l'idéologie communiste (Anonyme). De fait, l'intérêt pour les idées socialistes ou communistes était assez généralisé dans ce milieu, comme l'illustre le cas de Thérèse Renaud et Fernand Leduc, deux autres signataires de *Refus global*. Dans *Un passé recomposé*, Renaud raconte que le groupe qui fréquentait l'atelier de Fernand Leduc à Montréal avant son départ pour la France en 1946 « lisait . . . tout ce qu'on pouvait trouver sur Marx » (20), et que Leduc a même fréquenté un certain temps les communistes, « bête noire de l'Amérique du Nord » (21), non seulement à Montréal mais aussi lors du séjour du jeune couple à Paris entre 1946 et 1953 :

Nous avons donné rendez-vous [le 14 juillet 1946] à nos amis (communistes convaincus, hélas j'ai oublié leurs noms). Ils sont cependant restés importants dans mon souvenir pour l'éveil à la politique française qu'ils suscitèrent à ce moment-là. Avec eux nous apprenons l'histoire du Parti communiste pendant l'occupation, ses combats pour une société meilleure, nous prenons conscience de l'histoire politique de la France dans ce qu'elle a de plus contestataire, généreuse. (59)

On sait que Paul-Émile Borduas rejette clairement l'option communiste dans la section « Règlement final des comptes » de *Refus global*. Et pourtant, *Combat* a publié en février 1947 une entrevue que Borduas avait accordée à Gilles Hénault, co-directeur du journal en question et poète généralement associé aux Automatistes—même s'il « ne sera pas invité à signer *Refus global*, son militantisme au sein du Parti communiste étant jugé incompatible avec l'esprit du manifeste » (Biron 115). L'entrevue en question causera d'ailleurs des ennuis au chef automatiste lorsqu'il décidera de s'exiler aux États-Unis.³¹

Le CCF et Jacques Ferron

Si le CCF (devenu au Québec le Parti social démocratique du Canada en 1955) a eu peu d'impact dans les milieux francophones du Québec, il y a quand même eu un certain nombre de personnes qui s'y sont intéressés, et notamment Jacques Ferron, un des écrivains québécois majeurs du vingtième siècle.³² Voici comment Susan Murphy décrit cet épisode :

Vers le milieu des années 1950, Jacques Ferron, un médecin particulièrement passionné par des questions de justice sociale, s'est inscrit—après une courte liaison avec le communisme qui entraîna son arrestation en 1949 lors d'une manifestation contre l'OTAN—au Parti socialiste démocratique (PSD), dont il fut un des candidats aux élections fédérales de 1958. C'est fort probablement à travers le PSD (la branche québécoise du CCF) qu'il fit la connaissance de

l'homme qui deviendra le modèle du protagoniste fictif canadien-anglais de *La nuit*—ainsi que de *La charrette* (1968) et du *Ciel de Québec* (1969)—, l'Anglo-Montréalais Francis (Frank) R. Scott (1899-1985), membre fondateur du CCF et du PSD. En 1969, cependant, Ferron rompit avec le PSD de façon véhémement à cause de son refus de reconnaître que le Québec avait le même droit à l'auto-détermination que l'Algérie, en fustigeant particulièrement Frank Scott à cause de son hypocrisie à ce sujet. Ferron adhéra ensuite à l'Action socialiste pour l'indépendance du Québec (ASIQ), un petit regroupement séparatiste d'extrême gauche fondé par Raoul Roy en août 1960, et publiera des articles dans le périodique du mouvement, *La revue socialiste*, dès ses débuts.³³

On trouvera d'ailleurs une transposition fascinante, tout à fait ferronienne, de cette période de sa vie dans le roman *La Nuit* qu'il publiera en 1965 et où le personnage François Ménard dit avoir perdu son âme lorsque, traduit en cour, il a nié son communisme. Ferron est également un des écrivains qui a joué un rôle important dans la réorientation du nationalisme québécois vers la gauche. Sa vie et son œuvre témoignent en fait de la transition de la « Vieille gauche » à la « nouvelle gauche », celle qui aura tant de succès dans le Québec des années 60 et 70, surtout auprès de l'élite intellectuelle et artistique, où la seule discussion consistait à décider quel-isme (marxisme, marxisme-léninisme, etc.) aurait la préférence.

En guise de conclusion

À partir de ce rapide survol d'un certain nombre d'écrivains québécois de la première moitié du vingtième siècle qui ont joué un rôle important dans l'avènement du modernisme en littérature québécoise, il me semble justifié de conclure que, en dépit des théories de Pierre Bourdieu ou d'autres, rien ne permet d'affirmer qu'il y avait antagonisme entre la modernité littéraire et la « vieille gauche ». En outre, il semble clair que la défense d'une littérature moderne ou moderniste, dans le contexte social de l'époque, constituait automatiquement un acte anti-traditionaliste et anticlérical. Dans ce sens, on peut dire qu'au Québec, en particulier, être moderniste impliquait une prise de position idéologique voire politique.³⁴ En même temps, ceux parmi les écrivains modernistes en question qui optent pour le socialisme ou le communisme le font apparemment autant par conviction personnelle qu'à cause de leurs tendances artistiques.

NOTES

- 1 « This dialectical approach seeks to address the conjunctures and contradictions of modernist and leftist cultural formations in interwar, wartime, and Cold War Canada, a dialectic that recognizes the anti-modernism and social-political radicalism of the old left

- as mediating discourses in the formation of modernist aesthetic practices » (Irvine).
- 2 “[N]ew scholarship on literature, theatre, and visual art in early to mid-twentieth-century Canada has shifted over the past decade toward more complex conceptions of the leftist social and political orientations of modernist cultural production” (Irvine).
 - 3 Voir entre autres son article sur « Le marché des biens symboliques », qui contient déjà l'essentiel des idées qu'il développera dans ses ouvrages postérieurs, surtout en ce qui concerne le domaine de l'art et de la littérature.
 - 4 Cette expression se rencontre fréquemment à l'époque. On la retrouve même sous la plume d'Édouard Montpetit, dans un texte où il prône justement le provincialisme littéraire : voir Robert Monval [Édouard Montpetit].
 - 5 On se rappellera d'ailleurs que la plupart des grands romanciers français du dix-neuvième siècle se trouvaient à l'Index et étaient donc interdits aux lecteurs catholiques.
 - 6 Puisque la « Vieille gauche » n'est pas une expression courante en français, je me contenterai la plupart du temps de parler tout simplement de « la gauche », avec l'idée sous-entendue que cette expression, lorsqu'on parle de la première moitié du XX^e, à moins qu'on ne le précise autrement, est l'équivalent de la « Old Left ».
 - 7 Voir entre autres, Mills. Il existe bien sûr beaucoup de sites qui mentionnent la « Old Left », dont plusieurs entrées dans Wikipédia, mais presque toujours seulement par rapport à la « New Left ».
 - 8 Il y aurait de la recherche à faire sur le rapport entre la littérature et *Le Pays* (1910-1922), journal fondé par Godfroy en 1910, et qu'il dirigera jusqu'à son départ en Belgique en 1914 en tant que premier représentant commercial du Québec. Le journal continuera à paraître jusqu'en 1921, et ce malgré son interdiction par Mgr Bruchési en 1913.
 - 9 Pour d'autres renseignements sur le Parti ouvrier, voir, entre autres, Leroux; Rouillard.
 - 10 L'histoire du Parti communiste du Canada a également été difficile. Déclaré illégal en 1940, il changera son nom en Parti ouvrier progressiste (Labour-Progressive Party) en 1943. (« Communist Party of Canada », Wikipedia, en ligne)
 - 11 Condamné pour espionnage pour le compte de l'Union soviétique en 1947, Rose passera six ans en prison. Il choisira par la suite, en raison du harcèlement de la police, de s'exiler en Pologne. (« Parti communiste du Québec », Wikipedia, en ligne)
 - 12 Par contre, cette tendance change radicalement lors des élections fédérales de 2011 quand le Nouveau Parti démocratique, version moderne du CCF (PSDC) fondée en 1961, connaîtra un succès spectaculaire au Québec.
 - 13 Le culte de la poésie qu'avait Émile Nelligan correspond bien, lui aussi, à la théorie bourdieusienne.
 - 14 Robert Larocque de Roquebrune adoptera lui aussi une perspective plutôt élitiste qui correspond bien à son nom d'origine aristocratique. Lors de mon entretien avec lui en septembre 1972, il m'a fait l'effet d'un homme charmant, « a gentleman and a scholar », comme on dit en anglais.
 - 15 Voir par exemple Hayward, « *Le Nationaliste* et les futurs “exotiques” (1^{re} étape), » dans *La querelle du régionalisme*.
 - 16 Voir à ce sujet Hayward, « *L'Aube* ».
 - 17 Joseph Ainey est un membre du Parti ouvrier du Québec dont Henri Bourassa et *Le Nationaliste* d'Oliver Asselin (dont Marcel Dugas était un grand admirateur à l'époque) avaient appuyé la campagne électorale en novembre 1906. Son programme électoral prônait l'assurance maladie et une pension de vieillesse, la suppression des banques privées et la création de banques d'État, la liberté de la presse, l'élection des juges par le peuple, la création d'un Ministère du travail, l'abolition du Sénat, l'abolition de la

- Commission du Port de Montréal, et la tenue des élections fédérales tous les quatre ans à date fixe. (Voir, entre autres, Morgan.)
- 18 « PAUL MORIN / Affiches artistiques en tous genres, seul à Montréal / 188 Avenue du Parc / Tel. Bell E. 3866 ».
 - 19 « Parmi ses nouveaux camarades, le futur auteur des *Phases* ne devait pas tarder à découvrir tout un groupe d'écrivains en herbe, très férus comme lui de littérature : c'étaient René Chopin, Marcel Dugas, Paul Morin, Antoine Sylbert, d'autres encore. Tous ces heureux adolescents, que rapproche le même culte désintéressé, avaient trop d'enthousiasme pour ne pas vouloir tenter des œuvres en commun. Ce fut d'abord la publication de *l'Aube* (1908), puis de *l'Encéphale* (même année), enfin la fondation du Soc, cercle littéraire d'étudiants (1909). Faut-il dire qu'à l'origine de chacune de ces entreprises se retrouve le nom de notre poète? » (Fournier 270)
 - 20 D'une disposition plutôt fantaisiste, ce recueil reproduit par exemple, avec des remarques ou des changements, des dessins d'Osias Leduc, la Mona Lisa de Léonard de Vinci, des poèmes d'autres auteurs et même quelques-uns de *Phases*, le premier recueil de Delahaye, tout en se moquant explicitement de l'accusation d'imitation dont on accable infailliblement les jeunes écrivains canadiens. Avec son ton désabusé, *Mignonne* représente à la fois une plaisanterie et une contestation de l'art et de la société canadienne de l'époque. Il date de 1912 alors que le mouvement Dada sera fondé en 1916, et le surréalisme en 1924.
 - 21 Ce livre reproduit le texte d'une conférence que Dugas prononça à Québec et à Montréal pendant la Première Guerre. Il ajoute d'ailleurs, à la suite de ces déclarations en faveur de la révolution et de Jean Jaurès, qu'il n'ose pas révéler toute sa pensée, de peur de trop scandaliser le public canadien.
 - 22 La conférence publique qu'il donne à ce sujet est publiée sous forme de brochure : *Notre nouvelle épopée*. Ottawa : Service de l'information Ministère des services nationaux de guerre, 1941, 11 p.
 - 23 Voir Dugas, *Salve alma parens* (1941).
 - 24 Jean Ruchési (1901-1979) est un professeur d'histoire et de science politique à l'Université de Montréal qui deviendra par la suite sous-secrétaire de la province du Québec, puis ambassadeur en Espagne et en Amérique latine.
 - 25 François Hébert affirme à ce sujet que « Louvigny de Montigny le trouvera même bolchévique dans son poème "La complainte du chômeur" » (252).
 - 26 « As I have never engaged in either espionage or sabotage, or run afoul of the laws of the land, even that [registering as an alien and giving his finger prints] leaves me unworried and tranquil » (Lettre du 4 oct. 1940. Voir aussi la lettre de Dantin du 1^{er} novembre 1940).
 - 27 C'est lui, par exemple, qui a proposé à Guy Delahaye de présenter sa candidature à l'École littéraire de Montréal. Il a aussi été un ami fidèle de Marcel Dugas. Il y a toute une recherche à faire sur cet aspect de la vie d'Albert Laberge.
 - 28 En ce qui concerne le milieu de la peinture, voir aussi l'excellent article d'Esther Trépanier sur les rapports complexes et souvent problématiques (mais réels) qui existaient entre de nombreux artistes progressistes québécois et le Parti communiste entre 1930 et 1945.
 - 29 Ou, comme l'affirme Ethier-Blais, « autour de Borduas et ses amis, les staliniens rôdent » (30).
 - 30 Comme le rappelle aussi Ethier-Blais, ce n'était vraiment pas un bon moment pour les Automatistes, et surtout Borduas, de faire preuve d'un tel esprit de révolte. « Il s'agissait de faire un exemple [de Borduas], détouffer dans l'œuf toute révolte intellectuelle. Le gouvernement avait saisi *Combat*, organe du parti communiste auprès des Canadiens français; Balzac sera interdit; la remise du prix Nobel à André Gide avait suscité, dans ce *Quartier latin* où Borduas comptait certains de ses plus ardents défenseurs, de vives

protestations. D'une manière générale, le balancier bougeait en sens contraire des idées contenues dans *Refus global* » (39-40).

- 31 Il y aurait toute une étude à faire sur le lien entre l'œuvre poétique de Gilles Hénault et le communisme. L'article de Michel Biron sur « Distances du poème : Gilles Hénault et *Refus global* » offre d'ailleurs un aperçu intéressant sur la perspective de cet artiste en 1946, au moment où il était fort impliqué dans le Parti ouvrier progressiste et où pour lui, semble-t-il, la Révolution était tout simplement inévitable : « Irrépressible, la révolution passe, pour le poète ou l'artiste, par “le ministère des mots et de la représentation visuelle”, non par une intervention d'ordre social ou politique. Hénault reconnaît que l'œuvre d'art est “un acte et que l'artiste est un homme d'action au même titre qu'un politicien”, mais ils appartiennent chacun à des univers distincts, parallèles : dès qu'ils se superposent, l'œuvre court le risque de devenir un “simple instrument de propagande”. En même temps, il accorde à l'œuvre une “valeur positive”, fût-elle affectée, modernité oblige, d'un fort coefficient de négativité » (115).
- 32 D'autres Québécois bien connus qui ont adhéré au PSD incluent Roger Lemelin, Gaston Miron, Michel Chartrand, et Thérèse Casgrain.
- 33 Ma traduction de l'extrait suivant tiré d'un article inédit de Susan Murphy, « Poetry and Polemics : the Confederation Group of Canadian Poets in Jacques Ferron's *La nuit* », qui paraîtra sous peu : « In the mid-1950s, Jacques Ferron, a medical doctor passionately committed to social justice, joined—after a flirtation with communism that led to his 1949 arrest while attending a street protest against NATO—the *Parti socialiste démocratique* (PSD) and stood for election under its banner in the federal elections of 1958. It was in all likelihood through the PSD (the Quebec branch of the CCF) that he met the man who would inspire the fictional English-Canadian protagonist of *La nuit*—as well as that of *La charrette* (1968) and *Le ciel de Québec* (1969)—the Anglo-Montrealer Francis (Frank) R. Scott (1899-1985), a founding member of both the CCF and the PSD. In 1960, however, Ferron broke vehemently and vociferously with the PSD over its refusal to recognize that Quebec had the same right to self-determination as did Algeria, castigating Frank Scott in particular for his hypocrisy on this issue. Ferron then joined the *Action socialiste pour l'indépendance du Québec* (ASIQ), a tiny separatist group on the far left of the political spectrum founded by Raoul Roy in August, 1960, and published articles in that movement's periodical, *La revue socialiste*, from its inception. » (Voir à ce sujet Ferron.)
- 34 Et puisque la querelle du régionalisme, loin d'être une polémique uniquement artistique, était une des arènes où s'opposaient différentes visions de ce que devait être l'avenir de la nation canadienne-française, l'adjectif « politique » nous semble ici justifié.

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Liminal

A fire next door—
neighbourhood panicking,
intersections barricaded by cruisers,
fire trucks like frantic elephants
charging down the street. I remember
baseball games and snowmobiles,
our coach dying inside a bulldozer,
caught on a bridge down a side-road
in an ice storm—transport swerving,
a spark at impact, cab in flames.
Rain pelted the windshield, steaming—
his son forever terrified
of storms. Two years later,
Angie was struck by a car,
flung from her snowmobile
at a stop sign—a pylon plucked
by tire—a weight that changed form,
instantly. We visited her, drunk at 2am,
smoked a joint, stared at plastic
flowers, the sketch of birds
and meadows burned into black
stone. When I propose to my wife
in an abandoned farmhouse,
a fallow field—we announce
ourselves to the dead:
stand above our grandparents'
and uncles' graves, flash
the ring, whisper our spouse's
name, words forever
buried by stones.

Yves Thériault

Un vert avant la lettre

C'était après vingt-cinq ans de carrière littéraire que l'écrivain québécois Yves Thériault résumait ainsi le rôle primordial que joue la nature dans sa production littéraire : « la nature, dans mon œuvre, c'est une sorte de *deus ex machina* qui influence puissamment le comportement des personnages; c'est la force première qu'ils doivent respecter » (*Textes et documents* 29). Dès son premier ouvrage, *Contes pour un homme seul*, paru en 1944, et jusqu'à sa mort en 1983, Yves Thériault s'efforce dans son œuvre abondante—plus de quarante titres—de peindre l'homme, les passions qui le gouvernent, sa place et son sens dans le monde. Pour lui, une telle saisie ne saurait s'effectuer hors du contexte de la nature, lieu où se déploient sans entrave les pulsions ataviques à la base de notre comportement collectif, espace sacré privilégié par Thériault dans la plupart de ses romans et contes.¹

Or il ne serait pas excessif de dire que, presque trente ans après sa disparition, Yves Thériault est toujours actuel, surtout dans l'optique de la relation de l'homme avec la nature. Comme on le sait, le débat sur l'environnement est de plus en plus vif. Le réchauffement climatique, la croissance du mouvement vert, la sensibilisation accrue à l'égard de la protection de l'environnement, le protocole de Kyoto, pour ne nommer que ceux-là, sont des phénomènes qui n'auraient pas laissé indifférent Thériault, pour qui le rapport de l'homme avec son milieu naturel constitue une partie intégrante de sa production écrite.

Mais l'on sait également que les débats entourant l'environnement ont suscité, et continuent de susciter, de vives polémiques, et ce, de la part de multiples camps : des « climato-sceptiques » qui nient catégoriquement la théorie du réchauffement planétaire et qui défendent la place privilégiée de l'homme dans la nature et sa consommation inconditionnelle des ressources naturelles, jusqu'aux verts les plus endurcis et, à la limite, à l'écoterrorisme le

plus extrême. Entre les deux il existe un éventail complexe de prises de position différentes que nous ne prétendons pas pouvoir analyser à fond dans cet article. Nous nous contentons simplement de rappeler brièvement les grandes lignes du mouvement environnementaliste et de signaler l'importance des mouvements écologistes historiques menant aux instances modernes (les premières manifestations environnementales au dix-neuvième siècle et la naissance du Club Sierra en 1892, par exemple), et de signaler également l'influence de grands penseurs et écrivains tels Henry David Thoreau (*Walden*), Rachel Carson (*Silent Spring*), et James Lovelock (ses ouvrages *Gaïa*). Mentionnons enfin l'apport indéniable de nouvelles organisations politiques comme le Parti vert (surtout en Allemagne), les actions controversées de groupes plus radicaux comme Greenpeace, et, bien sûr, les enjeux cruciaux de Kyoto. Or, pour important que soient tous ces éléments, nous ciblons ici, afin d'orienter la discussion sur l'œuvre de Thériault, les diverses approches idéologiques qui colorent le débat sur l'environnement.

Il est généralement admis que l'on peut distinguer deux mouvements principaux dans la lutte pour la protection de la nature : l'environnementalisme et l'écologisme. Le premier serait un mouvement plutôt philosophique et social qui vise à préserver et à « guérir » la nature environnante en adoptant des politiques à cet égard et en faisant la promotion de changements sociaux qui ont pour but de faire évoluer les mentalités. L'ordre du jour semble inépuisable : on passe du simple recyclage et compostage chez le particulier (agir local, penser global) aux questions plus larges qui découlent de l'activité humaine : le réchauffement de la planète, la protection des espèces menacées, l'effet des pluies acides, la disparition de la couche d'ozone, le maintien de la biodiversité et de l'équilibre naturel, la destruction de la forêt amazonienne, la surpopulation, la sauvegarde des ressources naturelles et une transition vers une économie plus verte, les déchets nucléaires (et les déchets tout court), le développement des sources d'énergies renouvelables (éolienne, hydrolienne, marémotrice, solaire . . .), et la mise au point de voitures électriques. La liste est longue ne cesse de croître. Il s'agit ici d'une philosophie fondamentale, voire une idéologie quasi politique, avec une composante spirituelle et humaine. C'est une idéologie anthropocentrique qui stipule que l'être humain a une obligation morale de protéger l'environnement. Elle accepte les leçons de l'écologisme (voir plus loin), mais en les adaptant aux besoins humains. Si nous pouvons sauvegarder la planète, celle-ci continuera à maintenir les conditions nécessaires à la survie et à l'épanouissement de la vie humaine.

L'écologisme, par contre, cherche à préserver l'environnement dans des termes absolus, sans tenir compte de la place de l'être humain dans le monde naturel et sans tenir compte des besoins des générations futures. La nature a une valeur intrinsèque qui exclut l'élément humain.

Certes, comme l'environnementalisme, l'écologisme voit la nature comme un tout interconnecté, embrassant chaque entité, vivante, et inanimée. Cependant, là où il diffère, c'est dans son rejet de l'idée que l'être humain occupe une place privilégiée dans la nature.² L'écologisme, en prônant une éthique de l'environnement naturel, récuse l'approche anthropocentrique inhérente à l'environnementalisme, disant qu'elle est contraire aux principes fondamentaux qui régissent la planète et qu'elle constitue une sorte de chauvinisme—nous nous plaçons au centre de la Création, reléguant les autres espèces à la périphérie—ce qui mène au spécisme. L'écologisme prône le biocentrisme, une approche qui dicte que la nature s'articule autour d'une valeur morale intrinsèque qui ne dépend aucunement des besoins ou désirs humains. L'être humain n'est qu'un simple maillon dans la chaîne, rien de plus qu'un simple élément parmi tous les éléments—vivants ou pas—de l'environnement. Dans sa forme plus radicale—l'écologisme dit « profond »—il ne reconnaît que la valeur du monde non-humain. Il estime que les droits des animaux ont le même statut moral que ceux des êtres humains. Comme tel, l'écologisme s'oppose à toute croissance économique et vise même à démanteler la société industrielle moderne afin de retourner aux principes préindustriels. Dans son itération la plus radicale, il considère que l'homme n'apporte que destruction et que la seule solution pour le maintien de la vie sur la planète est sa disparition.

Donc, entre une philosophie réaliste qui exige la participation de l'homme afin de résoudre les problèmes environnementaux et une idéologie absolue plus idéaliste qui n'admet pas les valeurs humaines (bien que, paradoxalement, et non sans ironie, ce fût des valeurs humaines qui concurent ladite idéologie), où Yves Thériault se situe-t-il? On assiste quand même à deux mouvements qui partent du même principe, un principe qu'Yves Thériault partage pleinement. Mais jusqu'où va-t-il? Quelle est sa prise de position envers la nature et comment en envisage-t-il la protection?

Thériault n'est certes pas le premier écrivain canadien-français à parler de la nature dans son œuvre. Ce thème, si fondamental à la psyché canadienne, remonte aux écrits des premiers explorateurs et missionnaires au XVII^e siècle. Nos premiers écrivains sont tour à tour émerveillés, épeurés, envoûtés, et révérencieux devant l'étendue et la majesté des forêts, plaines, et cours d'eau

canadiens. Cette révérence est mille fois amplifiée dans la littérature du terroir, au dix-neuvième siècle et pendant les premières décennies du vingtième siècle. La terre devient pour ainsi dire une entité vivante, parfois épouse exigeante qui ne pardonne pas la séparation d'avec le cultivateur, comme dans *La terre paternelle* et *Trente arpents*; parfois mère douce et généreuse, telle qu'on la voit dans *Jean Rivard, le défricheur*; parfois adversaire rude et même meurtrier—l'on songe à *Maria Chapdelaine*, où la terre est le lieu d'une guerre impitoyable entre les Chapdelaine et la forêt environnante et où le voyageur François Paradis, si habile en forêt, y trouve quand même la mort. Mentionnons aussi les nombreux contes qui mettent en vedette la nature (par exemple, *Forestiers et voyageurs* de Joseph-Charles Taché), et surtout l'hymne à la grande nature québécoise qu'est *Menaud, maître-draveur*, de Félix-Antoine Savard. Dans ce roman, on voit clairement la communion entre Menaud et la nature. Les deux, doués d'une force immense, se complètent dans une compréhension et un respect mutuels, un accord qui fait entendre la voix des aïeux. La nature ici est allégorie, à la fois consolation et rebuffade, surtout lorsque Menaud y trouve du re-confort après la noyade de son fils pendant la drave.

Le genre de représentation du rôle de la nature s'observe aussi ailleurs qu'au Québec : songeons à la relation entre la mer et les Acadiens chez Antonine Maillet et aux énormes forêts de l'Ontario du Nord chez Hélène Brodeur. Puis, dans l'ouest canadien, l'on pense à Gabrielle Roy, écrivaine manitobaine qui nous révèle les multiples visages des vastes prairies et les épreuves que la nature impose aux habitants (la sécheresse et la solitude dans *Un jardin au bout du monde*, l'éloignement dans *La petite poule d'eau*), ainsi que la consolation que leur procurent la vue des collines, l'étendue du ciel bleu, et la douceur du vent. Sans oublier bien sûr la place de l'autochtone comme chantre de l'ordonnance de la nature, telle que révélée dans *La montagne secrète*. D'ailleurs, même son livre *Alexandre Chenevert*, roman de la ville, illustre, dans la deuxième partie, une complète concordance entre la nature et l'homme alors que Chenevert renaît à la vie pendant un séjour dans une cabane isolée en pleine forêt.

Pour important que soit le rôle de la nature chez ces écrivains, celle-ci reste en général assez secondaire ou n'apparaît que ponctuellement. Chez Yves Thériault, par contre, la nature est le noyau de son univers fictionnel et il y revient constamment. Le rôle joué par la nature dans son œuvre renvoie avant tout et presque toujours aux grands espaces vierges, aux paysages sauvages et majestueux, et aux animaux qui les habitent. Rejetant la ville, il choisira la toundra déserte, la forêt millénaire, ou la mer farouche

pour donner assise à la plupart de ses récits, car pour lui, ce ne sont qu'en ces lieux privilégiés que les sens peuvent percevoir et que l'homme peut se découvrir, assimilant les leçons de la nature afin de mieux connaître le partage avec la femme, voie du salut. C'est d'abord par le contact sensoriel que l'homme connaît le monde, et c'est par les sens qu'il le décrira. Il voit dans la nature une âme-sœur et tente de la définir dans cette optique, d'où le « gazouillement » du ruisseau, les « pleurs » du saule, le « susurrement » du vent. Combien de fois trouve-t-on chez Thériault des passages où le vent hurle, la forêt tremble, la rivière chante, ou le soleil boit l'eau? Cependant, la personnification de la nature chez Thériault va au-delà d'une simple figure de style; elle devient la clé de voûte d'une vision globale qui ne cesse d'ériger la nature en être vivant. Thériault rejoint en ceci la pensée de James Lovelock, pour qui le monde naturel serait une entité imbue de vie (voir Drouin 147). Pour Thériault, le caractère « humain » de la nature se voit avec limpidité dans deux aspects fondamentaux de son œuvre : la sensualité inhérente à la nature et le rôle primordial accordé à l'indigène dans son rapport avec le milieu ambiant. Ces deux leitmotifs informent toute l'œuvre de Thériault et découlent directement de la perception chez lui de la nature comme un être vivant.

La nature devient tout d'abord chez lui un lieu hautement érotisé, et par les descriptions évocatrices qu'il en fait, et par les liens qui le rattachent à l'être fondamentalement sexuel de l'homme. Ce dernier s'avère être pour lui une créature mue par des tendances élémentaires dont la plus profondément ancrée est la sexualité. Ce passage de son deuxième roman, *Le dompteur d'ours*, paru en 1951, est exemplaire : les noces du personnage principal eurent lieu par un matin qui « coulait sur la nature comme un parfum de prix, qui étreignait les fleurs, qui valsait sur les faîtes de montagnes, qui était doux et coquet et plein de chansons et d'appels » (139). On voit bien dans cette profusion de sensations comment la nature reproduit les conditions menant à l'union charnelle : le parfum envoûtant de la fiancée, l'étreinte des amoureux, les danses et les chansons de la fête, et l'appel qui clôt la soirée, appel de la chair et des sens.

Il est rare en effet que les sensations de la nature évoquées par Thériault n'aient pas une signification sensuelle, même latente. Comme il l'affirme lui-même : « Ce n'est pas avec mes sens que j'écris mais avec ma sensualité et c'est infiniment plus important » (*Conférences* 62). La plupart des sensations qu'il réveille pour nous sont invariablement associées à divers éléments, dont le retour constitue des leitmotifs chargés d'érotisme. Il y a ici, entre

autres, ceux du vent, de la montagne, de la terre, de l'eau, et du soleil. Chacun de ces motifs revêt un caractère spécifique et continu à travers l'œuvre de l'écrivain, caractère qui reflète les rôles traditionnels adoptés par lui. Ainsi, on verra la force et la brutalité masculines dans certaines symbolisations et la douceur et la soumission féminines dans d'autres. Thériault entre naturellement—et à dessein, faut-il le dire—dans les catégories reçues et les images et les fonctions habituelles d'une manière directe et sans détour. On pourrait parler par exemple de la sensualité caressante du vent ou des valeurs maternelles incarnées par la forme mammaire de la montagne et l'image à la fois sensuelle et nutritive qui en est véhiculée. Par ailleurs, on constate la sensualité de la terre ondulée et riche, « bonne, grasse et juteuse », objet de caresses et de baisers dans *La fille laide*, symbole maternel parfait lié à la fonction primordiale : la fécondité qui assurera la continuation. Dans « La faute d'Adrienne » (*Contes pour un homme seul*), par exemple, nous apprenons que la terre et la femme sont faites toutes les deux « pour porter la semence et le fruit » (132).

Les éléments s'unissent donc afin d'investir la nature entière d'une sensualité primordiale qui colore toute la production littéraire de Thériault. Mais il va plus loin. Ce contact sensoriel par lequel la nature se fait connaître à l'homme revêt un caractère nettement érotique non seulement par les descriptions sensuelles de la nature que trace l'auteur, mais aussi par les valeurs sexuelles que véhiculent ces divers éléments. La tiédeur sensuelle du soleil, la forme suggestive de la montagne mammaire, les caresses tendres du ruisseau ou de la brise, les vagues rythmées de la mer transcendent tout aspect purement maternel pour doter la nature d'un érotisme fondamental, féminin. Même les animaux acquièrent une dimension sensuelle chez Thériault : l'on pense notamment à la fourrure soyeuse et ondoyante de la loutre dans *N^o Tsuk*, ou à la louve en chaleur et ses ébats passionnés avec son mâle dans *Mahigan*.

Cette présence féminine, tendre et aimante, dicte à l'homme le comportement idéal dans toute relation avec la femme. Là où le couple vit en harmonie, les valeurs féminines sensuelles de la nature prévalent. Mais cette harmonie est souvent absente chez Thériault, car l'homme agit en dominateur absolu, possédant et subjuguant sa partenaire. Sa puissance irréflectie empêchera tout épanouissement du couple. Cet état de domination est souvent reflété dans la nature par une mer orageuse et déchaînée, par un vent violent ou par un soleil écrasant, farouchement mâle, qui envahit tout, exigeant souvent le sacrifice de la femme. Ceci n'empêche évidemment pas une certaine

sensualité du soleil lorsque ses rayons caressent le corps féminin ou éclairent des ébats joyeusement menés sur l'herbe. Mais cette dimension n'existe que dans un contexte de partage d'où la domination masculine est absente, ce qui est rarement le cas. Et le règne animal n'y échappe pas non plus : bien que la sensualité douce de la loutre ou de tout autre bête à fourrure soit évoquée à plus d'une reprise, c'est néanmoins la sexualité farouche et violente du cheval (*Kesten*), du taureau (*Les commettants de Caridad*), ou du loup (*Ashini*) qui prédomine. En fait, la dualité contrastante qui prévaut dans la nature (soleil caressant / écrasant; eau tendre / violente; vent tiède / dévorateur, animal sensuel / farouche, etc.) se répercute dans la relation affective du couple en servant de modèle,³ et toute l'œuvre de Thériault n'est qu'une tentative prolongée et répétée de concilier les deux, de joindre le *yin* et le *yang*, de dompter une farouche masculinité dominatrice par des valeurs féminines d'entente et de partage.

C'est donc seulement en pleine nature, loin de l'influence néfaste de la civilisation moderne, que l'homme pourra connaître une sexualité épanouie et donc accéder à l'harmonie du couple. Mais avant d'y arriver, il doit s'incorporer à la nature, vivre selon son ordonnance, et s'identifier à elle, suivant ainsi le modèle de l'autochtone, personnage privilégié dans l'univers thériausien. Pour concilier les deux puissances primordiales, Thériault nous donne donc en exemple l'Inuk, surtout dans sa trilogie esquimaude (*Agaguk*, *Tayaout*, et *Agoak*), ou l'Amérindien (*Ashini*, *La quête de l'ourse*, *N'Tsuk*, *Mahigan*, *L'herbe de tendresse*) car c'est lui qui sait vivre en accord avec les différents avatars de l'être vivant dans lequel il est parfaitement intégré.

Thériault met en lumière dans ses œuvres inuit et amérindiennes une société dont l'histoire, les valeurs, et les attentes sont radicalement différentes de celles de la société occidentale. Ces différences sont beaucoup plus significatives que celles reliées à la description corporelle. Celle-ci, il est vrai, ne s'écarte nullement du paradigme physique et moral établi par plus d'un écrivain : autochtone à la peau foncée, aux yeux bridés, au visage placide et hautain, le regard impénétrable, insondable, impassible, ou fouilleur. Presque toujours silencieux pour mieux réfléchir, il observe longtemps, parle très peu, sait scruter la moindre piste, vit en complète harmonie avec sa femme qui, elle, est toujours douce, patiente, forte, et industrielle.

Cependant, Thériault ne se contente pas de s'arrêter à la simple description corporelle et morale. Il sonde plus profondément la psyché du peuple, amplifiant le paradigme par sa prise de position vis-à-vis des deux races : blanche et indigène, insistant sur les différences fondamentales entre les

deux.⁴ L'on a plus d'une fois remarqué que, dans ses livres qui mettent en scène l'autochtone, Thériault dresse inévitablement un réquisitoire acerbe de la société blanche qui prend parfois l'allure d'une véritable diatribe, comme, par exemple dans *Ashini* et *N'Tsuk*. Les héros éponymes de ces livres critiquent vertement la mentalité des Blancs qui ne respectent pas les lois de la nature, qui se servent de leur technologie pour détruire, démanteler, et dominer, pour « dénaturer la nature » comme le dirait Harold Fromm (voir Fromm 30-39). Au lieu de vivre au rythme de la nature, comme le fait l'autochtone, le Blanc, ayant perdu toute notion de l'importance du milieu environnant, veut y imposer sa propre ordonnance. Dans ses rapports avec les indigènes, il ne fera pas autrement, avec les résultats que l'on sait. La dégénérescence de la culture autochtone au contact avec le monde blanc est évidente dans plusieurs des romans de Thériault (*Agaguk*, *Ashini*, *La quête de l'ourse*, *Tayaout*, *Agoak*, *N'Tsuk*). *Agaguk*, par exemple, doit fuir sa tribu, dont les valeurs ont été contaminées au contact avec les Blancs, afin de recommencer à neuf dans la pureté de la vaste solitude de la toundra. *Ashini* tout particulièrement fustige cette société et la condamne comme source de violence aliénante et dépersonnalisante, la blâmant pour la dislocation de sa famille.

Si l'on examine la nature des revendications des indigènes au Canada, on découvrira qu'il y existe une constante, qu'il s'agisse des Dene du Nord, des Haïda de la Colombie-Britannique, des Micmacs de la Nouvelle-Ecosse, ou des Mohawks de l'Ontario. Il est question dans presque tous les cas de territoire. Celui qui veut comprendre le problème « indien » doit comprendre tout d'abord que la culture indigène n'est pas seulement liée à son milieu ambiant, mais qu'elle est ce milieu. L'autochtone est indissociable de la nature. *Agaguk*, par exemple, tire sa subsistance de la toundra, un lieu qui, pour les Blancs, est désert, hostile, meurtrier. Il lit avec acuité signes et pistes, possédant la science, la seule qui compte : comment vivre en harmonie avec le monde qui l'entoure. Complètement accordé avec la nature, il n'a qu'à humer la brise pour détecter la présence d'eau, n'a qu'à scruter l'empreinte d'un loup pour déterminer la taille de la bête, sa longueur, son état de santé, son âge, et son allure. Le grand livre de la nature ne recèle pas de secrets pour lui et, sans jamais avoir fréquenté l'école ni lu Darwin, il est parfaitement au courant de ses lois rigoureuses mais justes, surtout en ce qui concerne l'ordonnance de la nature et le rôle essentiel qu'y joue chaque élément. S'imaginant en train d'enseigner les secrets de la nature à son fils à naître, il lui montre la piste d'un rat musqué et, sans avoir vu les acteurs, il peut élucider chaque acte d'un drame millénaire :

Un rat musqué dont la piste vient jusqu'ici, puis retourne, soudain plus compacte, plus rapprochée, et disparaît sous les herbes là-bas, tu sais ce que cela veut dire? Il a délogé un vison et en est poursuivi, alors il fuit . . . Viens, viens avec moi jusqu'à ces herbes. Ici la piste du vison, regarde! Elle se confond avec celle du rat musqué. Bon, avance et regarde, là! Du sang, du poil. Un rat musqué est mort, dévoré par le vison. Pour eux aussi, l'une comme l'autre, la rançon de la survie. Pour que le vison vive, le rat musqué est sacrifié. Pour celui-là mort, dix qui naissent. Les portées des rats musqués sont fréquentes et nombreuses. Alors qu'à la femelle du vison ne naissent que deux petits, trois au plus . . . Il est donc juste que plus de rats musqués meurent par la faute des visons que des visons par la faute des rats musqués . . . Les Esprits l'ont ainsi voulu. (50)

La dernière phrase de cette citation est particulièrement révélatrice. La psyché de l'autochtone se révèle par le biais de son rapport avec son environnement naturel, un rapport qui trouve tout son sens dans sa valeur spirituelle. Si l'indigène chez Thériault trouve le salut dans la solitude, loin de l'influence corruptrice de la société blanche, c'est que c'est là où il pourra mieux vivre sa spiritualité avec les forces obscures de la nature, où il pourra communiquer avec ses dieux. C'est peut-être ici la leçon la plus percutante de Thériault : l'importance du sacré pour l'indigène, sacré qui trouve son expression dans la valeur accordée à la forêt. Panthéiste, l'indigène trouve de la signification spirituelle dans les arbres, les animaux, l'eau et même les rochers, et les conçoit comme un tout relié, inséparable de sa propre existence. Paula Gunn Allen l'explique avec lucidité :

The notion that nature is somewhere over there while humanity is over here or that a great hierarchical ladder of being exists on which ground and trees occupy a very low rung, animals a slightly higher one, and man . . . a very high one indeed is antithetical to tribal thought. The American Indian sees all creatures as relatives (and in tribal systems relationship is central), as offspring of the Great Mystery, as cocreators, as children of our mother, and as necessary parts of an ordered, balanced, and living whole. (246)

Le rôle primordial de la nature est valorisé à travers le symbolisme de la terre ancestrale percée par les racines des arbres millénaires, arrosée par la pluie nécessaire à la vie, fécondée par le soleil, surveillée par les crêtes des montagnes, domicile des dieux. La forêt est le lieu du renouveau, du cycle éternel, l'espace originel où se rencontrent les forces mystérieuses de la continuation, un lieu d'équilibre délicat où chaque élément joue un rôle essentiel. Mort et naissance se confondent dans le grand cycle mystérieux conçu par la nature. Le cycle éternel dans lequel l'homme se trouve engagé—la notion circulaire du temps chez l'autochtone qui fait contraste avec celle, linéaire, de la société blanche—n'a de meilleur reflet que le cycle de l'éternel

retour qui se vérifie dans la nature. Pour Thériault, l'ordonnance de la nature est primordiale et sert de modèle à l'homme blanc, car elle établit des rythmes et des lois qui assurent la continuité du tout : des lois auxquelles nul ne saurait déroger.

Même les animaux y acquièrent une valeur symbolique de totem. Avant de tuer un phoque, par exemple, l'Inuk—qui utilisera toute la bête (peau, graisse, viande, ivoire, os, ligaments, etc.) à l'inverse du Blanc qui ne prendra souvent que la peau—récite une prière en s'excusant pour l'acte nécessaire qu'il va commettre. Le foie de la première prise sera par la suite offert aux dieux. Dans *Ashini*, le vieux Montagnais, avant de dépecer un vison pris dans son piège, offre l'animal aux Dieux :

J'ai tendu en offertoire la dépouille au plus grand de mes dieux, le Tshe Manitout, puis aux autres, ceux des forêts et des buissons, ceux qui règlent le cours des eaux et ceux qui acheminent les nuages au ciel. Je n'ai oublié aucune des puissances . . . Divinités de la vie, (le Tshe Manitout qui insuffle l'animation à l'homme dès sa conception), divinités de survie, divinités d'ordonnance et de bon maintien de la nature, divinités humbles aussi, l'hagiographie de ma religion à moi, qui a longtemps gardé bien haut l'honneur de la race rouge. (89-90)

« Divinités d'ordonnance et de bon maintien de la nature » : voilà le principe essentiel qu'Yves Thériault ne cesse de nous inculquer. C'est le premier des quatre piliers de l'écologie, formulés par Barry Commoner et rappelés par Dominique Simonnet : toutes les espèces vivantes, y compris l'homme, sont interdépendantes (voir Simonnet 14-15. C'est nous qui soulignons). L'autochtone, signataire du contrat naturel dont parle Michel Serres, est parfaitement conscient de cette interdépendance et reconnaît que chaque collectivité, y compris la sienne « vit et travaille dans le même monde global que toutes les autres » (78).

Ceux qui ne respectent pas l'ordonnance, les rites de la nature, en souffrent nécessairement les conséquences. Ikoué, par exemple, en détruisant un barrage de castor (*Le ru d'Ikoué*), enfreint les règles immuables de la forêt et doit en subir le châtement—la sécheresse—avant de pouvoir accéder au savoir. C'est ce sens du sacré qui a été pendant longtemps perdu ou oublié et qui semble aujourd'hui revenir en force pour mieux aider l'autochtone à circonscrire sa propre spécificité et à se démarquer de celle de la société dominante.

On ne saurait trop réitérer que, pour Thériault, la véritable puissance ne réside pas dans les muscles, mais dans le respect silencieux de la grandeur de la nature et de ses lois inéluctables. Si l'indigène est si souvent le privilégié chez Thériault, c'est qu'il sait respecter l'environnement, sait se plier à son ordonnance, sait vivre en accord avec lui, au contraire du Blanc qui tente de

le dominer, de le façonner à son image et selon ses besoins, d'après une mentalité égocentrique que certains attribuent à l'héritage du christianisme.⁵ L'humanisme, né du christianisme, nous éloigne de la nature dans sa préoccupation avec la prééminence humaine; il obscurcit notre vrai rôle dans la nature, nous fait penser que nous sommes plus grands que nature, à part et au-dessus d'elle. La vérité donne à réfléchir : nous, comme espèce terrestre, sommes dispensables; notre disparition de la planète aurait un effet assez minime sur la biomasse, car nous demeurons aux extrémités des processus écologiques importants. Les champignons, les insectes, entre autres, sont beaucoup plus importants que nous du point de vue écologique, et s'ils disparaissaient demain, l'effet sur la vie sur terre serait catastrophique. L'homme moderne n'arrive pas à voir que son moi est enraciné dans la terre; il a perdu cette capacité, car la nature est modifiée, occultée par la technologie, au point où il paraît que c'est la technologie qui est responsable de tout, et pas la nature. « Tout être humain, nous dit Jean-Paul Simard, se définit par son aptitude à vivre en harmonie avec la nature, dans l'acceptation de ses rythmes et de ses lois » (39). Or chez Thériault l'harmonie que l'on retrouve dans la nature sert de guide à l'homme dans ses relations avec autrui. L'indigène, symbole de l'homme dominé par l'homme, est là pour nous montrer le chemin qui mène au partage et à l'équilibre. Seule la nature offre ce modèle d'équilibre, d'harmonie parfaite à laquelle l'indigène participe depuis des millénaires. Les œuvres autochtones de Thériault ne cessent de souligner le fait que le Blanc impose ses valeurs alors qu'il aurait tout à apprendre de l'indigène qui sait accorder sa propre démarche à celle de la nature, comme le dirait Ashini. Pour l'indigène, l'argent et la société qui en dépend—celle de la consommation et de la domination—minent le concept du partage, concept central à sa vie spirituelle. Thériault est un écrivain engagé qui veut libérer l'homme de ses pulsions violentes dominatrices et créer un monde plus harmonieux où la force motrice serait justement ce partage. Il fera appel à l'indigène pour nous le faire voir, car le sens métaphysique de la réalité de ce dernier est une partie intégrante de son existence. Tout est imbu d'existence chez l'autochtone; pour lui, la terre est vivante, au même degré que l'être humain est vivant. Les cultures animistes voient tout dans la nature—humains, animaux, arbres, roches, cours d'eau—comme vivants, capables de communiquer et d'interagir entre eux et avec l'homme. D'où le concept fondamental du partage. Comme le dit Maurice Emond : « Les romans indiens [de Thériault] indiquent une nouvelle voie au héros thériausien : le chemin de la grande nature, les noces de l'homme et de la terre. C'est là, loin de la civilisation et de ses limites

aliénantes, qu'il peut se retrouver, apprendre à dialoguer avec les voix de la nature-femme, s'ouvrir à l'accueil et l'amour » (115).

Dans cette quête d'équilibre entre puissance et amour, la nature—surtout la nature érotisée—sera l'inspiration, le modèle. La science de vivre en harmonie avec la nature est réservée à ceux qui, comme l'autochtone, en comprennent l'ordonnance et en font partie intégrante, qui n'en dérangent pas l'équilibre, comme le fait l'homme dit civilisé. À cet égard donc, l'on n'aurait pas tort de dire que Thériault s'éloigne des préceptes de l'écologisme, car l'être humain—en l'occurrence l'indigène—est toujours appelé à jouer un rôle primordial dans la préservation de la nature. Mais on aurait tout de même tort de le placer catégoriquement dans le camp des environmentalistes, car certaines de ses prises de position sont nettement écologistes : la valeur intrinsèque de la nature, l'importance des animaux et des éléments inanimés, surtout par rapport à la sensualité inhérente de la nature, et l'exclusion de toute présence humaine, à l'exception de celle de l'indigène. Cette dualité répond parfaitement à la vision ambivalente de l'écrivain. L'ambivalence, évidente chez la plupart de ses héros masculins, l'amène à une conceptualisation nuancée de la nature. Si Bruno (*Les temps du carcajou*) est déchiré entre son besoin de tendresse et d'amour et sa fascination avec la cruauté et la destruction; si Victor Debreux (*Cul-de-sac*) se rend compte trop tard, alors qu'il est emprisonné dans une crevasse et qu'il se fait dévorer par un épervier, que sa puissance de contremaître et les machines qu'il dirigeait afin d'écartier les montagnes pour construire des routes n'étaient que dérisoires; si Herón (*Les commettants de Caridad*) subit une transformation radicale qui change le jeune mâle fort et arrogant en une loque humaine, risible et faible, après avoir été blessé par le taureau qu'il pensait pouvoir asservir; si Hermann (*Le dompteur d'ours*), à première vue un homme puissant qui donne l'impression de tout pouvoir régenter, même un ours sauvage, se révèle en fin de compte veule et lâche, un charlatan minable; si donc le personnage masculin thériausien exhibe cette double personnalité, il ne faut pas oublier qu'il s'agit là d'hommes blancs qui se veulent dominateurs, plus forts que le monde environnant. C'est cet orgueil démesuré qui mène infailliblement à leur déchéance.

Et même si l'autochtone jouit d'un statut particulier chez Thériault, comme nous l'avons indiqué, il n'est pas exempt d'une certaine ambivalence lui aussi, malgré sa position privilégiée.

Cette ambivalence trouve son écho dans la nature, car cette dernière, habituellement si généreuse envers l'indigène, peut être à l'occasion cruelle,

exigeante et arbitraire—songeons au fils d'Ashini, noyé, ou aux Inuit, qui doivent pratiquer l'infanticide en raison de la dureté de la vie sur la toundra, ou encore à Ikoué et aux siens, menacés par une sécheresse meurtrière. Cependant cette cruauté semble être le prix à payer pour maintenir l'harmonie qui assure la survie des indigènes. Cette vision manichéenne de la nature se voit surtout dans le rapport de l'autochtone avec les animaux. Ce dernier reconnaît le rôle essentiel de l'animal dans l'ordonnance de la nature, comme nous voyons chez Agaguk et chez Ashini. Mais même s'il respecte, voire vénère la bête, c'est toujours dans un contexte de violence, un rapport conflictuel dont l'issue est la mort de l'un ou de l'autre. L'autochtone doit tuer pour survivre ou pour éviter de l'être à son tour. Agaguk, par exemple, tue le Grand Loup Blanc qui menaçait non seulement son fils Tayaout mais aussi la nouvelle lignée qu'il espère créer. Cependant, Tayaout, vingt ans plus tard, meurt sous les griffes d'un ours polaire dans *Tayaout*. Idem pour Mahigan, qui tue une ourse qui s'attaque à lui, mais qui finira victime de Mahigan le loup. Cette dichotomie se voit à son mieux dans *Ashini* : si le Montagnais honore la dépouille du vison qu'il a pris, cela ne peut pas escamoter le fait que le rapport homme-bête est une guerre millénaire datant de l'époque où l'homme, lisons-nous, était « l'ennemi de tout animal » (*Ashini*, 98), massacrant visons, martres, loups-cerviers, castors et ainsi de suite. La trahison de l'homme fait naître la ruse chez la bête et le combat s'engage. Et si l'indigène en sort parfois vainqueur, c'est surtout grâce à son respect pour son adversaire, nécessaire pour sa survie.⁶ Jean-Marc Drouin précise : « À chaque fois, l'idée d'un déséquilibre créé par un manque de science et de conscience écologique des peuples est utilisée comme un avertissement. À l'inverse, les Indiens des plaines de l'Amérique du Nord ont été souvent donnés en exemple pour leur art de vivre en harmonie avec la nature » (23-24).

Cependant, le problème—et Thériault en est bien conscient—c'est que l'Amérindien se trouve aujourd'hui aliéné, éloigné de son monde environnant naturel. Vivant dans les réserves, loin de la nature, l'indigène découvre un mode de vie, non pas d'harmonie mais de dissonance; il découvre des valeurs temporelles et spirituelles opposées aux siennes, un temps profane sans signification. Dépourvu du sens sacré d'une vie si intimement liée au monde naturel, il est incapable de s'intégrer dans une société totalement étrangère à sa propre spiritualité. La perte du sacré entraîne nécessairement une dévalorisation de soi, accompagnée d'un sens d'aliénation et de désespoir. Il n'a d'autre avenir que son passé et donc s'y réfugie. Chez Thériault,

l'indigène garde la nostalgie d'un passé lointain qu'il cherche à réintégrer sans succès. Pour Ashini, par exemple, qui veut ramener les siens à leur vie d'autrefois, à une époque de perfection, vers la terre primitive, une ère de bonheur parfait avant l'arrivée des Blancs, la réserve devient une métaphore pour la ségrégation, la contrainte, et l'aliénation. Il méprise les siens qui y sont établis, tout comme Agaguk qui a renoncé à sa tribu, corrompue par le contact avec la société occidentale, pour aller recommencer sa vie à neuf. L'autochtone qui participe au monde blanc est mis au ban. Ashini reste toutefois seul, abandonné, et la sienne est une voix isolée dans la solitude, symbole triste de la désintégration d'une identité particulière. Même Agaguk, dont l'avenir avec son épouse semblait si prometteur à la fin d'*Agaguk*, compromet ses valeurs dans *Tayaout* en s'associant aux Blancs. Il sombre dans la déchéance et meurt, tué par son propre fils.⁷

Ashini et Agaguk, entre autres, représentent la tentative—vouée à l'échec—de récupérer une identité dont ils ont été dépossédés parce que leur centre—la nature—leur a été enlevé. Poussés au désespoir, refusant l'assimilation et condamnant l'abdication des leurs, se réfugiant dans un passé dont les valeurs sont sûres mais qui sont mal accordées avec le monde moderne, ils finissent par échouer. La voix des Anciens se tait alors que les jeunes abdiquent. Quel serait donc l'avenir de l'autochtone arraché à la nature protectrice et nourissante?

Thériault ne répond pas; sa tâche est d'amener le lecteur à reconnaître les problèmes concernant non seulement l'autochtone, mais aussi l'environnement et notre place là-dedans. Il sait que l'autochtone ne peut pas retourner à sa vie traditionnelle—c'est là la leçon d'Ashini et surtout d'Agoak, pour qui le retour au passé implique le retour à un état de brutalité et de violence ataviques. Donc, même s'il semble préconiser un retour à un état édénique d'où le recommencement serait possible, et par là semble adopter la prise de position écologiste d'un retour à une société préindustrielle, il sait pertinemment que ce n'est pas possible. Cette ambivalence cadre parfaitement avec l'ambivalence de la plupart de ses héros masculins. Idéaliste, Thériault aimerait pouvoir retourner à un passé qui permettrait un renouveau; réaliste, il sait que la véritable solution réside dans un changement de mentalités, dans l'adoption d'une attitude opposée à celle qui a conduit aux problèmes actuels, qu'il appartient aux êtres humains d'effectuer les transformations nécessaires à la guérison de la planète.

Thériault veut que nous prenions conscience de l'importance de la nature et des principaux enjeux environnementaux, et que nous reconnaissons

que la domination et l'aliénation ressenties par l'indigène face au monde occidental sont devenues une métaphore pour la domination et la destruction de la nature par l'homme. Ce que recherche Thériault, de façon cyclique et incessante, est un moyen par lequel nous pourrions, suivant le modèle de l'autochtone dans un cadre moderne, fonctionner de concert avec la société environnante, en harmonie avec elle afin de survivre et nous épanouir sans en même temps y nuire. Il est continûment en quête d'une solution qui nous permettrait de former un partenariat—une relation de réciprocité dirait Michel Serres—une alliance avec la terre, d'après les mêmes principes incarnés par les valeurs féminines de partage et d'égalité telles que révélées par la nature érotisée. Le défi est énorme : il incombe à l'homme, dont le rôle dans la question environnementale est primordial, d'effectuer les changements nécessaires à la création et au maintien d'une réciprocité durable. C'est cet objectif de partenariat—illusoire diraient les uns, nécessaire dirait l'auteur—que promeut incessamment Yves Thériault et auquel il revient avec insistance, car il n'y a pas de solution de rechange. L'avenir de la planète, et celui de l'être humain, en dépendent.

NOTES

- 1 Le rôle de la nature chez Thériault n'a certes pas échappé à la critique: presque toutes les études qui lui sont consacrées font mention de la place prépondérante de la nature dans son œuvre. Curieusement, cependant, cet intérêt pour Thériault, accru durant son vivant, semble s'estomper dès après la disparition de l'écrivain en 1983. C'est pourquoi nous nous réjouissons du fait que, après plusieurs années de ce relatif silence de la part de la critique, le vingt et unième siècle semble avoir amené un net regain d'intérêt à l'égard de sa vie et de son œuvre. On cite avec plaisir au moins deux colloques de l'ACFAS, dont l'un qui mène à la publication des *Cahiers Yves Thériault 1* en 2004, sous la direction de Renald Bérubé et Francis Langevin, ainsi qu'une exposition littéraire à la Grande Bibliothèque de Montréal en 2008, *Yves Thériault : le pari de l'écriture*, qui donne naissance à l'ouvrage du même titre. Ajoutons à cela deux analyses du roman *Agaguk* (une monographie de Paul Perron et un article d'Amaryll Chanady) et une monographie de Mark Benson, *La quête érotique d'Yves Thériault* (2008). Enfin, notons la création en 2003, par la fille de l'écrivain, Marie-Josée Thériault, des Éditions du dernier havre. Depuis lors, plusieurs nouvelles éditions des œuvres de Thériault ont vu le jour.
- 2 Nous faisons abstraction ici des différentes sous-catégories de l'écologisme, tels l'écosocialisme, qui combine des principes socialistes avec l'écologie pour promouvoir une idéologie anticapitaliste; ou l'écoféminisme, qui établit un lien entre la destruction de la nature par l'être humain et l'oppression de la femme par l'homme.
- 3 Parlant de l'eau, Gaston Bachelard note que cette dualité se trouve en nous tous : « devant les eaux, Narcisse a la révélation de son identité et de sa dualité, la révélation de ses doubles puissances viriles et féminines » (34). On touche ici le concept de l'androgynie.

- 4 Thériault, bien que québécois de souche, se réclamait souvent des quelques gouttes du sang montagnais qui coulaient dans ses veines. D'ailleurs, un stage comme directeur des Affaires Culturelles au Ministère des Affaires indiennes à Ottawa dans les années soixante l'a sensibilisé aux problèmes que vivaient (et vivent toujours) les autochtones canadiens.
- 5 Jean-Marc Drouin explique : « En détruisant le culte païen des bois et des sources, en affirmant que le monde créé est fait de phénomènes physiques, en faisant de l'homme l'image de Dieu et le maître des autres créatures, le christianisme a favorisé l'essor des sciences de la nature et le développement des techniques, mais il a en même temps amené l'homme à se prendre pour le centre du monde et à ne voir dans le reste du monde que des matériaux et des instruments créés à son image » (182-83). D'où le célèbre projet cartésien, nous rappelle Jean-Marc Drouin, de rendre les hommes « maîtres et possesseurs de la nature » (Descartes 128).
- 6 Tel n'est pas le cas du Blanc, qui dans presque tous les cas chez Thériault sort perdant d'une confrontation avec l'animal : Ingrid meurt sous les sabots de Dragon et Kesten se suicide après avoir abattu l'étalon (*Kesten*); Pilár meurt éventrée sous les cornes d'un taureau qui par la suite laissera Herón estropié, infirme et impuissant (*Les commettants de Caridad*); Julie est tuée par une ourse (*La quête de l'ourse*) et Victor Debreux, pris dans une crevasse, est lentement mais inexorablement dévoré par un épervier (*Cul-de-sac*).
- 7 Pour une lecture plus nuancée de la divergence irréconciliable entre les mondes blanc et autochtone dans *Agaguk*, voir l'étude d'Amaryll Chanady.

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After riding the escalator back

To switch the watch
a Swatch a second time, a third,
each face scratched minutely,

or because the date was stuck
I became a traveller in the mall
forever unhappy with a purchase

but returning always unalone
brought there with my wife
who loves me and worries for

the sorrow that ticks away
inside the case of my self-schism
but that's not all

I go up and offer each broken
or semi-imperfect object to
the kindly merchant of watches

who resembles a small Paul Simon
which is smaller than you might
imagine possible, and while

outside there is London getting
Sunday under a darkening wing
inside it is the timelessness

of some brief caring act,
not entirely due to exchange of
money, and I am in love

and ruined in some parts of inner
workings, a cog that clicks
upon another toothed gear

stymied again, under the magnifying
glass, still unable to be pried free—
sorrow's just an hour by hour

journey, but in between, there are
seconds as good as before, pretty
good intervals to cling to you and me.

Border Crossings in Isabella Valancy Crawford's Story-Paper Fiction

Scholarship on the nineteenth-century short story has lagged behind studies in modern short fiction, while criticism of early Canadian short stories, especially before 1890, has been sparse and sometimes condescending. The reasons for this are both obvious and complex—not least, the continuing influence of modernist aesthetics over our sense of what is valuable in short fiction.¹ Nevertheless, the short story flourished in the nineteenth century, before Joyce and his contemporaries forged models that cast most of its early practitioners into shadowy areas of literary history. This essay argues that there are good reasons for examining some of the short fiction shaped by traditions of melodrama and romance that the modernists rejected. More specifically, it seeks to show that the little-known stories of Isabella Valancy Crawford reveal a vigorous creative response to the demands of the literary marketplace and prevailing conventions of short fiction in the 1870s.²

Chiefly known for her poetry, Crawford contributed more than thirty stories to popular Canadian and American “story papers” between 1872 and 1886.³ Her earliest work appeared in 1872 and 1873 in two ephemeral Canadian weeklies, *The Hearthstone* and *The Favorite*, but she fell out with their publisher, George-Édouard Desbarats, and over the next twelve years wrote fiction almost exclusively for the prolific New York publishing firm of Frank Leslie.⁴ At least twenty-three stories by Crawford appeared in Leslie publications, notably *Frank Leslie's Chimney Corner*, and it was not until a few months before her death that she again wrote fiction for the Canadian market, producing two stories, “Extradited,” published in the *Toronto Globe*

in 1886, and “In the Breast of a Maple,” published posthumously many years later. What is of interest here are the effects of these border crossings on work composed for Canadian periodicals on the one hand and American papers on the other.

In looking abroad for a more stable and lucrative market than her own country afforded, Crawford is far from unique among nineteenth-century Canadian writers. The first editions of John Richardson’s *Wacousta* (1832), Catharine Parr Traill’s *The Backwoods of Canada* (1836), and Susanna Moodie’s *Roughing it in the Bush* (1852) were published in England, and by the post-Confederation era, as Nick Mount remarks, “Traffic in literary goods and influences moved more freely across Canada’s borders in this period than in any other, and like other forms of economic and intellectual traffic was especially fluid across the country’s only land border” (13).⁵ Crawford’s experience, however, illustrates hazards as well as advantages in the international market for fiction. The ambiguous position of Canadian writers in the Atlantic triangle of English-speaking nations is manifest in the publication history of one of her earliest tales: “The Silvers’ Christmas Eve” first appeared under her name in *The Favorite* in 1872, was pirated, significantly altered, and published anonymously in 1874 under a different title in a British monthly magazine, and shortly thereafter re-crossed the Atlantic to make its third appearance (again anonymously) in the *New York Times*. It is indicative of Canada’s status on the international literary scene that the pirated version has expunged all signs of its Canadian origin.⁶

It is similarly noteworthy that while Crawford’s fiction for Canadian periodicals is usually set in Canada, not one of the stories that she wrote for Leslie’s magazines is. Their settings range from the American West, New York City, upstate New York, and New England, to the coast of Brittany, London and the English countryside, Rome and the Campagna, and the Scottish Highlands. They are populated by Americans of all classes and occupations, British aristocrats, Cockney servants, West Country English lasses, French villagers, and dashing Italian military officers, but nowhere in them is a Canadian or a reference to Canada to be found. In effect, Crawford herself excluded Canadians from her fiction for Leslie’s firm as ruthlessly as the British literary pirate who excised all traces of Canada from “The Silvers’ Christmas Eve.”

Canada had only recently and partly emerged from colonial status, and held small interest for American and British editors who assumed (as did many Canadians, well into the twentieth century) that life in the United

States and Europe was what counted where contemporary manners and cultural activity were concerned.⁷ One ramification of this state of affairs was that Crawford's stories for the American papers became more formulaic and perfunctory over the twelve years in which she produced them. No doubt this deterioration reflects pressing financial need and hasty composition, but her work may have become increasingly vulnerable to the levelling norms of magazine fiction precisely because of its disconnection from the immediate materials of her Canadian experience. It may be no coincidence that several of her early Canadian stories for *The Favorite* and her two late Canadian stories are among her best.

The Canadian border was, however, only one of many that Crawford's fiction crossed: it also breaches boundaries between popular and elite literature, poetry and prose, and humor and melodrama. In the 1870s, the gap between popular and elite literature had not widened to the extent evident under the impact of modernism in the early twentieth century. Writers such as Tennyson (her favorite poet) and Dickens (possibly her favorite novelist) appealed to a broad reading public through exploiting popular modes of romance and melodrama.⁸ Crawford attempted to do the same, but lacked the more secure position that these writers achieved and the privileges that they enjoyed in the world of nineteenth-century publishing. Following the death of her father, an improvident small-town doctor, she found herself at the age of twenty-six living in a Toronto boarding house, supporting herself and her mother largely on what she could make by writing fiction for the readiest market available to her.⁹ Whether through personal preference, editorial constraint, economic exigency, or (more likely) a combination of all three, most of this work is tailored to the demand of the story papers for sentiment, romantic love, melodramatic crisis, and happy endings.

The basic element of romance in Crawford's fiction is the courtship tale of lovers challenged or estranged by difficulties who eventually realize their hopes in the happy ending of marriage.¹⁰ The basic element of melodrama is, of course, the villain who conspires against them. While these conventions occur in innumerable narratives that precede and follow the story-paper era, the fiction published in this medium relies heavily on them and typically presents cursory and banal renderings of the plot. As a critic of works of "story-paper literature" put it succinctly in 1879: "the surprising thing to learn is that there is really so much less in them than might be expected" (Bishop 389). It must be admitted that this judgment applies to some of Crawford's stories; however, as Michael Peterman has suggested, "if the Leslie operation undervalued

aesthetic matters, Crawford often found ways to be creative” (74). Her best stories resist, subvert, and enliven the clichés of romance and melodrama through her command of irony, handling of perspective, and poet’s sense of language. I propose to demonstrate how this is so by considering three examples: “Peaches” (1873), written for *The Favorite*, and “River-Lead Cañon” (1874) and “Beepringle’s Lass” (1876), both published in *Frank Leslie’s Chimney Corner*. These three pieces illustrate her resourcefulness in handling the formula of story-paper short fiction and also reveal through their respective settings in Canada, the United States, and England a conscious attempt to engage the national and literary ethos of each country.

“Peaches” is one of Crawford’s shortest stories but its brevity yields a wealth of complex meaning. In generic terms, it reflects Crawford’s predilection for poetry by drawing upon the pictorial and linguistic richness of the Tennysonian English idyl, a form that Robert Pattison has described as marked by “self-consciousness and eclecticism” (18). The opening paragraphs create a mellow rural atmosphere and artfully frame the discovery of love in the countryside with an awareness of the city and the greater world beyond, much in the manner of Tennyson’s “The Gardener’s Daughter” (1842) and its famous topographical coordinates: “Not wholly in the busy world, nor quite / Beyond it, blooms the garden that I love” (33-34).¹¹ Crawford is highly conscious of but not in the least anxious about this influence. At the outset, an allusion to Tennyson’s “The Talking Oak” (1842) replaces that imperial arboreal icon with its Canadian counterpart, a “lordly grove of rustling maples ‘hidden to the knees in fern’” (81).¹² This adaptation of the Laureate’s poetic mode and imagery at once acknowledges the Canadian writer’s affiliation with English literature and affirms the authority of her own position and the attractions of her own landscape. Her nationalist viewpoint is amplified a few sentences later when the hero reports that the heroine’s first glance “prostrated him mentally as a ball from a rifle in the hands of one of our ‘Canadian Team’ would have done physically” (81)—a reference to a much-lauded contingent of Canadian militia that won the Kolapore Challenge Cup in 1872 at an annual tournament in Wimbledon, England, for marksmen from different parts of the Empire.¹³ The humorous use of this source of Canadian pride for a romantic simile accompanies the acknowledgement, in this bucolic setting, of mixed realities: the river bears not only “the white wings of fairy fleets” but also “the jetty smoke of great steamers” (81). Moreover, there is throughout the narrative an undercurrent of sexual responsiveness and an awareness of the faintly ridiculous binaries

of gender. The hero is the first to blush when he encounters the heroine, whom the narrator calls, with tongue in cheek, “the Divinity,” and her answering blush contributes to the martial imagery when she puts right his assumption that she is the usual inexperienced maiden of romance: “Mrs. Lawrence,’ corrected the Divinity, a flying squadron of dimples, bannered by a blush, sweeping across that face” (81).

The plot of “Peaches” is simple and perhaps predictable. Hugh Pentrith, a young engineer, arrives in what appears to be the orchard region of southern Ontario to oversee the installation of a bridge and is smitten by a young widow, Rowena Lawrence, who lives with her grandmother in a home beyond the peach orchard beside the village hotel. Leaping ahead several months, the narrative describes how Rowena, now betrothed to Hugh, spies him one evening in the hotel parlor embracing “a fair-faced Juno, crowned with glimmering golden hair” (83). She returns her engagement ring with a peremptory note, and he decides to decamp, declaring to the grandmother his anger over Rowena’s lack of trust, his refusal to explain himself, and his intention “to leave Canada forever next week” (85). Then a sudden shriek impels him to action:

Hugh hurled himself round the corner and met flying towards him a little figure lapped about in golden flames, waving above the bright head in cruel, graceful, slender tongues, and whirling and writhing into the crisp air.

He opened his arms and caught her, crushing the flames down, and yet blinded and cruelly scorched by them as he sprang towards an open cistern, which he remembered mechanically.

It was full, thanks to the autumn rains, and in a second he had plunged with her into it.

By every rule of romance the cistern ought to have been a river, and Hugh ought to have laid Rowena dripping on the grass, pressed a frantic kiss on her brow and departed by express train for the Rocky Mountains.

He did nothing of the kind. He fished her out of the cistern, and when he saw what the flames had done to the pretty white neck, the dimpled arms and the poor little hands, he forgot that one side of his own face was cruelly scorched, and his arms literally masses of raw, hideous blisters; he forgot everything but the fact that she still lived and breathed faintly, and that he had saved her. (85-86)

Clearly, Crawford is able here—as in many stories—to have her romance and mock it too. This she achieves principally through her narrator, a colleague in Hugh’s head office named Compass (signifying perhaps not only his engineering profession but also his comprehension of things and ability to assess their value). As a surrogate for Crawford, he provides the distancing effect that Pattison regards as characteristic of the idyl (19-20), cultivating

lyrical grace and urbane irony in his narration just as he does a combination of sympathy and amusement in his perspective on romantic love.

In the final part of the narrative, having recovered from their injuries, Hugh tells Rowena that the Junoesque woman at the hotel was in fact his sister, who had been passing hurriedly through the village with her husband. Following a break in the text, an unidentified voice—proxy for the reader, it seems—demands: “Pray, what have peaches to do with all this nonsense, may I ask?” To which the narrator responds:

Well perhaps not much. They met under the peach blossoms, and Hugh thinks that except for that peach preserve attending to which Rowena’s dress took fire, she might never have stood beside him crowned with a rosy coronal of the same rich blooms, while he slipped on the third finger of her left hand a plain gold ring, with the sapphire set with pearls to guard it.

That is the reason I call this humble tale “peaches,” and as that delectable fruit has a kernel, so this has a moral which you are heartily welcome to if you can find it. (87)

This challenge to readers is a rather different and certainly a less threatening proposition than Mark Twain’s notice at the outset of *Huckleberry Finn* that “Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot” (2). Mr. Compass’ valedictory remark is of a piece with his arch narration and invites us to wonder what moral he has in mind. Is it one of the aphorisms uttered in the text, perhaps the grandmother’s admonition that “love is as sharp to wound as hate” (85), or the proverb “*L’homme propose et Dieu dispose*” (85)? Is it some cautionary wisdom about the danger of jumping to conclusions, or the attendance of folly upon romance, or the role of chance in human affairs? Or is it perhaps an oblique comment on the necessity of attending to the texture and implications of the entire story rather than reducing it to a moral? The pleasure of eating a peach is in savouring the flesh rather than swallowing the pit, and the pleasures of Crawford’s story are certainly more inherent in its sensuous language, allusiveness, and complex narrative effects than they are in any moral that might be extracted, or, for that matter, in the familiar plot of romantic love in adverse circumstances and a heroine to be saved from peril.

The editors’ introduction to Crawford’s *Collected Short Stories* suggests that if there is a significant difference between stories published in *The Favorite* and those later published in Leslie’s American papers, “it may be the predominance of humour in the former and melodrama in the latter”

(Early and Peterman, *Collected* xvi). In “Peaches,” one manifestation of this difference is the absence of the stock villain of melodrama, who does, however, make a notable appearance in her next story, “River-Lead Cañon,” with which she made her debut in *Frank Leslie’s Chimney Corner* in the autumn of 1874. While this tale has a comic frame narrative focused on the unassuming Bolling family, its highly melodramatic main plot features the standard figures of villain, heroine, and hero. Perhaps inspired by the recent success of Bret Harte’s stories about California’s mining camps, Crawford seems to have deliberately designed “River-Lead Cañon” for American readers; certainly she addresses some of their preoccupations in the 1870s by setting it in the town of Miningville, “an excrescence of civilization in the wilderness” (88) where the national imperatives of westward expansion, dynamic capitalism, and class mobility are very much in the foreground. A remarkable paragraph near the beginning describes the railway’s penetration of the immense reaches of the West and contains a memorable variation on the image of “the machine in the garden” that Leo Marx has identified as a crucial motif in nineteenth-century American literature:

A railway—track-slim and curving as a serpent—ran to it through leagues, leagues, leagues of forest fastnesses; past leagues, leagues, leagues of terrible gray cliffs; past leagues of wide waters flecked with the wing of loon and bittern; past leagues of cranberry-swamps; past solitary farmhouses waiting in the wilderness for the onward stride of commerce and civilization to bring markets and companionship—shrieking to the lonely fields of heaven through nights of rapid flight through sighing forests, while antlered phantoms scud from before the panting engine, and the yell of the wolverine and the hoarse shriek of the owl answer the devilish notes from the escape-valves—bellowing through rocky defiles, the very homes of thunderous echoes; shooting past deserted lumber-shanties—gaunt skeletons looming through misty dawn or gray nightfall—shrieking, whistling, roaring, dropping trains of fire, belching columns of steam and smoke, the incarnation of Toil and Tumult hurrying through the still and solemn woods, an artery of Life before whose stream repose will give way to action. (89)

This passage is striking in its elision of the pastoral “middle ground” that Marx describes as typical of early American writing and in its vivid depiction of the epochal encounter in nineteenth-century America of two forms of the sublime: the immemorial and formidable sublime of the wilderness, and the new but equally terrifying technological sublime of the thriving national “Life” that is about to transform it.¹⁴ Clearly, this is a very different landscape from the idyllic setting of “Peaches,” although the northern inflection of its topography and fauna may owe as much to Crawford’s Canadian point of view as they do to her Romantic and Transcendentalist antecedents. Also

worth noting here is the alignment of her syntax, as an enactment of human expressive power, expansiveness, and control, with the inexorable force and momentum of the railway itself.

As the story opens, a telegram to Mr. Wreather, supervisor of the Cañon Mine, announces that its owner, Mr. Stormer, is about to arrive by rail with his daughter Olympia. When Stormer returns to New York, Olympia remains for an extended visit with the Bollings. In a casual ramble beyond the town, she is saved by a mysterious miner named Masters from a fall into the gorge where the mining operation is located (the “river-lead” of the title is a reputedly unsafe shaft in the canyon wall beside a powerful river that runs through the area). On a second excursion, she is escorted by Wreather on a Sunday morning to the deserted canyon, forcibly held by him in the river-wall lead, and threatened with death unless she promises to marry him. Wreather, “a human grinding mill” (91), admits that years earlier he framed her fiancé, George Leighton, for the theft of money from her father’s safe. Then, in a scene that may remind readers today of the B Western films of early twentieth-century Hollywood, he reinforces his demand by lighting a slow match that leads to a powder keg under the river wall of the mine shaft. While he becomes mesmerized by the twisting course of the ignited fuse, Olympia hears a footstep outside and flees. As the explosion floods the canyon with the river’s torrent, she is plucked from impending death a second time by Masters, whom she now recognizes—one is inclined to say “of course”—as the long-lost and heavily-disguised Leighton.

While this summary might reasonably be taken to suggest that “River-lead Cañon” is little more than a farrago of implausible coincidence and banal melodrama, a disposable thriller calculated to please its mass-market audience, the story does offer the mitigating features of Crawford’s stylistic flair, deft handling of structure, and ability to imbue even the most clichéd plot with some depth of implication through her allusive prose and manipulation of symbolic landscape. It also resists one of the most familiar conventions of melodrama by avoiding a climactic struggle between its villain and hero, notwithstanding young Joe Bolling’s notion that Masters might be “incited to bestow a thorough ‘licking’ on the obnoxious Wreather—‘a consummation devoutly to be wished,’ according to Joe’s views” (97). While the narrative lacks the sustained irony of “Peaches,” its colorful prose successfully infuses its romance motifs with realistic detail. The central melodrama involving Olympia is effectively framed by the story’s focus in its opening and closing sections on the rustic Bollings, whose enhanced fortunes and improved

grammar in the epilogue signify the passage of Miningville from raw frontier town to middle-class prosperity.

The sweltering mining “cañon” initially seems to invite but in fact resists association with the infernal. It retains the green vigor of natural growth, and its “rolling clouds of visible heat—iridescent waves of molten gold . . . tinged with a mellow red” (96) carry positive, even erotic, implications; indeed, the chasm is symbolically female in its physical contours and as the site of Olympia’s peril, loss of composure, and defense of her integrity. Perhaps jeopardizing the oft-declared mission of the *Chimney Corner* to serve up fiction suitable for the entire family, the account of her near-fatal tumble into the abyss and rescue by “Masters” is eroticized to the point of suggesting a sublimated sexual act: “She sat up on the aromatic carpet of pine-needles, and rubbed her bedazzled eyes. The fall had loosened her hair, and it slipped sunnily down her shoulders; her cheeks began to light slowly into wonderful bloom; she looked up at Masters, doubt in her confused gaze” (102).¹⁵ In the symbolic design of the story, the counterpart to this ambiguous and hazardous gorge is the safe space of the hospitable Bolling home, where Mrs. Bolling embodies maternal good sense and domestic comfort.

In light of Crawford’s teasing invitation to look for a “moral” in “Peaches,” it may be useful to apply the same question to “River-Lead Cañon.” In the first part of the story, Wreather remarks sententiously that “it’s the business of every man when an individual neglects his duty,” while little Joe Bolling is “impatient of moral axioms” (90). As in the case of “Peaches,” a less summary meaning is intimated through imagery that shows how the contradictions of experience are as apt to complicate as to clarify moral issues. Perhaps the most significant duality is between Christian and classical allusions. The latter have to do largely with natural elements and Olympia’s patrician bearing, while the former evoke the Biblical story of the Fall. The insinuation into the wilderness of human enterprise is repeatedly couched in the image of a serpent. Moreover, Wreather mentions “the curse of labor” (107), his name recalls the description in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* of Satan in serpent form (9.516-18), and the knotted bouquet of ferns and roses that Olympia lets drop to the floor of the mine-shaft when Wreather reveals his malice recalls the garland “Of choicest Flow’rs” (9.840) woven by Adam for Eve that falls from his hands when he learns of her transgression.

Like the similar sequence of allusions to *Paradise Lost* in Crawford’s narrative poem *Malcolm’s Katie*, this motif in “River-lead Cañon” challenges rather than reprises the story of the Fall: it emphasizes Olympia’s steadfast

innocence, just as the poem stresses the significance of Katie's constancy as an inversion and repudiation of Eve's original sin. At the same time, it suggests a critical perspective on the transformation of nature by the relentless press of human activity and the energies of capitalist enterprise, particularly in the paragraph in which Olympia approaches River-lead Cañon in its hushed Sunday-morning state:

The cañon was quiet, for man was not there, and the roar of the river beyond was one of those voices of nature which belong to solitude and enhance repose. A canopy of golden Summer mist lay over it—a glorious veil or shade of splendor, like the hand of God above the cleft in the rock where the future lawgiver lay concealed. Here and there, like a torn tapestry, the faint sweet pink of the wild-rose hung upon its walls, and the scarlet flame of the cardinal-flower quivered like a tongue of fire. Ferns, damp and cool as the tresses of naiads, waved lightly, although there was no perceptible breeze, and Olympia, with her hands full of ferns and roses, was glad to feel the shadow of the gothic arch of the river-lead upon her, and enter the cathedral gloom of the cave, where the dripping from the river made a fairy tinkle and a grateful coolness. (106)

This convergence of classical and Biblical allusions is suggestive rather than didactic: despite the reference to God's apparition to Moses (Exod. 33-34), there is no authoritative pronouncement on morality here. Nor, despite the apocalyptic signs ("hand of God," "torn tapestry," "tongue of fire") and the subsequent release of nature's violence in the flood, is there a transformative revelation. The counterpoint of classical with Christian imagery relativizes these traditions rather than valorizing a particular system of values. At the same time, the passage creates a vivid sense of satisfaction in natural things and intimates their numinous significance, thus providing an enlarged perspective on the harsh wilderness and tumult of civilization described at the outset of the story. The meaning of nature in "River-Lead Cañon" is fluid, multifaceted, and irreducible to the binaries of the natural and technological sublimines memorably evoked in the opening pages. Thus, while there can be no denying that Crawford gave her mass-market readership what it wanted in the more explicit pieties and melodramatic plot of "River-Lead Cañon," she also seeds richer meanings in the texture and undercurrents of its narrative.

While Crawford located most of her stories for Canadian publications in Canada and most of those for Frank Leslie's firm in the United States, she also set several stories in England, a circumstance that points to the continuing prestige of fiction about English life and the fascination of aristocratic figures for North American readers. As the narrator of a nearly contemporary tale by Bret Harte observes, "the democratic reader

delights in the nobility” (108). Crawford’s best “British” story is probably “Beepringle’s Lass,” published in the *Chimney Corner* in 1876. Like “Peaches” and “River-Lead Cañon,” it undertakes an imaginative treatment of a specific national setting and employs a formal strategy that puts into complex perspective the more obvious implications of its characters and action. Of crucial importance in this respect is its movement from the richly allusive, mythologically suggestive style of its opening pages to the diminished social comedy, dialect, and merely serviceable prose of its conclusion. The narrative moves from its epigraph, “Hapless little maid of Arcady!” (an adaptation of a lyric from Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Thespis*) through three episodes and an epilogue.¹⁶ In the first section, John Dillon, the wealthy squire of a West Country estate called “Arcadia,” having become lost in the labyrinthine forest on his property, encounters Phyllis Beepringle, the simple-minded daughter of his tenant, and rescues her from an attack by the fierce “yalla bull” that haunts the domain. In the second, Dillon’s neighbour and love-interest, Lady Psyche Darolles, makes her debut at Queen Victoria’s court, where she is upset by her Blimpish cousin Colonel Grey’s misconceived jest that he has seen Dillon “spooning” with a pretty farm girl. In the third, Psyche herself wanders into the forest on Dillon’s estate and encounters Phyllis, whereupon the two young women are confronted and Phyllis is killed by “t’ yalla bull” before it can be shot by gamekeepers who have been instructed to hunt it down. The epilogue sees a repentant Colonel Grey take pains to resolve Psyche’s misunderstanding and reconcile her to Dillon, and closes with an exchange of observations on the lovers by two servants in Psyche’s London residence.

The opening of “Beepringle’s Lass” describes the semi-pastoral domain of Dillon’s “Arcadia” and is replete with mythological and literary allusions, notably to the story of the Minotaur, an analogy that underlines Dillon’s limitations (he is sardonically introduced in the first sentence as “my hero”), and to Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, *Henry VIII*, *The Tempest*, and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. These last four references, in the space of a few short paragraphs, to the various Shakespearean forms of tragedy, history, romance, and comedy anticipate ways in which the story will problematize genres and blur their boundaries. At the outset, however, the predominant atmosphere is that of the last-named play: as if the glistening forest in which Dillon goes astray and the mention of Puck were insufficient, a recalcitrant donkey also appears on the scene. This “green world” is of course the landscape of enchantment familiar in Shakespeare’s romantic comedies, a space of disorientation and redemptive possibility removed from the rational

and conventional world; however, as events prove, the imaginative and erotic energies that it unleashes can be as destructive as they are creative.¹⁷

The detailed description of Dillon's estate yields more than the romance motifs mentioned above; it is also littered with signs of history: "a ruined arch, Gothic, with a fragment of old wall clinging to it, black with ivy, and a few huge old stones beside it, half buried in heath and moss, showing where a pillared aisle had stood when the heath had been a battlefield and the ruin an abbey" (182).¹⁸ There is more to this scene than a superficial sense of the picturesque: the residual markers of a feudal culture are prelude to the examination of a contemporary society stratified by class. Country squires are invested with unquestioned authority and their tenants with delegated authority over still more powerless figures like the orphan boy and bound laborer Tony Scriptur, while Tony in turn struggles to enact his small measure of assigned authority in watching over Miller Beepringle's daughter. In generic terms, the courtly imperatives of Shakespearean romantic comedy are called into question in "Beepringle's Lass" through intimations of a more historical perspective and a realignment of sympathy from high-bred lovers to the vulnerable and abject figure highlighted in its title. This displacement of attention and value from "high" to "low" is reinforced by the manifest vapidity of the royal court, the very locus and epitome of precedence, where Psyche makes a debut that is singularly lacking in significance before "a stout, cheerful royal lady in mauve satin" (196). Just as different Shakespearean genres are evoked and dissolved in Crawford's text, so are the structures of class called into question through their implications for the title character and her fate.

As an "innocent" in a twofold sense—without guilt, and limited in her mental faculties—"Beepringle's lass" is sexually attractive in the perception of others while remaining asexual in her childlike attitudes and behaviour. In her innocence, she is oblivious to the forces of class and commerce that shape the lives of other characters: when given coins, she makes them into a necklace rather than using them as a medium of exchange. More importantly, she becomes the centre of unfounded scandal when Psyche is led to think that Dillon may have taken sexual advantage of her simplicity; in what may be an allusion to Shakespeare's famous sonnet on lust, Psyche feels that that this surmise involves "terrible baseness, indeed; it was black as night; it was deep as any hell" (198).¹⁹ For Psyche, the consequence is a psychological and moral passage beyond innocence: a "haggard precocity of mind" (198).

When, at the crisis of the story, Phyllis is crushed beneath an emblem of aggressive virility, the narrative insinuates an allegory of the destruction of girlhood in the awakening to and attraction of masculine power; she plays an unwitting part in this denouement when her “short, shrill laugh” draws the bull’s attention to the two nymphs in the wood. Her requiem is contained in an exchange between the gamekeeper and his son who has shot the beast:

“T’ squire woan’t like thic,” remarked the old gamekeeper, ruefully, “nor t’ miller. Poor wench!”

“Poor little maid!” said Jerry. “Well, she be easier spared than some.”

“Mebbe,” said old Byber, gruffly. “Roll off t’ bull, lad.” (202)

Class relations are registered here in the precedence of the squire’s reaction over the bereaved father’s. The merest questioning of norms by which individuals are valued is concentrated in old Byber’s fleeting “mebbe,” and the narrative proceeds to Psyche’s reconciliation with Dillon after Colonel Grey apologizes for his damaging jest at Dillon’s expense. To Dillon’s remark that he had sensed something amiss between them, Psyche replies, “But it’s right now,” (203) an observation that does not extend to the dead girl whose beauty had inspired Grey’s folly. The story ends with a droll exchange between two Cockney servants, one of whom offers a piece of advice to his companion: ““When there’s lovers hin a ’ouse, sneeze hin the passidge, hand hagin hon the door-mat, yer safe for a tip from ’im sooner or later. Good form or bad form, sich things *his*, hand will be huntil civilization his more general”” (204). The young lovers survive their estrangement, the social order remains intact, and its privileges and practices continue; however, the customary happy ending of romantic melodrama and the formal completion of comedy are undermined by the death of “Beepringle’s lass,” the lingering question of what readers should make of it, and the story’s decidedly critical sense of what “civilization” entails.

“Extradited,” published in the Toronto daily *Globe* more than a decade later, marks Crawford’s return to Canadian materials in her fiction a few months before her death. It is by far her best-known story, a fact that can be attributed to its reprinting in 1973, its Canadian setting, and its divergence from the style of her work for Frank Leslie’s firm.²⁰ Rather than orchestrating allusions, myths, and genres in the context of a melodramatic love story, it undertakes direct psychological analysis and pivots on the issue of moral choice central to classic realistic fiction. It is tempting to praise “Extradited” for its realism and regard it as a promising development in Crawford’s fiction cut short by her death at the age of thirty-six. This assessment carries some

weight but runs the risk of reinforcing a view of her previous short fiction as merely conventional and inferior. In fact many of these earlier stories reveal a versatile imagination that draws upon a broad and eclectic range of materials to transform the popular modes in which she chose—or was obliged—to work. In the best of them, evocative landscapes, reverberant allusions, and an adroit manipulation of genre allow her to extend the scope of typical story-paper fiction and imbue it with depth and significance. As the foregoing discussion is intended to show, she fashioned stories that could appeal at once to a mass readership whose needs were met by the formulas with which she complied and to readers who could find other dimensions in her work. These stories are also astute in evoking the cultural terrain as well as describing the physical settings of different countries in which she set them. Commercial necessity confined most of her short fiction within a conventional framework, just as inauspicious circumstances restricted her personal experience and opportunities during her years in Toronto. Still, a potent intellect, fertile imagination, and practical ingenuity enabled her to create stories that look, and move, beyond those limits.

NOTES

- 1 See, for example, Gadpaille, Metcalf, and New. For a more sympathetic treatment of early Canadian short fiction, see Lynch and Robberson, and McMullen and S. Campbell. Davey contends that the development of English-Canadian short fiction “occurred almost entirely outside the early twentieth-century Anglo-American theory of the unified and autotelic story” and that its investigation “requires a much more pluralistic and eclectic view” of the form (142-43). Tallack’s study of the nineteenth-century American short story similarly challenges the modernist bias of twentieth-century short-story criticism.
- 2 The most useful critical comments on Crawford’s short fiction are those of Waterston, and W. Campbell (brief discussions of “Extradited” and “In the Breast of a Maple”), Dellamora (an interpretation of “Extradited” as a story of “male same-sex romance” [25]), and Peterman (an account of Crawford’s relations with Leslie’s firm together with an appraisal of her 1882 story “Fair Little Jealousy”).
- 3 Most of Crawford’s short fiction has only recently become readily available with the publication of Early and Peterman’s edition, *Collected Short Stories of Isabella Valancy Crawford* (2009), which provides full bibliographical details. All citations in this essay to Crawford’s short stories are to this edition. On the phenomenon of the nineteenth-century American story papers, see Bishop, Cohen, and Noel.
- 4 For details of Crawford’s lawsuit against Desbarats for payments owed to her, see Early and Peterman, Introduction, *Winona* 9, 23-27.
- 5 On the difficulties of publishing in nineteenth-century Canada and the recourse of Canadian writers to publishers in England and the United States, see Davies, Mount, Parker.
- 6 See Early and Peterman, Introduction, *Collected* xxxiii-xxxiv.

- 7 Doyle asserts that “in the imaginative literature of the United States, as in other expressions of the thought and experience of that complex nation, Canada has perennially figured as a vague, peripheral, and ambiguous concept” (1), and notes “the comparative paucity and insignificance of the images of the northern country in the American literary tradition” (2). The career of the Nova Scotian writer James De Mille (1833-80), who set most of his fiction outside Canada and published all of it in the United States, is instructive in this context.
- 8 On Crawford’s relation to Tennyson, see Devereux, Livesay, and Waterston. Tennyson is by far the most quoted contemporary writer in Crawford’s *Collected Short Stories*, with 29 references to 14 for the runner-up, Longfellow. While Dickens is less frequently cited, his influence is palpable in the comic names of characters, the use of dialect, and the ambiguity of stories such as “The Silvers’ Christmas Eve” and “The Lost Diamond of St. Dalmas.”
- 9 For a useful biography of Crawford, see Farmiloe. On Crawford’s probable sponsorship by James McCarroll, a sometime Peterborough resident and editor for Frank Leslie’s firm, see Early and Peterman, Introduction, *Winona* 17-19.
- 10 See Early and Peterman, Introduction, *Collected* xvi-xxiii.
- 11 On Tennyson’s English Idyls, see Culler, O’Donnell, and Pattison.
- 12 See Tennyson, “The Talking Oak”: “Hail, hidden to the knees in fern, / Broad Oak of Summer-chace” (29-30).
- 13 See “The Canadian Team at Wimbledon,” part of the extensive coverage of the team’s triumph in the *Canadian Illustrated News* in August 1872.
- 14 On the technological sublime, see Marx 190-209.
- 15 See, for example, a statement in the *Chimney Corner* in late 1875: “The Chimney Corner is so long established, and so well known, that it is scarcely necessary to expatiate on its advantages as a family journal. It combines with attractive fiction, so universally desired, many instructive elements. It aims to elevate the taste and impart information in an agreeable form, while it constantly entertains and pleases the mind and the eye. It has for this reason been a favorite in all American homes, from its happy combination of all the elements required for a pure, high-toned, yet entertaining weekly visitant” (Editorial note).
- 16 Crawford’s version differs significantly from the refrain of Gilbert and Sullivan’s song: “Happy little maiden, she— / Happy maid of Arcadee!”
- 17 On the green world in Shakespeare’s romances, see Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* 182-84 and *A Natural Perspective* 140-46.
- 18 This landscape perhaps owes something to the “Abbey-ruin” described near the beginning of Tennyson’s *The Princess*; see especially the Prologue, lines 89-95.
- 19 Compare Shakespeare, Sonnet 147: “For I have sworn thee fair and thought thee bright, / Who art as black as hell, as dark as night” (13-14).
- 20 Originally published in the *Globe* on 4 September 1886, “Extradited” was edited by Petrone in 1973 for the *Journal of Canadian Fiction* and subsequently included in her edition of Crawford’s *Selected Stories* (1975). It has since been anthologized at least four times (Early and Peterman, Introduction, *Collected* xli-xlii).

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Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman (with Antlers)

Her profile stately: black bangs, black mouth.

Her profile carved into a brooch.

Procured.

Her profile uncurtained, inured with light.

Preening, feral, shaken.

Her black bangs an unbroken body of water.

Her black bangs a curtain, a swimmer's beacon.

Surf leaping, antlered.

Her arms heavier in water, a bouquet of leaves.

Her hands offset with square stems, white flowers.

Her hands leafing through the horehound.

Tralala lala.

Her hands owned.

Solomon Gursky Was Here A History by Hunger

In H.G. Wells' 1909 novel *Tono-Bungay*, a new-moneyed Londoner indulges his imaginative appetites in the building of a country mansion:

All the world has heard of that extravagant place which grew and changed plans as it grew, and bubbled like a salted snail, and burgeoned and bulged and evermore grew. I know not what delirium of pinnacles and terraces and arcades and corridors glittered at last in the uplands of his mind. . . . At another time he caught a suggestion from some city restaurant and made a billiard-room roofed with plate glass beneath the waters of his ornamental lake. (270-71)

A story of newfound wealth and class transit will usually give the reader access to the shows of affluence put on by its characters, however disapproving the book itself is of such conspicuousness. In *The Way We Live Now*, more or less the originary novel of finance, the tycoon Augustus Melmotte advertises his material situation by inviting the Emperor of China to dinner, while Anthony Trollope's narrator advertises his own *class* status by pointedly *not* noticing what Melmotte serves at table—and by larking those attentive characters who do avail the reader of that information. Eighty years after *Tono-Bungay*, Mordecai Richler tells us of another financial ascendancy, this one up the slopes of Mount Royal:

The three Gursky brothers had built neighbouring fieldstone mansions on the Montreal mountainside . . . once through the wrought-iron gates, an awestruck Moses, totally unprepared by his father, was confronted with undreamed-of splendour.

There was an enormous swimming pool. A heated, multi-level tree house, designed by an architect and furnished by an interior decorator. A miniature railway. A hockey rink, the boards thickly padded. (24-25)

But if, as we read Richler's description, we feel a twinge of vicarious gratification, or, like the young observer, of jealousy, we are not simply debasing ourselves before some more abstemious authorial sensibility. In fact, the inevitability of our jealousy, our desire for gratification, is precisely what the book is about.

Edward Ponderevo, Wells' Englishman, and Bernard Gursky, Richler's Canadian, both represent historical intensifications in capitalist materialism. Both are ruthlessly ambitious, spurred by a sense of class inferiority, and both make their fortunes in related ways: in small glass bottles, and also, in despite of ethical consensus. Gursky, an unflattering riff on Samuel Bronfman, is a distiller and bootlegger. Ponderevo, after some experimentation, succeeds in branding a runaway health tonic, the eponymous Tono-Bungay. But Ponderevo is plainly and simply a fraud. Tono-Bungay is not as advertised, in fact does nothing, something nobody to my knowledge has said about Seagram's. With that characteristic enthusiasm of the earlier twentieth century for foundational dichotomies, Wells' book makes its tycoon both a proprietor and a victim of false consciousness:

[H]e had a controlling influence in the direction of nearly thirty millions. The irrational muddle of a community in which we live gave him that, paid him at that rate for sitting in a room and scheming and telling it lies. For he created nothing, he invented nothing, he economized nothing. I cannot claim that a single one of the great businesses we organized added any real value to human life at all. (220)

Just as his services are unnecessary, so are his compulsions. Once he has the money to do so, Ponderevo feels compelled to act an absurd, predetermined class part: "We got to get samples of all the blessed wines there are, and learn 'em up. Stern, Smoor, Burgundy, all of 'em! . . . Learn up golf and tennis and things. Country Gentleman. Oh fay" (241).¹ The financier's adventures are narrated by his nephew George, who begins as his partner in crime but is gradually pulled away in his pursuit of the perfect flying machine. George is Edward's foil, an ascetic disciple of the radical real of science:

Scientific truth is the remotest of mistresses; she hides in strange places, she is attained by tortuous and laborious roads, but *she is always there!* Win to her and she will not fail you; she is yours and mankind's for ever. She is reality, the one reality I have found in this strange disorder of existence. She will not sulk with you nor misunderstand you nor cheat you of your reward upon some petty doubt. You cannot change her by advertisement or clamour, nor stifle her in vulgarities. (277)

But Richler's hero, a scholar named Moses Berger who has ruined his prospects with drunkenness, cannot stand so aloof. *Solomon Gursky was Here* is about appetites—for mansions, or better, for whiskey—which cannot

be ignored, never mind the warp of cultural valuation and prohibition. Hunger, in the unremittingly anatomical sense, is the book's guiding figure. Dating as it does to 1989, *Gursky* is by no means any happy manifesto for the "greed is good" epoch. Bernard Gursky, who enjoys surreptitiously salting the food of heart-conscious employees, is decidedly less likeable than Edward Ponderevo, and Berger certainly likes him less than George does his uncle. But before pronouncing this novel, even in its most excoriating moments, a corrective attack on the wicked, we ought to consider the more intransigent ethical problems that arise from the figures of consumption and appetite. With a sense of entrapment, of endgame inevitability singular in Richler's work and noteworthy among laments of the gaudy marketplace, *Gursky* details a kind of greed which, though impossible to dismiss as unnatural or even evitable, we are nonetheless never permitted to condone. In its billed role as Richler's epic, *Gursky* is also a comment upon more particularly national forms of moral self-identification. As Charles Foran notes in his recent biography, Richler himself described the book as "fat and filthy" (533). These, to a considerable extent, are the adjectives *Gursky* will not let Canadians deny themselves.

The nuclear story from which the larger observations of the novel radiate is that of a family, and particularly, of a family consuming itself. Ephraim Gursky, an English-born Jew, emerges mysteriously from the Canadian Arctic in about the middle of the nineteenth century. He leaves a son, Aaron, in Saskatchewan. Aaron gives Ephraim three grandchildren, Bernard, Solomon, and Morrie. These three become bootleggers, and begin to amass a fortune, but not before Ephraim alerts his favoured grandson Solomon to the insatiable maliciousness of his brother. After pointing out the voracity of an arctic wolf, Ephraim asks:

"Do you understand?"

"Sure I do."

"No, you don't. I'm trying to warn you about Bernard." (38)

Sure enough, Bernard gives the Gursky story its most obvious nudge into transgressive indulgence. Jealous over money and status, he saddles Solomon with legal blame for the family's collective smuggling operations. Solomon avoids incarceration by disappearing, apparently dying in a flying accident, while control of the family business, now legitimated as McTavish Distillers, falls to Bernard. Things get more cannibal: Bernard's children battle with Morrie's over influence in the company, and attempt to deceive Solomon's naively religious son Henry into giving up his shares. Solomon's daughter

Lucy becomes first a drug addict, and then a binge eater, “gorging herself on platters of unhatched chicken eggs, *kishka*, and flank steak” (534). Most disturbing is the case of Isaac Gursky, Henry’s son and Solomon’s grandson. After a snowmobile accident kills his father and leaves him stranded in the Arctic without food, Isaac is rescued by a bush pilot. He has only survived, the pilot recounts, “by slicing chunks out of Henry’s thighs” (526).

Very probably, Isaac has no choice. He had, after all, to eat something. But the implacability of his need is shocking, unacceptable, registers as a cultural rupture. The rebbes at the yeshiva he attends in New York are awestruck: “How could you do such a thing? . . . But your own father, *alay ha-sholem?*” Isaac’s claim that it was better to eat Henry than his Netsilik travelling companion since “The other one was *trayf*” does little to mollify them (528). Isaac’s appetites continue to put him at odds with Jewish ritual purity. Already, Henry has taken him to task for eating like the other boys in the Arctic town of his raising.

He found him hidden behind an oil drum chewing greedily on a raw seal’s eye, sucking the goodness out of it. “You musn’t,” Henry chided him, tenderly wiping the blood off his chin with a handkerchief. “It’s not kosher. It’s unclean, *yingele*. *Trayf*.” (97)

After his father’s death, Isaac takes to cannabis. He is eventually expelled from his school for sex with his cleaning lady.

In the chapter of *The Periodic Table* named “Potassium,” Primo Levi gives a multiply resonant account of his work as a chemist in Fascist Italy.

Distilling is beautiful. First of all, because it is a slow, philosophic, and silent occupation . . . purity is attained, an ambiguous and fascinating condition, which starts with chemistry and goes very far. And finally, when you set about distilling, you acquire the consciousness of repeating a ritual consecrated by the centuries, almost a religious act, in which from imperfect materials you obtain the essence.” (58)

On the one hand, this is an anthropologically astute allusion to the tradition of kashrut Levi knew from childhood; purity, dietary and in other senses, is not a positive property of matter—as Mary Douglas writes, “there is no such thing as absolute dirt” (2)—but a state produced by ritual, and specifically, by exclusion. The chemist knows that benzene is pure because he has followed a *practice*, vaporizing the chemical to isolate solids, just as the observant Jew knows that meat is kosher because a recognized *shochet* has drained the animal’s blood.² But, historically situated as it is, Levi’s ablutionary chemistry evokes another kind of cleansing, one no less significant to a European Jew. “Almost every militant chemist,” Levi notes with baleful suggestiveness, “can confirm it: that one must distrust the almost-the-same, the practically identical, the approximate” (60).

This kind of parallel, between anti-Semitism and the more exclusionary kinds of Jewish observance, also has its place in Richler. Rachel Feldhay Brenner has noted the novelist's anxiety about "a growing similarity between the Jew and the tyrant" in the post-Holocaust world, an ethnically derived moral insularity which perpetuates antagonism (85). Brenner's study, *Assimilation and Assertion*, dates to 1989 and is consequently silent on *Gursky*, but her observation is in any event most strongly relevant to earlier characters—Mr. Cohen in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* or Harry Stein in *St. Urbain's Horseman*. In keeping with the present discussion about appetite, I would add that particularly in these earlier novels, the losses of caste which come from desire tend to be a good thing. Nancy Hersh, Jake's wife in *Horseman*, is the clearest instance of the Richlerian gentile sex heroine as cultural liberatrix; Yvette Durelle is the negative or tragic version of that type, which even in *Gursky* makes its appearance as Diana McClure, Solomon's great Westmount romance. In this light, dietary malpractice could be Richler's own version of what Kwame Appiah would later call "the case for contamination," with Henry, the puritanical Hassid, a Kronos eaten by his children rather than eating them.

This was exactly Levi's position. In a passage slightly blunter than that above, he writes of "Two conflicting philosophical conclusions: the praise of purity, which protects from evil like a coat of mail; the praise of impurity, which gives rise to changes, in other words to life. I discarded the first, disgustingly moralistic" (34). But no sense of benignant cosmopolitanism will excuse Isaac, from whose patriphagia everyone recoils, even the narrative itself—reproducing it only in a clipped sentence from a minor character. Nor will it excuse the Gurskys in aggregate. The rebbes may be terribly silly, but there is nevertheless something deeply discomfiting in Isaac's inability to stop, his proneness to need. Signally, his attempt to invoke the law of kashrut is an utter failure; as in the benzene ceremony, the contaminant has been excluded, the trayf travelling companion spurned. And yet Isaac remains unclean.

If there is a Richler who hates prigs, prudes, and hypocrites, there is also a Richler zealously committed to decrying sin. Admittedly, these are positions one can take together in a rhetorical breath, particularly when one casts oneself in antithesis to fallacious ethnic boosterism. In *Mordecai and Me*, Joel Yanofsky recalls a lecture at Montreal's Jewish Public Library in 1979, in which a bellicose Richler told his audience that too many in the Jewish community "find themselves absolutely adorable," and "confuse their

writers with publicists” (qtd. 213). Here, the deflation of neighbourhood piety coincided perfectly with the writer’s own higher moral purpose. But one still wants to ask: is Richler more disturbed by the faults he finds with his audience or by the unwillingness of that audience to admit them? Are Montreal Jews pretending to be something they should not, or failing to be what they should? This tension in Richler’s work, between rules which cannot be kept and people who are not good enough, is never really resolved, insofar as *resolution* would imply solubility, satisfaction, happy ending. It is first *synthesized*, first articulated as a fully self-conscious problem, however, in *Gursky*. The point of Isaac’s crime is not, as it seems to have been with Mr. Cohen in *Duddy*, that Mosaic or eugenic exclusion is unnecessary and cruel. It is that such exclusions, regardless of their desirability, do not work. Whatever happens, hunger will be at the root of it, and those who succeed will be, and always have been, the tricksters who play to hunger.

The principle can, no doubt, be immensely gratifying. The legal spanner in the Gursky works is Bert Smith, a Saskatchewan customs agent who will not take a bribe or a drink. Bernard takes him to lunch, offering to pay for Smith’s coffee and blueberry pie, but is rebuffed, and Solomon’s legal scapegoating begins (367). But Smith, a bitter, pungently written little racist, does not succeed in abstention. Decades after the trial, he unwittingly accepts Gursky money. His first purchase, “a coffee and blueberry muffin,” sees him symbolically reabsorb the contaminated offering (442). Less symbolically, Smith’s desire for a “British Canada” is the anti-Semitic side of Levi’s exclusionary coin, and we are glad to see him disappointed on both fronts.

But as counterweight to this apparent liberative potential in transgressive eating, there is the case of L.B. Berger. L.B.—like Bernard Gursky, a pointed character attack, this time on the poet A.M. Klein—is Moses Berger’s father, a pompous but unfulfilled literary figure in Montreal’s Jewish community. Ditching his freethinking Yiddish tea circle, L.B. offers himself to people who can better satiate his ego, the genteel gentiles of McGill University: “Catty, clever people, L.B. thought. Writers who luxuriated on private incomes and knew the best years for claret” (20). At length, the poet makes his needy way into the pocket of no less a person than Bernard Gursky, hired to write drecky speeches for fundraisers. The imagery of this transition is all that of food: at the pivotal moment in the poet’s apostasy, we learn that he “now eschewed chopped liver on rye with lemon tea and, instead, nibbled Camembert and sipped Tio Pepe” (20).

Again, this is not to say that L.B. would have been better, or better off, had he stuck to the food of the shtetl. Working for Bernard Gursky, a fellow Jew, is infinitely more distasteful than palling around in Canadian Bloomsbury (it is for the connection to Gursky that Moses repudiates his father as “someone who has eaten the king’s salt” [29]). The similarity is one of motive: in either direction, L.B. has been led by his belly. Prohibition does not work, but enticement does.

The whole Gursky fortune is derived from this principle—“prohibition” operating in its most obvious, historically specific sense. In 1861, Ephraim is already manufacturing an “unquenchable Blackfoot thirst” for his homemade rotgut and using it to acquire stolen horses (144). But the most completely sketched of Gursky pawns is Moses. As a graduate student, Moses turns down a job offered him by Bernard, but if he does better than his father, it is only in being snared by a more significant hunter. Early in the novel, Moses begins his morning with “a shot of Greysac Cognac, now yet another Gursky brand name,” and then begins ruminating on Solomon (10). Through his father’s acquaintance with the family, Moses becomes obsessed with the elder Gursky’s disappearance. Studying in England, he finds himself taken up by a mysterious, wealthy English Jew named Sir Hyman Kaplansky, who whispers to Moses several indefinite but highly suggestive parables about disguise and manipulation before himself disappearing in, of course, another flying accident. Moses continues to receive clues, anonymously or covertly, which drive him to track down and document the adventures of Solomon’s numerous afterlives, a glorious collection of revenges against notable anti-Semites and personal foes and interventions in the most definitive moments in global affairs.

Moses’ pursuit of evidence, his unwitting discharge of Solomon’s ghostly bidding, always coincides with his alcoholism. Kaplansky’s first teasing insight into his secret identity is concluded with an offer: “what would you say to a sherry?” (191). Later, Morrie Gursky, who is implicitly sympathetic to his oldest brother, coyly helps Moses to some necessary information, as well as to the contents of his liquor cabinet.

“What are you up to, Moses?”

Moses reached for the bottle.

“Don’t worry. It doesn’t stain. Just pour yourself another.” (213)

Morrie has already dissembled a concern for Moses’ apparent drinking problem. He actually begins the interview by offering “something to drink maybe?” Moses asks for coffee instead, and Morrie expresses relief. “You’re

not living up to your reputation. But I'm relieved to see that." Yet, as he tells his story, he invites Moses to "pour himself another" several times (209). Decades later, Moses is helped to discover Solomon in footage taken from press coverage of Watergate. Solomon leaves Moses a note, sportingly assuring him that "For the record, I didn't erase the tape" (313). At this point Moses is taking Antabuse to prevent drinking. Yet his reaction to the message is immediate: "When the waiter approached his table, Moses ordered a Macallan. A double. Neat" (313).³

And Moses, through all of this, is the scholar, the detective, the Servant of Truth. In *Tono-Bungay*, truth was the *alternative* to greed. George's scientific pursuits drew him away from monetary influence, rather than towards it, the austere products of his engineering standing aloof of his uncle's avarice. In *Gursky* there is no such separation. Curiosity is an appetite, like everything else, and like other appetites, it demands satisfaction. In the early scene, as he drinks his Greysac, Moses imagines that he

... might never have become enthralled with Solomon. The legendary Solomon. His bane, his spur. Instead he might have enjoyed a life of his own. A wife. Children. An honourable career. No, the booze would have got to him in any event. (11)

Feeding also features in Solomon's private revenges. In a luridly memorable scene, Sir Hyman Kaplansky hosts a seder for "friends" he has acquired in English high society, in fact a cherry-picking of aristocratic Nazi-appeasers and Judeophobes, one of whom makes the hilarious disclaimer that "Although I loathe anti-Semites, I do dislike Jews" (503). Kaplansky seats his guests before a "gleaming mound of beluga caviar" and "moist smoked salmon" but repeatedly delays letting them eat (507). He reads from T.S. Eliot's "Gerontion" with mock sympathy. Finally, as complaints of famishment become insistent, Kaplansky introduces the first course: matzoh, the bread of affliction. Disarmed by their ravenousness, guests discover only too late that Kaplansky's matzoh leaks blood when bitten into, and react with satisfying hysteria. This is only a few years after the Holocaust. Solomon's trap, baited with ostentatious offerings of food, springs a kind of inverted blood libel on the persecutors of his people.

It is when these gustative overtures feature in the rivalries *within* the Gursky family that they take on their most expansively historical significance. Bernard, the wolf of Ephraim's Aesopian illustration in the Arctic, is always eating, "nibbling cashews or sucking on a popsicle" (226). When a teenage Solomon, showing off by leaping into a pen of frightened horses, urges his brother to follow him with the promise "I'll buy you a beer,"

he is putting his grandfather's warning about Bernard directly into operation (352). The occasion out of which Ephraim, years earlier in the Arctic, made his lesson to Solomon was the setting of a trap. Applying honey to a knife mounted in the snow, Ephraim tells his grandson, "The wolf will come down later, start to lick the honey and slice his tongue to ribbons. Then the greedy fool will lick the blood off the blade until he bleeds to death" (38). And if Bernard is the wolf, Ephraim is teaching Solomon to be another animal. Ephraim is often seen with a raven. His name among the Netsilik, Tulugak, is the Inuktitut word for raven. Several of the alter egos Solomon uses after his disappearance play on the animal's name: Mr. Cuervo, Monsier Corbeau, Dr. Otto Raven, or Corvus Trust, the shadowy capital group which ultimately wrests control of McTavish from Bernard's son Lionel. The raven, inveterate trickster, always plays upon the appetites of others. In his house in England, Kaplansky finds Moses examining a piece of Inuit art. "Ah," Sir Hyman said, entering the library, "I see that you've been seduced by the deceitful raven" (191). He then relates a legend in which the raven lures a band of humans under an overhang and directs an avalanche onto their heads (191). And then, raven himself, he offers Moses a sherry.

It is this part of the novel, Ephraim and Solomon as the fusing of the indigenous Canadian raven/trickster figure with the Wandering Jew, which earns *Solomon Gursky Was Here* its frequent designation as magic realism.⁴ For my purpose, the important thing about these mythic borrowings is that they locate greed and transgression at a point of absolute origin, making them constitutive of history rather than mere periodic breaks, deviations, or the private mistakes of particular characters. In Kaplansky's story, the raven creates the world.

. . . he was dissatisfied as, at the time, the whole world was still dark. Inky black. The reason for this was an old man living in a house by the river. The old man had a box which contained a box which contained an infinite number of boxes, each nestled in a box slightly larger than itself until finally there was a box so small all it could contain was all the light in the universe. The raven was understandably resentful. Because of the darkness in the earth he kept bumping into things. He was slowed down in his pursuit of food and other fleshly pleasures and in his constant and notorious need to meddle and change things. And so, inevitably, he took it upon himself to steal the light of the universe from the old man. (494)

Through Ephraim in particular, the imperatives of manipulation and transgression embodied in the raven become inseparably bound up in Canadian history. From Victorian London, Ephraim panders his way into another founding myth, the Franklin Expedition. He is more or less the only

survivor, the rest of Franklin's men dying of lead poisoning from tinned food or of hypervitaminosis from eating the liver of a polar bear.⁵ Again, via the defeated spectre of Bert Smith's British Canada, the theme of contamination is raised, and we have the option of reading *Gursky* as a story of Canadian admixture, of a nation fortuitously impure. But to any such celebratory account we have to add the fact that Ephraim, the one crew member who is able to participate in the history which follows this seminal tragedy, survives only by allowing his shipmates to gorge themselves on poison, and by feeding himself from hidden stores, smuggled aboard the H.M.S. Erebus in secret.

Ephraim's story reiterates these themes of hunger and manipulation with every step he takes across the Canadian historical landscape. First, he persuades a Netsilik community to feed him and satisfy his sexual wants by converting them to an ad hoc version of Judaism, with himself as prophet and high priest. Later, he appears in Magog, Quebec, soliciting the religious dedication of the desperate Anglophone settlers of the Eastern Townships. The credulity of the villagers is directly ascribed to their physical hunger, the necessity of "eating cowslips and nettles, pig-weed, ground-nuts, and wild onions" (180). "Whatever them Millenarians is," one farmer comments after a lascivious look at one of Ephraim's female followers, "it's sure as shit a lot more fun than what we got" (7). Later still, incognito as the Reverend Ishmael Horn, Ephraim lures destitute European settlers to Canada with the promise of "milk and honey" and, less figuratively, "hot soup and freshly baked bread" in a scam for his own pecuniary gain, aided visually by a pet raven (83-84). Bert Smith's parents, fittingly enough, number among Ephraim's dupes.

In her benchmark study *Purity and Danger*, the anthropologist Mary Douglas proposes that the symbolic and ritual safeguards a culture erects against pollution are essential to its ethical stability.

The ideal order of society is guarded by dangers which threaten transgressors. These danger-beliefs are as much threats which one man uses to coerce another as dangers which he himself fears to incur by his own lapses from righteousness. They are a strong language of mutual exhortation. At this level the laws of nature are dragged in to sanction the moral code. . . . The whole universe is harnessed to men's attempts to force one another into good citizenship. Thus we find that certain moral values are upheld and certain social rules defined by beliefs in a dangerous contagion. (3)

There are, however, "social structures which rest on grave paradox or contradiction" (145-46). For instance, among the Mae Enga of New Guinea:

The men of the clan choose their wives from other clans. Thus they marry foreigners. The rule of clan exogamy is common enough. Whether it imports strain and difficulty into the marriage situation depends on how exclusive, localized and rivalrous are the intermarrying clans. In the Enga case they are not only foreigners but traditional enemies. (146-47)

This practice of importing wives from as far away as is practically feasible is the result of a series of prohibitions, designed to protect male purity from an anatomically construed “vulnerability to female influence” (147). But it is in constant conflict with another, more personal imperative towards “an intense competition for prestige,” with the members of different clans making exogamous marriage difficult to negotiate (147). This situation of untenable strain between cultural order and desire is a limited version of what *Gursky* alleges about Canada. For pure-wool Anglocentrists, he includes Jews on the Franklin Expedition, just as for Canadian Jews, he recounts cannibalism among the faithful.⁶ Even a more ethnically neutral sense of Canadian self, as polite, or even-tempered, or not greedy, becomes unavailable. None of the processes of societal definition seem to hold up.

Douglas thought of these crises in social regulation as relatively exceptional, probably because they were so destabilizing: “The left hand is fighting the right hand, as in the trickster myth” (157). *Gursky*, in which the trickster myth seems to be the general pattern of history, is closer to the ideas of more contemporary anthropologists like Elizabeth Povinelli, whose work questions past emphasis on the stability of cultural systems—albeit with a greater sense of ethical trauma at these changes, which despite their apparent inevitability, do remain legible as transgression. The loss of self experienced by the crew of the *Erebus* is both literal and excruciating. We last see their de facto leader, Lieutenant William Norton, “sobbing as strips of skin peeled off his legs” (436).

Adam Gopnik, in a commemorative notice of Richler’s death for *The New Yorker* in 2001, has it that:

. . . he was often grouped with the great generation of American Jewish writers, as a slightly lesser, northern version of Roth and Bellow and Malamud. But he really had nothing in common with those avid, world-devouring writers. If he belonged anywhere, it was to the train of acerbic English comic novelists whom he knew and admired during his long séjour in London. Evelyn Waugh was perhaps first among his idols, and Kingsley Amis’ “Lucky Jim” a sort of model. (30)

Sanctioned by an organ which could easily have taken a more possessive stance on Richler, I feel justified in comparing *Solomon Gursky Was Here* to one more English novel, this one by another, younger Amis. In *Money*, which

Martin Amis published in 1984, just five years before *Gursky*, a narrator named John Self is literally stung into a monologue on the state of consumption:

The wasp was dead. That sting was its last shot. Flies get dizzy spells and bees have booze problems. Robin redbreasts hit the deck with psychosomatic ulcers and cholesterol overload. In the alleys, dogs are coughing their hearts out on snout and dope. (246)⁷

Overconsumption, in other words, isn't just cultural. If the cities through which Self binges are an unmistakably Reagan-era New York and a specifically Thatcherite London, *Money's* versions of greed and indulgence nevertheless attach themselves to a fundamental nature. Like Richler's book, *Money* is all about susceptibility and manipulation. Self, a prospective film director and peculiarly nasty version of the modern consumer-as-bacchanalian, makes his way by appealing to everyone's more acquisitive instincts: investors, screenwriters, prostitutes, actors who are little different from prostitutes. And it is his own cravings which do Self in; the producer he thinks is footing his gargantuan liquor and sex bills has been robbing him from the start.

In the relationship between Amis' and Richler's books, we could begin to sketch a literary response to the political and economic climate of the 1980s, a carrying-over of the naturalization of greed and consumption in those discourses, with the proviso that in these two works, at least, that naturalization has largely negative implications. But the comparison with *Money* will in other ways throw *Gursky* into relief. In Amis' novel, the inevitability of the impulse does not quite imply that we inevitably act on it. After Self loses his fortune, he finds an unprecedented kind of peace: "I want money again but I feel better now that I haven't got any" (361). Some characters can even resist money when they have it, in a way which seems to have to do with class. In London, Self consults a writer with the unambiguous name of "Martin Amis," whose haughtily stoic appearance in the book perfectly predicts the controversial role of high-culture jeremiah that the real-life Amis has taken on since its writing.⁸ "This Martin Amis, he lives like a student," Self tells us (220). When Self presses him on his monastic habits, Amis says, "I really don't want to join it, the whole money conspiracy" (243).

Appetite, then, becomes a kind of incontinence, something one shouldn't put oneself in the position of being able to gratify. This allows for a straightforwardly ethical stance: the fact of desire may be inevitable, but *giving in* too much to it is condemnable and disgusting. Amis, in perfect

contrast with Wells, is making an argument *for* culture, with overdraft limits and the public school aitch standing in for the injunctions against gender contact that Douglas describes in New Guinea. *Money* could itself be read as this kind of injunction: “The distance between author and narrator corresponds to the degree to which the author finds the narrator wicked, deluded, pitiful, or ridiculous,” Amis tells Self in a confrontationally metafictional passage: “This creates an appetite for punishment” (229).

But in *Gursky*, there is no question of a “return” to past standards. However much this may confirm a normally pleasing Richlerian register—and certainly, there is much that is pleasing in Ephraim and Solomon, unflappable, irresistible characters, characters who are unhypocritical about what they want and who will play mercilessly with anyone less candid—it is nevertheless crucial to this novel that it is morally disturbed, and that its vision of history, including Canadian history, is a perpetuation of moral disturbance. In *Gursky*’s final scene, as Moses Berger watches a raven disappearing into the sun, he realizes how completely he has been baited: “It finally struck him that he wasn’t the angler but the salmon. A teasing, gleeful Solomon casting the flies over his head” (550). The ambivalence of Moses’ position is the ambivalence of the novel; impressively, even hilariously, we have been duped and led to war against our own rules from the beginning.

NOTES

- 1 Ponderevo’s inept French is supposed to add to the ridiculousness of his proposal. “Stern” and “Smoor” should be the wine regions Sauternes and Saumur. “Oh fay” indicates “Au fait.” See Wells 406n.
- 2 This logic of separation sometimes recurs in explanations of kashrut at the systemic level. Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, glossing the thirteenth-century Spanish rabbi Bahya ben Asher, suggests that “One of the main reasons God commanded the dietary laws was to distinguish the Jews, God’s chosen people, from all the other nations of the world” (119).
- 3 Sander Gilman observes how Antabuse is itself, like recent innovations in stomach-stapling surgery, a very literal ritual of exclusion: “Such procedures sound much like those of Disulfiram (Antabuse), a drug prescribed to alcoholics that makes them nauseous and likely to vomit when they drink. The fat boy whose stomach has been reduced in size suffers an intense bout of nausea” (232). If, in Gilman’s description, these excisions bear a disturbing hint of Foucaultian discipline, their failure in Moses’ case is less than a relief.
- 4 See, for instance, Richard Todd’s chapter in the 1995 collection *Magical Realism: Theory, History, and Community*.
- 5 Besides lead and vitamin A poisoning, we could say something of cannibalism. John Rae, the Scottish doctor and explorer who conducted the first extensive search for Franklin, returned to Admiralty authorities with distressing (if perhaps unsurprising) accounts from the Inuit of how the sailors had devoured their dead. The report met with considerable

- indignation, with the most authoritative rebuttal coming from Charles Dickens in his journal *Household Words* (361). The arctic location of this scandal and the moralistic backlash against it, make for an almost typological antecedence to Isaac's crimes.
- 6 A more extensive and focused application of Douglas' anthropological lens to Kashrut law can be found in Howard Eilberg-Schwartz's *The Savage in Judaism*.
 - 7 To a considerable extent, John Self is a reprise of Roger Micheldene, the titular protagonist of Amis Sr.'s 1963 novel *One Fat Englishman*. I choose the later character here out of a desire to synthesize an attitude towards greed and gluttony particular to the moment of the 1980s.
 - 8 Recent examples are Amis' comments on the British celebrity author Katie Price in Stephen Adams' article "Jordan is just 'two bags of silicone' says Martin Amis."

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Three Brats, One Hero

Arlene Alda; Lisa Desimini, illus.

Lulu's Piano Lesson. Tundra \$18.99

Dirk McLean; France Brassard, illus.

Curtain Up! Tundra \$19.99

Caroline Merola

A Night on the Town. Tundra \$17.99

Monica Kulling; Bill Slavin, illus.

All Aboard!: Elijah McCoy's Steam Engine. Tundra \$19.99

Reviewed by Hilary Turner

Digging into a new stack of picture books from Tundra is usually a delight. This widely respected publisher of books for children—the oldest in continuous existence in Canada—has earned a reputation for innovation and excellence. But the current batch, with one exception, seems not quite up to Tundra's usual standard.

Lulu's Piano Lesson by Arlene Alda and illustrator Lisa Desimini is a bright, cute, visually appealing book that somehow fails to make its mark. The concept is simple: Lulu attends her piano lesson and then, for the ensuing week, finds excuses not to practise. Instead, she is captivated by the sounds she hears while at play—the squeak of a swing, the ring-ring of her bicycle bell, and so on—all of them signs of her natural ear for music. In the end, her very sympathetic piano teacher captures this innate aptitude and induces Lulu to channel it into some work at the keyboard. But two things bother me. Lulu's mother seems strangely unconcerned by her daughter's insouciance. Is she

not aware that piano lessons cost money? Does she simply *know* that everything will turn out all right? Secondly, the repetition here (On Monday, On Tuesday, and so on) exemplifies a familiar narrative device enjoyed by very young children. But surely those who are old enough to take piano lessons have come to appreciate a more sophisticated approach? Alda and Desimini, who previously collaborated on the popular *Iris has a Virus*, are talented artists who have this time forgotten to define their audience.

On a similar theme, *Curtain Up!* by Dirk McLean and France Brassard chronicles the mounting of a musical stage production from auditions to opening night. The central character, Amaya, is also the star of the show, and we follow her as she learns her lines, grows comfortable with the stage and set, and copes with her jitters. Brassard's watercolour illustrations are beautiful and detailed, and they provide a superb visual introduction to stagecraft, costuming, set design, and all the activities that come together in a theatrical production. Yet apart from Amaya's anxiety about forgetting her lines, the narrative here is oddly detached, and without tension. Nothing goes wrong, the applause is enthusiastic, and the critics are enchanted. But even a textbook case of how to put on a play should make some room for comedy, and maybe even a little for the struggle and frustration that are a natural part of learning to do a thing well. The very reverse of the oblivious Lulu, Amaya is just too good to be true.

Young Martha, the protagonist of *A Night on the Town* by Caroline Merola, is an odd child in an ever odder story. While waiting for the Tooth Fairy one dark summer night, she is paid a visit by a large blue creature with horns. Pickles McPhee is an escapee from the forest in pursuit of adventure. In her nightgown and slippers, Martha leads her new friend on a wild caper that includes the park, the pool, and a candy store, closed and locked for the night. Prompted by Martha, Pickles smashes the door, and the two commence a midnight feast that is eventually interrupted by the police—who are understandably confounded by the sight of a large blue burglar, species unknown. The book is all in good fun, and the illustrations, bright and cartoon-like, contribute to the feeling of giddy exuberance. Still, the central event of the story is a break-and-enter. The dénouement, in which Pickles is gently escorted back to her loving family, and in which Martha concludes that their night of mayhem “had been worth it all,” seems ethically hasty. Without wishing to return to the moral-on-every-page didacticism of Maria Edgeworth or Sarah Trimmer, I was left a little breathless by the absence of any poetic justice whatsoever.

In telling the story of the legendary inventor Elijah McCoy, Monica Kulling in *All Aboard!* creates a nearly perfect balance of plot, character development, and an age-appropriate lesson in perseverance. Young Elijah, the child of African-American slaves who came to Canada by the Underground Railway, is initially the victim (but later the inheritor) of the North American dream of success achieved through individual merit. With a gift for mechanics and a dearly bought British education, Elijah seeks work as an engineer in 1866 in Michigan. To his dismay, and on account of his race, he is grudgingly offered the menial position of “ashcat” on the Michigan Central Railroad. As he toils away in the engine room, stoking the boilers and oiling the moving parts,

he is inspired with the idea of a self-oiling engine. Interestingly, the resulting McCoy oil cup, the original “real McCoy,” was merely the precursor to fifty-seven patents that Elijah filed in his lifetime. *All Aboard!* is a straightforward, unadorned kind of narrative. Even Bill Slavin’s capable (and sometimes amusing) illustrations sustain the focus on the protagonist’s drive to overcome his disadvantages, to employ his gifts, and to contribute something useful to his society. Clever, honest, and workmanlike, this is a book that does justice to its subject without frills and furbelows.

Unleash the Hound and Look

Madhur Anand and Adam Dickinson, eds.

Regreen: New Canadian Ecological Poetry. Your Scrivener \$18.00

Liz Kotz

Words to Be Looked at: Language in 1960s Art. MIT P \$17.95

Sina Queyras

Unleashed. BookThug \$20.00

Reviewed by Travis V. Mason

What do an anthology of Canadian ecopoetry, a collection of blog posts, and a study of language in 1960s (New York) have in common? How can these three books—*Regreen: New Canadian Ecological Poetry*, *Unleashed*, and *Words to Be Looked at: Language in 1960s Art*—inhabit the same review space? Perhaps the way a river, a salmon, and an eagle occupy the same geographic space, which is to say carefully and essentially? The energy that runs through each of these texts, the essence that enables a reviewer to begin the project of thinking of such disparate works as somehow linked, is language. Language as medium for communicating; language as tool for constructing meaning; language as object detached from contextual meaning. For Sina Queyras, aka Lemon Hound (which is also the name of her blog and her second book of poetry),

language inheres as writing, and “writing is thinking, not just assembling.” Queyras follows: “it is the matter of thinking that I worry about most in contemporary writing.” The blog, as a relatively new medium, simultaneously seduces with the freedom to publish whatever whenever and troubles for its tendency to move participants/practitioners away from “stillness of mind” toward dispersive thinking. Still, the threat of becoming distracted by blogging and growing uncomfortable “with the practice of instant publication” is not enough to keep Queyras away from Lemon Hound.

The book, published by Book Thug’s Department of Critical Thought, covers blog posts from 2005 to the end of 2008. The variety of topics—interviews with poets, reports on art exhibits, discussions of poets/poems—indicates Queyras’ sharp, deeply intelligent, inquisitive, and open mind. Queyras asks questions in ways that elicit thoughtful responses, if not answers, from herself and from commenters (in the transition from cyberspace to printed page, comments have been left out of the book, save for six pages at the end). The final entry encapsulates much of what Queyras brings to contemporary poetics, both academic and public (which sometimes, but not always, overlap), and what makes her, to my mind, a key figure for discussing such different works as *Regreen* and *Words to Be Looked at*: love of language and appreciation for multiple poetics vie with concern for, on the one hand, dismissive claims of experimental poetry’s inaccessibility and, on the other hand, an eroding attention to narrative. Or, as Queyras puts it, “Is it terribly old fashioned of me to want poetry to be about something? To go somewhere?”

The art, including poetry, that Liz Kotz studies, deploys language in ways that defy arrival at any meaningful linguistic place: words are to be looked at as objects, not to be read as linguistic gesture. This goes for the various “text scores” for John Cage’s

4’33”, his infamous work of silence, which Kotz posits as driving the turn to language, as well as influencing avant-garde Fluxus poetry and text-based photography. Tracing this trajectory, Kotz provides a thoroughly researched historicity largely missing from criticism that dismisses much experimental art, in large part by emphasizing the role technology—typewriters, magnetic tape-recording equipment—played in encouraging experiments skeptical of the confident determinacy of language. Words took on materiality as things that needn’t point toward other things. Vito Acconci explains his “total refusal of language’s referential and associational dimensions”: “It started to *seem* impossible to use on the page a word like ‘tree,’ a word like ‘chair,’ because this referred to another space, a space off the page.” The contradiction—refusing referentiality by avoiding words that refer to another space, thus reaffirming referentiality—figures less prominently in Kotz’s argument than it might have. The contradiction implies that “maybe language poetry, whatever or however one might try to contain that, is a . . . place of wild, a place of things not immediately named, a place of remaining open,” which is how Queyras thinks through the question of nature poetry in a time of the Internet and social networking.

Queyras alludes to Don McKay’s notion that “poetry comes from a place of wild seeing,” evoking language’s attempt, via poetry and metaphor, to reside in wilderness, “that placeless place beyond the mind’s appropriations” as McKay puts it in *Vis à Vis: Field Notes on Poetry & Wilderness*, without possessing it. In the excerpt selected for *Regreen*, McKay writes that “wilderness” is “[s]o overwritten it should probably be granted a reprieve from definition;” “Write it down,” he suggests; “Cross it out.” This contrarian impetus exemplifies co-editor Adam Dickinson’s claim that “the eco-poem attends to the world-building (and

world-effacing) capacities of language as well as to the natural and social worlds in which the poem is situated.” The poems Dickinson and Madhur Anand choose to explore ecological transformations, how poets “re-imagine spaces in the act of restoring their diversity,” demonstrate a turn to language for myriad reasons and with varying results. In the first section, lyric presides, as it is wont to do, over poetic engagements with the phenomenal world—“another space”—while verse less comfortable with lyric traditions walks in the second section among built environments to negotiate psychosocial geometries, traffic jams, and tailing ponds. The third section resembles an ecology that Kotz and Queyras would appreciate as avant-garde, a place where “river,” “salmon,” and “eagle” point away from natural space and indicate moments of language referring to the arbitrariness of meaning. Nothing in *Regreen* quite disavows linguistic meaning the way the artwork Kotz looks at does: even a. rawlings’ pronoun-dominant “Signs of Whom,” that begins

I you he she they we
her your our my her his their
us them her him you me
myself ourselves ours mine
yourself yours yourselves
himself herself themselves
hers theirs

relies upon linguistic meaning—implied and discrete—to produce emotional response and narrative momentum. It helps to read this poem aloud, preferably to an audience, an indication that these words are meant to be read (and heard) and not to be just looked at (and seen). As long as words continue to invite discussion—on blogs, in scholarly journals, amongst a reading public—the difference might be moot.



Recent Western Writing

Tammy Armstrong

Pye-Dogs. Oberon \$19.95

Jerry Auld

Hooker & Brown. Brindle & Glass \$19.95

Susan Dobbie

River of Gold. Ronsdale \$19.95

Al Rempel

Understories. Caitlin \$16.95

Reviewed by Nicholas Bradley

Hooker & Brown, Jerry Auld’s first novel, describes the alpine adventures of a young man on the brink of graduate school. He skirts that precipice, but finds himself in equally dangerous circumstances as part of a trail crew in the Canadian Rockies. The danger is often physical—Auld writes powerfully about climbing’s fine line between success and dire failure—but also textual. The protagonist combs the writings of colonial explorers and early mountaineers for information about two legendary peaks, Hooker and Brown, thus unravelling a historical mystery. Auld is strong on the technical aspects of mountaineering and on fraught relationships among climbers. The high mountains are finely evoked. Yet the novel’s formulaic narrative and romantic subplots render it melodramatic at times. And no less than Earle Birney’s “David,” *Hooker & Brown* presents the mountains as a site in which men are tested and forced to confront grim reality. (As indeed they, and women, sometimes are; but the writer must find a way to avoid overly familiar terrain.) The novel is nonetheless often enjoyable, a good book for the backpack—although Auld’s high-performance climbers would leave it at home to save weight.

One of my favourite poems in *Understories*, Al Rempel’s first collection, offers a different understanding of another forbidding landscape. In “Saskatchewan Glacier,” walkers “lose a sense of scale and the push of time” as they approach, but do

not reach, the glacier. The poem begins with local lore: “they say there’s an old army jeep / trapped under the ice somewhere . . . and one day / water will leak from the cracked dash / and drip free from the gas gauge.” Yet glacier and jeep are inaccessible; Rempel uses their remoteness to suggest the difficulty of apprehending the size and age of geological formations. At a glacial lake, according to the speaker, “everything, even the water, looks old; / we trace our fingers in the silty clay / writing to ourselves about how close we got.” In “At the Other End of the Tide,” the next poem, an avalanche of images illustrates what “the Rockies” “shru[g] off”: “sheets of mica / thin as frost on a window pane,” “mountaineers by the jeep-full,” “bad luck,” “stories of grizzlies,” “the cold.” Rempel’s comic juxtaposition of geological and glaciological terms (till, eskers, moraines, trilobites) with descriptions of human “flotsam” (“small VWs, rattling loose guitars and tambourines,” “plastic wrappers,” “rented RVs”) leaven the poem’s stern claim that the mountains are utterly impassive. Many of the other poems in the volume depict aspects of life in Prince George. *Understories* is published by Caitlin Press, which has developed quite an interesting list of poets based in north-central British Columbia, including Ken Belford, Rob Budde, Barry McKinnon, and Gillian Wigmore. I was deaf to the music of some of Rempel’s poetry, but *Understories* at its best demonstrates the poet’s talent for listening closely to the surrounding world.

In Tammy Armstrong’s *Pye-Dogs*, the coastal landscapes of BC’s Sunshine Coast are the setting for conflict between locals (striking millworkers, longtime residents) and newcomers (environmentalists, commune-dwellers, tree-spikers). The tensions that arise as a result of competing understandings of place—the utopian impulse disrupts the established patterns of life in the resource-industry community—are familiar to readers of Jack Hodgins’

novels of Vancouver Island or Bill Gaston’s *Sointula*. The island on which *Pye-Dogs* takes place is accessible only by ferry, that fact of life on the coast (adored by visitors, reviled by locals) that lends itself so well to metaphor. Ferries allow passage between worlds: between the living and the dead, here and there, centre and margin, familiar and strange, home and away. The novel depicts the distances between such worlds, as well as it attempts to span them. Ferry trips punctuate the novel’s narrative; arrivals and departures mark the rhythm of island life:

Rye Bob sat for some moments watching the marina: sails billowed, the boats shuttled in and out of the harbour where the ferry crew, in their orange vests, smoked down at the dock and waited for the 40-car Queen of Capilano to return over the sun-capped Strait. It was a clear day. The mainland was a pachyderm of green, peaked with snow still in places. The glaciers would keep all summer, merely softening, as the days grew warmer.

Despite the idyllic setting, however, Armstrong’s island is an unhappy, claustrophobic place, in which class divisions and family tensions make coexistence difficult. Armstrong is a careful observer of riven places and people, but her characters are in fact tightly linked by sadness and desperation.

Susan Dobbie’s *River of Gold* is set during the Fraser River gold rush of the early 1860s; the novel is a sequel to *When Eagles Call* (published by Ronsdale in 2003). Some versions of the history are well known: Pierre Berton’s *Klondike* (1958) includes accounts of the search for gold in the Fraser Canyon, and this is Robert Service territory, too. Dobbie’s novel offers a revision of conventional accounts, however, focusing on the confluence in the Cariboo of people of different origins. Colonial British Columbia is portrayed as a highly multicultural world, constituted by Scots, Californians, Nlaka’pamux, Sto:lo, Chinese,

French-Canadian voyageurs, African Americans; the narrator is Hawaiian. The novel is convincingly researched, but at times the dialogue bears a heavy expository burden. *River of Gold* celebrates the Cariboo's rich history, but it also contains an elegiac dimension:

Geography has become the topic of all conversation. There's talk of the great watershed dividing the Cariboo, of gold-bearing rivers flowing into a great unnamed lake. Unknown rivers and streams are taking miners' names. The natives would argue that point. For thousands of years they've had names for them. But now places receive English names, as miners stake claims, hack their way through the wilderness, slash trees and build themselves log cabins.

The arrival of newcomers meant profound changes to the ways of life of the original inhabitants. This is one of the West's oldest and saddest stories, told again and again.

A Woman's Work is Never Done

Brenda Austin-Smith and George Melnyk, eds.

The Gendered Screen: Canadian Women Filmmakers. Wilfrid Laurier UP \$32.95

Reviewed by Liz Czach

The Gendered Screen: Canadian Women Filmmakers is an important contribution to Canadian film studies, ensuring the centrality and significance of Canadian women's contribution to filmmaking. This new collection of essays tackles the intersections of film authorship, gender, and nation, and while these terms may be undergoing challenges as organizing principles for the study of film, as the editors note in their introduction, they "had not lost their troublesome fascination for us as teachers and scholars of film." The editors refrain, however, from employing any rigid

definitions, encouraging the debates and tensions that arise from the various usages of these potentially vexing terms to shape the anthology. A wide range of filmmakers, regions, and filmmaking practices is covered, and this expansiveness is easily the book's greatest strength.

The Gendered Screen is organized into three sections: the first, "Feminist/Feminine Binaries and the Body Politic," features an essay each on four different directors (Andrea Dorfman, Lynne Stopkewich, Anne Wheeler, and Joyce Wieland) from different regions in Canada; the second section, "Queer Nation and Popular Culture," as the section heading suggests, deals with filmmakers whose queer identity shapes their filmmaking practice, including two of Canada's best known feminist filmmakers, Léa Pool and Patricia Rozema; and the final section, "Transiting Nationality and the Battlefield of Otherness," delves into work of Aboriginal and minority filmmakers including Alanis Obomsawin, Loretta Todd, Christine Welsh, Mina Shum, and Deepa Mehta. *The Gendered Screen* thus performs a twofold function, devoting attention to emerging or under-explored filmmakers while furthering the inquiry into some of Canada's key female auteurs.

The majority of the essays in the volume take an auteurist approach to the examination of individual Canadian women filmmakers, and this tactic varies in success. *The Gendered Screen* is strongest when devoting attention to emerging or under-explored filmmakers. For example, Andrew Burke's article on the films of Andrea Dorfman is exemplary in focusing on a little analyzed filmmaker and employing a well-chosen prism through which to analyze her work—the idea of craft. Likewise, Shana McGuire and Darell Varga's essay on the documentary work of Sylvia Hamilton draws attention to the important work she has done in documenting Black Canadian history. Jean Bruce's essay "The Art of

Making Do: Queer Canadian Girls Make Movies” similarly approaches the work of queer video artists Dara Gellman, Thirza Cuthand, and Dana Inkster to underscore how their low-budget aesthetics can be productively linked to what de Certeau called the “art of making do.” These essays bring much-needed attention to filmmakers who have previously garnered little scholarly discourse. Correspondingly, essays that deal with filmmakers with smaller bodies of work are often more satisfyingly in-depth, such as Brenda Austin-Smith’s focus on the transnationalism and hybridity in the films of Mina Shum or Lee Parpart’s analysis of the feminist adaptation in the films of Lynne Stopkewich.

Given the small corpus of monographs and edited collections devoted to Canadian women’s filmmaking, it is understandable that *The Gendered Screen* sometimes sacrifices depth for breadth. Thus while some of the essays provide an excellent overview of a filmmaker’s work, this expansiveness occasionally comes at the expense of deeper analysis. Directors with lengthier filmographies, such as Anne Wheeler, Patricia Rozema, Léa Pool, or Deepa Mehta, are thus occasionally disadvantaged as authors attempt to account for an entire oeuvre, moving quickly through a large corpus of films. This isn’t necessarily a failing of the anthology but an indication of the impulse of some scholarship on Canadian women filmmakers, that is, to cover as much ground as possible because so little work has been done. Jerry White’s article “Les Québécoises” is indicative of this direction as he discusses the work of Denise Filiatrault, Manon Briand, Catharine Martin, and Lucie Lambert amongst others. This overview is impressively comprehensive given that few of these directors have had any significant scholarship devoted to them in French, let alone in English, but it does forfeit more sustained critique.

As the editors of the volume note, “No

collection such as this can be complete or comprehensive.” And while they acknowledge the inability to be comprehensive, this is an ambitious volume that covers a lot of ground. Many of the essays function as excellent introductions to a filmmaker’s work and are easily adaptable to course curricula while also yielding some new insights and approaches to Canadian women’s cinema.

Writing about Death

David Bergen

The Matter with Morris. HarperCollins \$29.99

Bonnie Burnard

Suddenly. HarperCollins \$34.99

Reviewed by Adrienne Kertzer

David Bergen’s *The Matter with Morris* begins with an epigraph from Saul Bellow’s *Herzog*, one of the many ways Bergen directs the reader to imagine his protagonist, Morris Schutt, as a Canadian, non-Jewish *Herzog*. Like Bellow’s protagonist *Herzog*, Morris is a professional writer. However, after his son Martin dies in Afghanistan, Morris can no longer write the kind of witty autobiographical newspaper columns that charmed his readers and alienated his family. On an enforced leave, he liquidates his investments, and cancels his cell phone, credit cards, and e-mail. Enraged by the circumstances of his son’s death, including his role in provoking his son’s enlistment, he embarks on a philosophical quest to learn how to live justly. He thinks that if he understands Socrates and the bigger questions, “he might not be so flummoxed by his own littleness.” One of the many books he consults is Bellow’s *Herzog* whose protagonist asks similar questions and “in the midst of his madness . . . [writes] unsent letters full of playful and searing intellect to people both dead and alive.”

In contrast to *Herzog*, whose quest is driven by his wife’s infidelity, Morris’ private grief is framed by political events:

a consequence of the American invasion of Afghanistan and Canada's willingness to send soldiers to that country. Bergen emphasizes the public context for Morris' mourning when Morris, unlike Herzog, actually mails the letters that he writes. One of his letters addressed to the prime minister leads to an RCMP investigation. Herzog has trouble explaining to police why he is carrying his father's loaded gun; in contrast, Morris, a self-declared pacifist, possesses a gun because he has stolen it from an American woman in an attempt to keep her from using it. Bergen's ironic treatment of Morris' dilemma in imagining how he will explain his possession of the gun to the RCMP extends to his satire of Morris' beliefs about Jewish identity. Morris doesn't just admire Jewish novelists; he repeatedly wishes he were Jewish, because he is convinced that if he were, he would know better how to respond to Martin's death. Whenever Morris meets someone whose approach to suffering he admires, he is likely to ask, "Are you Jewish?" Rarely does anyone answer in the affirmative, and he is frequently disappointed when the Jewish men he meets do not match his preconception about what Jewish men are like. How to respond best to suffering is also highlighted in the novel's ending when Morris, like Herzog, decides to stop writing letters. Planning the apology that will be the subject of his first column, Morris imagines that he will apologize "to the writers [such as Bellow] he had stolen from." He then quotes the passage from *Herzog* in which Herzog critiques the advocacy and praise of suffering. The final pages of the novel depict Morris at a Remembrance Day ceremony as his father, who can no longer remember very much, sings Leonard Cohen's "Everybody Knows." It's not clear if Morris' father can understand the lyrics, but the music consoles him.

Bonnie Burnard's *Suddenly* looks at contemporary suffering and death in a different

context. Her novel examines the reactions of "standard-issue, middle-aged women," Sandra and her two best friends, when Sandra is diagnosed with breast cancer. The novel begins in 2000 just after Sandra has found the "hard little bastard bullet" but before she has told anyone or even had time to write in her journal about this discovery. It then moves to 2004, during the days of her dying when one of the few activities she and her two closest friends are still capable of is to read brief passages from the journals she has kept. The novel concludes little more than a year later, just after Jack, her widowed husband, instructs one of her friends to review the journals and decide whether Sandra's daughters should have them. Historical events are not absent, but they are secondary to the interpersonal relationships and events that dominate Sandra's life: 9/11 is the day that she learned that her breast cancer had spread; the Vietnam war is the event that leads one female friend's partner to abandon her; and the invasion of Kuwait, a minor part of the journal entry that Jack reads in a desperate attempt to communicate with his comatose wife.

In contrast to the objections Morris Schutt's family members raise about his willingness to turn their private experiences into matters of public knowledge, Sandra's friends, Jude and Colleen, even when they disagree with Sandra's account of events, take comfort in the journals. Because friendship is the accumulation of knowledge by the other, death represents the loss of that knowledge and threatens the self's survival: "how can she survive now, without this friend who knows her as well as she knows herself?" Both friends are uncertain about what Sandra would like them to do with the journals; one later recalls Sandra's use of the conditional, "I guess if I don't want them read, I could tell you to take them with you today." The journals serve as entries into the complex relationship of the three women, the men in their lives, and their children.

In *The Matter with Morris*, Bergen's subject is a father's response to his son's death; the reactions of his children, his wife, and his would-be mistress, who is grieving the loss of her son in Iraq, are all provided from Morris' perspective. As the title indicates, what is the matter *is* the matter with Morris. In contrast, in *Suddenly*, the representation of dying necessitates multiple perspectives. A typical chapter begins with Sandra examining her journal for its description of a print she bought during a trip to Mexico. It then shifts to Colleen's longing to discuss with her dying friend (and sister-in-law) her husband's confession of his infidelity, a desire that leads Colleen to recall her own memories of that confession, and then, following the question she asks Sandra, a determination on Sandra's part to remind Colleen of some instance of her husband's kindness. But Sandra, distracted by thinking of her brother's kindness to her, suddenly desires to see the Mexican print—the last time she leaves her bedroom—and never gets to talk to Colleen about her husband's kindness. What remains is what she has written in the journals and her friends' recognition that her writing had made “three unlikely lives . . . complementary, somehow, in the telling.”

Voicing Constraint

George Bowering

My Darling Nellie Grey. Talonbooks \$39.95

Reviewed by Ian Rae

The prolific poet and novelist George Bowering is now in his seventies and one might expect him to slow the fast pace of publication he has maintained for half a century. Indeed, Canada's inaugural Poet Laureate could rest on his retired laurels and let the critical tributes and surveys roll in, such as the volume 71+ for *GB: An Anthology for George Bowering on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday* and the 2010

special issue of *Open Letter* devoted to his work. However, Bowering continues to defy the restrictive quality of such retrospective appraisals by publishing several books a year and the 2010 poetry collection *My Darling Nellie Grey* is one of his most ambitious publications to date.

My Darling Nellie Grey arose from Bowering's decision to write at least one poem for every day of 2006. Bowering also planned these poems as sequences, each with its own set of constraints—some formal (stanza lengths and recurring motifs), some thematic (homages to poets and painters), some slack (the “I Remember” device). Bowering's interest in these compositional “baffles” can be traced back to his serial poems from the late 1960s and thus predates the more recent fascination with constraint-based writing in Canada. However, Bowering's introduction also tries to align his baffles with the theoretical constraints of Oulipo and its acolytes. The comparison is awkward because Bowering's idiomatic expression, even within formal constraints, does not resemble the hypothetical language of the Oulipo writers, who inhibit idiomatic expression through arbitrary constraints, such as omitting the letter “e.” Bowering hints at this discrepancy when he recalls his discovery in 1960 of Queneau's *Exercices in Style* (1947; trans. 1958) and notes that “[a]lthough my poetry at the time was doggedly faithful to the notion that writing verse was a record of speaking verse, I was exhilarated by this [Oulipian] *texte*.” Bowering's growing interest in a constraint-based poetics counteracts the insistence on orality and the open-endedness that Bowering learned from the Black Mountain poets; it also goes against the ludic postmodernism that Bowering professed in the 1970s. Yet the idea of a rule-governed aesthetic paired with the speaking voice accords with Bowering's longstanding interest in Romanticism, which Peter Quartermain has argued is typical of the

Tish writers in general. Coleridge, for example, says that the “spirit of poetry, like all other living powers, must of necessity circumscribe itself by rules, were it only to unite power with beauty. It must embody in order to reveal itself; but a living body is of necessity an organized one—and what is organization, but the connection of parts to a whole, so that each part is at once end and means!” There is certainly a lingering Romanticism in the combination of voice and constraint in *My Darling Nellie Grey*, but Bowering has spent much of his career resisting the impulse to unite power with beauty in a stable and unified manner. Hence, Bowering’s condemnation of the American war machine has never been as relentless as it is in “Fulgencio” from *My Darling Nellie Grey*.

Rather than trying to fit Bowering’s talents and contradictions into an Oulipian mold, I would argue that the interplay of voice and constraint in *My Darling Nellie Grey* highlights a fundamental tension in Bowering’s poetics. Bowering theorizes this tension as early as a 1962 essay he submitted for R.J. Baker’s English 439 class at UBC. This essay, “The Skeleton of Classical Prosody,” can be found in the national archives in Ottawa (1st Accession, Box 32, Folio 1). In this paper, Bowering argues that prosody up to the nineteenth century sought to apply universal laws of prosody to individual speech patterns. This critical project struggled with poems and passages that were celebrated as poetry even though they broke the rules of prosody. For Bowering, following Ezra Pound, this contradiction is a clue to the underlying fault of classical prosody: namely, the belief that poetry should arise from abstract principles, not from the particularities of individual speech patterns. Hence the modern poets viewed the irregularities of classical prosody as keys to the underlying force of poetry (in contrast to rote versification). From 1962 onward, the test of poetry for Bowering

would be whether the poem sounded as if its music arose from the cadences of his speaking voice. Yet, having found his voice in his lyrics of the 1960s, Bowering immediately began devising abstract constraints to replace the old, canonical strictures. *My Darling Nellie Grey* is the longest and one of the best examples of this career-long project.

The Daring Wager

Di Brandt and Barbara Godard, eds.

Wider Boundaries of Daring: The Modernist Impulse in Canadian Women’s Poetry. Wilfrid Laurier UP \$42.95

Erin Moure; Smaro Kamboureli, ed.

My Beloved Wager: Essays from a Writing Practice. NeWest \$24.95

Reviewed by Linda Quirk

Wider Boundaries of Daring is an important new book which reimagines literary modernism in Canada—an overdue historical revision which responds to calls issued by David Arnason in 1983, by Barbara Godard in 1984, and by Carole Gerson in 1992. Challenging prevalent masculinist genealogies, which tend to position F.R. Scott’s “The Canadian Authors Meet” as “the birth announcement of Canadian modernism” (in which “T.S. Eliot’s daunting women ‘talking of Michelangelo’ are reduced . . . to ‘twittering’ Miss Crotchets”), this collection of essays foregrounds the leadership of Dorothy Livesay, P.K. Page, Phyllis Webb, Miriam Waddington, Anne Marriott, Margaret Avison, Elizabeth Brewster, Anne Wilkinson, Jay Macpherson, and Elizabeth Smart. What is offered is “a corrective to the current telling of Canada’s literary history by highlighting the achievement and legacy of our best modernist women poets, not ‘alone’ but ‘together,’ not as solitary and marginal receivers of modernist influence but as important makers of it, consciously engaging in a collective, revisionary, ‘new’ cultural project.”

In her introduction, Di Brandt makes a clear and compelling case for the bold revision that this book proposes. The sixteen essays that follow explore a range of interrelated topics from Christine Kim's revisionist study of the role of small magazines in developing Canadian modernism to Candida Rifkind's examination of Miriam Waddington's largely overlooked critical writing, and from Anne Quéma's study of Elizabeth Smart's passionate and sublime modernism to Ann Martin's exploration of the generational influence of Florence Randal Livesay's life and work on the career of her daughter (Dorothy Livesay). Together, the essays in this collection reveal that these women were not passive participants in modernism, nor were they the followers of male leaders; among other things, they did not subscribe to "the masculinist model of aestheticism divorced from the challenges and the obligations of personal life." They were prolific and influential writers who engaged deeply with a range of modernist concerns: "the interrogation of subjectivity in the domestic and public arenas; new definitions of sociality and the implications of new media on the local, national, and transnational level; and experimental mythopoetic, surreal, 'decadent,' imagist, and what we would now call feminist and ecopoetic approaches to language and creative expression."

Echoing these modernist pioneers, award-winning contemporary poet and accomplished translator Erin Moure asserts that "writing is always and forever a social practice," and she imagines a world in which "a citizen, like a poet, is one who works through and against received forms." Moure's *My Beloved Wager* is a collection of essays in which "essay" is "the fraught terrain of a practice, an *essai* or *try* articulated from inside the work of poetry" and where her work as a translator contributes significantly to the insights that she offers into reading practice, writing practice, and the

functioning of language. This is a varied collection, filled with thoughtful meditations, wry humour, and complex theory. Deeply personal, unruly, unapologetic, Moure is unafraid of the toughest of the tough questions about art, about representation, about gender, and about the impossibility of denying the terms of the authorized discourse. Suggesting that mainstream English Canadian readers find her work "difficult and strange," Moure wryly characterizes it as "hi-toned obscurantist lesbo smut" and explains that she is "working on poetic form, on what the brain can understand emotionally from the poem as a whole (the macro level) even when in individual sentences (the micro level) semantic value is missing—there is no apparent sense."

In her extended meditation on poetic practice—set apart from academic discourses on cultural product—Moure treats a writer's *work* not as "finished product," but as a verb, exploring the ways that words touch each other and the sounds of words as they fracture. She argues that "poetry is not about creativity or uplifting people but about risk, great risk, hurtling oneself at the boundaries of language, ears pressed to the borders of the structure and hearing its constraints, which also indicate openings. Operating at the edge of our belief about what language can do. Risking that you might not like or understand the result at first, or for years."

Moure celebrates the "little squiggly ants on the page" and the act of reading, which "itself constructs what is there." Acknowledging those who read for comfort or entertainment; challenging those who read as they have been taught: "poetry reduced to symbol and theme." For Moure, a book is a "risk," a "beloved wager," for "reading is where thought risks concatenation with that which is exterior to it" and old structures are challenged. Like the women whose "wider boundaries of daring" reimagined the Canadian modernist

literary landscape, Moure's "beloved wager" is on the possibilities offered by books and the fact that, sometimes, squiggly ants on a page can change everything.

Engagements contemporains

Paul Chamberland

Comme une seule chair. Noroît 14,95 \$

Jacques Flamand

Décombres de la beauté. Vermillon 15,00 \$

Compte rendu par Caroline Dupont

Bien que leur facture diffère grandement, les recueils *Comme une seule chair* et *Décombres de la beauté* témoignent d'un sentiment d'urgence partagé devant les vicissitudes du monde, sentiment duquel découle l'engagement très affirmé de leur auteur respectif.

Ayant pris jadis une part active au combat mené par la revue *Parti pris* lors du mouvement d'affirmation politique et sociale qu'a connu le Québec des années 1960, Paul Chamberland a adopté depuis un ton peut-être moins virulent, mais ses textes s'emploient toujours à protester contre certains états de faits jugés condamnables. Naissant du rapport à un réel invasif et prenant acte de l'injustice, de la tyrannie, de l'inconscience, de la barbarie sévissant aux quatre coins de la planète d'hier à aujourd'hui, cette parole poétique tente d'éveiller les consciences. Au nom de « la blessure humanité » qu'ils rendent dans toute sa corporéité, les vers de Chamberland adoptent ainsi la forme de questions (« Ça va durer encore longtemps / ce deux trois parmi des milliers / à tirer la sonnette d'alarme? » ou encore : « Ta viande, / qu'en augures-tu? / Elle séduit, / elle s'éteint. »), d'affirmations péremptives (« La Terre n'appartient pas. / Vous ne refaites pas la loi. »), d'adresses impératives parfois ponctuées d'énumérations éloquentes (« À ton tour de les entendre, / ces syllabes qui ne passent pas : / Abou Ghraïb, / Guantanamo, / Gaza, / Grosny, / Ciudad Juárez / et / Zyklon B. / Regarde-toi faire la

roue / au milieu d'un charnier. »), de fables animalières (« Grouille, panse, / prolifère et / bâfre et, grenouille, / ouaouaronne ta réplétion. »). De ces divers procédés, celui qui affiche la plus forte récurrence est sans contredit l'injonction faisant en sorte que la parole—presque aussi politique que poétique—est tout aussi tournée vers celui qui la profère que vers l'autre qui la reçoit, le poète s'adressant ainsi à la sensibilité de chacun pour lui signifier, en somme, que « [l]a marche vers l'éveil n'est pas d'abord un aller / simple pour l'extase mais un tourniquet / de gifles. »

Jacques Flamand, dans *Décombres de la beauté*, établit lui aussi ce pont entre le poète qu'il est et la société régionale, nationale, et mondiale dans laquelle il s'inscrit. Arborant la mention générique « Poèmes et réflexions », ce recueil entremêle poésie, prose, et citations provenant d'horizons divers—de la Bible et du Coran à Robertson Davies en passant par le marquis de Vauvenargues, Hugo, Vian, et Sartre—, toutes formes d'écriture que combine l'auteur pour livrer ses observations sur les affres des guerres de religions et de civilisations qui mettent à feu et à sang le Moyen-Orient depuis des générations. Dénonçant l'étourdissement généralisé grâce auquel nos sociétés parviennent à oublier les malheurs du monde (« extasiante frénésie / enfin l'anesthésie / ne plus penser »), usant d'ironie pour faire l'éloge de « Lucifer, infailible guide des humains », fustigeant l'acharnement à détruire des uns tout en déplorant la révolte des autres, il en arrive à dire : « j'ai le haut-le-cœur de vivre / complice des forces de néant / l'être humain sinistre utopie ». Pourtant, même s'il craint par moments de n'être qu'« un pantin de plus / dans la galerie des misères humaines » et en vient à se demander : « l'humanité vaut-elle de persévérer? », il ne désespère jamais complètement devant l'(in)humanité, sachant lire le monde autrement et en saisissant la beauté là où elle se trouve, soit d'abord

« dans le regard de l'observateur ». Aussi la dernière section du recueil s'attache-t-elle précisément à découvrir le beau « [d]ans la ténèbre des décombres », pour se fermer sur ce vœu : « Puissent artistes, poètes, et hommes et femmes de bonne volonté nous redonner des raisons de vivre et de croire. »

Equine, Bovine, Divine

Jan Conn

Botero's Beautiful Horses. Brick \$19.00

Robert Moore

Figuring Ground. Wolsak and Wynn \$17.00

Bruce Meyer

Mesopotamia. Your Scrivener \$16.00

Reviewed by Owen Percy

Botero's Beautiful Horses is the latest in Jan Conn's unique body of poetic writing that blends science, history, image, and dream into what she calls the "[s]trange embrace" of the surreal, the concrete, the visual, and the intellectual. Conn's verse here is terse and aphoristic as often as it is lush, evocative, and ornamental. Opening with epigraphs from Pessoa, Page, Lispector, and Paz, and often revolving ekphrastically around the paintings of Remedios Varo, the collection as a whole takes up the speaking consciousness of a North American literati (allusions and references to Al Purdy, Malcolm Lowry, Michael Ondaatje, Charles Olson, and others abound) wandering wide-eyed in a magical, transhistorical Latin America. The first section, "The Light of Poinsettias," explores the beauty and sublimity of Mexican and Venezuelan geography and history from a consciously outsider perspective in poems like "Ahora" and "Angel Falls." The poems in the second section, "Cosmological," act as our tour guides through a violent pre-contact Aztec empire, which is good, because "[c]oming here alone is not recommended." The poems in the subsequent sections, "Blunted Gold" and "Amazonia," return mostly

to the present, and offer the collection's most outstanding verse (particularly the Mars-landing poem "Signs of Water" and the eloquent elegy for the speaker's mother "Belém"). The collection's closing sections, "Absolute Love" and "Harmonium," seem in many ways like the beginnings of another book entirely. They are composed of several dense, intellectual, and scientifically savvy poems that muse upon desire and environmental apocalypse. At 124 aesthetically Brick-beautiful pages (not including ten pages of notes and acknowledgements), the collection tends to drag in the final two sections only by pulling us in markedly different directions than we had been going. The (very strong) poems seem to be the "extra dimensions required of string theory demanding / labyrinthine mathematical structures for sustenance," and might have better begun a different book devoid of the hazy, beautiful dream-like sensuality of the rest of *Botero's Beautiful Horses*.

Robert Moore's latest book, *Figuring Ground*, is a collection of memories, anecdotes, and meditations on everything from lust to livestock. Moore's background in theatre is immediately evident; one often feels, in fact, that *Figuring Ground* is more of a one-man show with a cast of dozens than just a boring old book of poems. The book's first two sections contain conversational contemplations of death and dying (including a particularly evocative series of lyrics about the speaker's dying father in poems like "Visitation" and "History"), lovely non-Romantic love poems like the standout "The Anniversary," and postmodern meditations on signifiers and signifieds like "Reduced to Parts of Speech," wherein the tongue-tied speaker muses, "I had nothing to do with the death of Custer. Until just / now, I mean. Ah, but it feels substantive, this being / implicated!" The twenty-three page section "Excerpt from *The Golden Book of Bovinities*" that closes the book offers a suite of poetic fragments

that are “pretending to be cow” in their aphoristic and often hilarious meditations. In all its punny play and brash political self-reflexivity, though (“After you’ve been branded, / had the living horn sawn from your skull / and seen your little ones sold into confinement / or death, you start to think it couldn’t get any worse. / But then, life comes along and hammers you / right between the eyes”), the sequence manages regular moments of musicality, aural pleasure, and metaphysical weight with its realizations like “[e]very cow carries the entire history of civilization / around all day in its mouth. It tastes like grass.” The book’s curtain falls, thus, on a surprisingly fresh and engaging note that warrants a hearty round of genuine applause for the thought and sound of *Figuring Ground*.

Bruce Meyer’s newest collection, *Mesopotamia*, is one that hearkens back to varying degrees of imagined antiquity and divinity. The poems often wander the contemporary world in a state of anxiousness, “wondering if we hadn’t already had the answer / and discard[ed] all answers because we couldn’t be sure,” and saying such un-pomo things as “The truth is the truth / no matter how garbled.” Taking its epigraphic cues from Eliot, Shakespeare, and the Book of Genesis, *Mesopotamia* is a text that yearns for a kind of past golden era of simple morality, and that, perhaps to its detriment, takes itself very seriously as literature. Poet Richard Harrison recently dubbed Meyer a “contemporary formalist” and quoted him in *Freefall* magazine (20.1) as saying that “writing in form gives one the sense of writing against something.” Most of the poems in *Mesopotamia*, though, seem to strain under such overt and orchestrated formalism. Along with the glossary of forms in the back of the book and an “After Note” that is ostensibly a defence of rigid, traditional form (and that shirks its own very sensible opening assertion that “A poet should never try to explain his

poems”), *Mesopotamia* as a book allows formality to become a distracting rubric that takes several of the poems hostage. The subtler bright spots in this collection, thus—the Don McKay-like “Shingling,” for example—are often overshadowed by didactic ultra-Canadian patriotic flag-wavers like “Ultracrepidaria” and “The Last Veteran of World War One Died in His Sleep This Morning.” The book would serve as a textbook example of both so-called “CanLit” and so-called “neo-formalism,” but not consistently, I’m afraid, to its, or their, credit.

Pilgrim and Parable

Sheldon Currie

Two More Solitudes. Key Porter \$21.95

Kathleen Winter

Annabel. Anansi \$32.95

Reviewed by Jim Taylor

“If you watch a game it’s fun. If you play it, it’s recreational. If you work at it, it’s golf.” This droll observation from Bob Hope could have been a cryptic chapter heading in Sheldon Currie’s novel, *Two More Solitudes*. Play is a vital metaphor in Ian MacDonald’s pilgrimage as he moves from Cape Breton to Quebec and back. The journey tracks his maturation from a pseudo-philosophical search for meaning to acceptance of personal responsibility to the realization that he must put away the things of a child and accept that his grandmother’s advice, “Don’t let your life get in the way of your dreams,” needs revising. Vergile, his guide, rightly tells him, “Don’t let your dreams get in the way of your life.”

Gifted, athletic, clever, scholarly, and so charmingly comical that one woman virtually imprisons him as her sex slave, Ian reminds us of the ‘60s hippies in search of themselves. Currie depicts Ian as an Everyman or perhaps an Every(young) man. He enjoys having his own way and neglects the needs of those around him.

He thinks the world is his oyster. His hubris is jarringly laid open to him in a sequence of events that disrupt his narcissistic pilgrimage. We exult when he gets his comeuppance from the two women he imposed upon (he's called a "hypocritical prick" and an "ass-hole"), and we exult even more when he catches Marie (his ex-girlfriend) and Father Angus making love in a locker room. As a pilgrim sailor searching for his bearings at sea, the sight of Father Angus and Marie *in delecto flagrante* takes the wind from his sails.

The image of play is everywhere, the most obvious being Ian's and Father Angus' love of baseball and the suicide squeeze, a gambit for intimidating a batter. Perhaps more significant are the frequent early references to *Harlequin's Carnival*, a painting by the Spanish artist Joan Miró. In the Christian calendar, the harlequin's carnival is like *Mardi Gras* before Lent, when carnivalesque indulgence is permitted: the normal order is overturned, and excess and debauchery are the order of the day. Ian, like the Lord of Misrule, a Falstaffian buffoon, is king for a moment. Surreal and mysterious, Miró's painting has the playfulness of folk artists like Maud Lewis, and Currie's approach to his material has the same playful quality. Two obvious parallels between the painting and the novel are seen in Currie's prose and his use of religious imagery.

Playfulness defines Currie's prose—puns, double entendres, ironic repartee, scatterings of literary references, ancient and popular, abound. But the most striking parallel to the *Harlequin's Carnival* is religious allusion. The Catholic Church is a constant and informing backdrop in Currie's writing. Here we see parodies of *The Divine Comedy* with two Virgil guides, and a parody of the Crucifixion, with Ian and Marie dragging a cross through downtown Halifax. Currie has learned much from the works of Flannery O'Connor, and this delightful novel, rich in allusions, is attuned to Cape Breton speech.

Annabel, the story of Wayne Blake, deals realistically with clinical and physical hermaphroditism—penis size, menstruation, fallopian tubes. But Kathleen Winter is more interested in using the myth of the hermaphrodite as a metaphor (the ancient alchemists saw the story of Hermes and Aphrodite's child as symbolic of perfection) to supply spiritual insights into ourselves and our world. She asks us to step outside accepted normality and imagine a different reality—one in which she dramatizes the truth that to name is to limit. This drama unfolds on the magical shifting stage of Labrador's compelling landscape. The Labradorian relationship with the land transcends ordinary love of pastoral scenery. For Wayne's father, Treadway, it is a visceral connection to the magnetic force of nature, and Winter's enchanting prose convinces us that such a connection is possible.

Virginia Woolf's epigraph about the intermixing of the sexes and the dream-like prologue of the mythical white caribou that has deserted the herd to walk thousands of miles alert us to the ominous motif that Winter explores—ominous because the glimpse of the solitary caribou causes the death of the first Annabel and her blind father. As in a Greek chorus' chanting, we are constantly reminded of the risks faced by the solitary—those who strive to free their vision from rigid stereotypes and embrace life's complexity. Winter adroitly affirms that much is risked when renouncing the pack, but much is gained.

The Blakes' infant is born with male and female genitalia. Treadway wants the child raised as a male; Jacinta wants it left alone. Jacinta, perhaps against her better judgment, accedes to her husband's wishes. The baby is christened Wayne, but both Jacinta and the family's closest friend, Thomasina, secretly use the name Annabel after Thomasina's drowned child.

Wayne struggles with his confused sexual urges. At nine, he is captivated by women's

synchronized swimming—both by its exquisite movements and the swimmers' outfits. His mother lets him purchase a red bathing costume. His fascination with design invokes the novel's most intricate image—the bridge. Like the hermaphrodite, the bridge is symbolic of oneness. Bridges allow things separate to be joined. A most poignant scene in the novel is the destruction of Wayne's playhouse where he studies the bridges of London, Edinburgh, Paris, and Florence. These bridges share the symmetry he loved in synchronized swimming. His own bridge, draped in blankets, rope, and tarpaulin, with delicate lattice-work designs, was a refuge where he could play with Wally Michelin, a charming girl—self-contained and compassionate—a devotee of Gabriel Fauré's music. But Treadway cannot accept his son's fantasy world or his relationship with Wally. He dismantles the entire bridge—and destroys Wally's cherished Fauré score. Ultimately, Treadway must expiate his crime by replacing the Fauré sheet-music and by providing Wayne with an opportunity to study—he chooses architecture. Recalling King Midas, Treadway sells his gold.

Notwithstanding the pain suffered by Wayne and by his parents, this is a captivating romantic novel with a happy ending.



Pictures and Profits

Gail Edwards and Judith Saltman

Picturing Canada: A History of Canadian Children's Illustrated Books and Publishing. U of Toronto P \$39.95

Reviewed by Elizabeth A. Galway

In *Picturing Canada: A History of Canadian Children's Illustrated Books and Publishing*, Gail Edwards and Judith Saltman present a significant, and sometimes sobering, account of the history of children's book publishing in Canada from the early years of the nineteenth century to the present day. This work makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of the history of children's literature production in Canada and addresses some important issues of concern to those engaged in such fields as education, book illustration, children's publishing, and children's literature scholarship.

Readers hoping for a comprehensive survey and evaluation of illustrated Canadian children's books will not find it here. Rather than analyzing and exploring specific texts in great depth, Edwards and Saltman focus on examining "the growth and development of Canadian children's publishing" as a whole. The study is arranged chronologically, beginning with an account of the pre-Confederation period. Throughout, there is a focus on the relationship between children's books and Canadian cultural identity. Edwards and Saltman argue that illustrated books are worthy of special study as "the visual images in children's books can do the ideological work of extending hegemonic discourses within a society about collective identity, memory, and normative social practices." Through considering the various developments in children's book illustration in Canada over the past century and a half, this work offers an interesting study of how changing visual images reflect ongoing shifts in the conception of Canadian identity.

The opening chapters of this work contain a succinct but helpful overview of the successes and failures of early illustrated Canadian texts that reveals the difficulties faced by nineteenth-century Canadian writers and publishers. The book's main focus, however, is on the important developments that took place within the industry from the 1950s to the present. This includes a revealing account of the history of children's libraries in Canada and the impacts, both positive and negative, that early children's librarians had on the creation of a children's publishing industry in Canada at the beginning of the twentieth century. The authors also consider the importance of changing technologies to the type and quality of illustrations produced for children's texts. After outlining the relatively brief flowering of the illustrated children's books industry during the 1980s, the authors turn their attention to the present woes facing those involved in the publishing of such texts in Canada. Edwards and Saltman shed light on just how big an impact the recent shift to market-driven publishing has had on the availability of texts (illustrated or otherwise) for young Canadian readers. They make a compelling argument that Canadians are witnessing a decrease in variety and quality in favour of more homogenous and marketable children's literature. The authors also provide an eye-opening account of how Canadians are now reaping the negative results of the significant funding cuts to education and school library programs of recent decades, including the large impact this is having on the world of Canadian children's literature. As the authors note, in Alberta alone there was "a more than eighty per cent reduction in the number of teacher-librarians working at least half-time, from 550 to about 100" between 1980 and 2001. The authors' account of the many structural challenges now faced by Canadian children's publishers raises some serious questions about the current health of the

children's book industry in this country.

In spite of the sometimes gloomy picture of the industry that is presented here, *Picturing Canada* also reveals that there is much to celebrate. While this work does not explore every example of illustrated children's texts in depth, it nevertheless provides a very valuable discussion of the ways in which Canadian children's literature "constructs, reflects, and questions particular social realities that articulate wider national and cultural concerns." The history of Canadian children's books and publishing that is presented here takes into account the always shifting tensions between culture and commerce, providing a valuable resource for those interested in how children's texts, from the nineteenth century to the present, reflect changing views of childhood, national identity, and aesthetic taste.

Anne Shirley's New Reach

Irene Gammel and Benjamin Lefebvre, eds.

Anne's World: A New Century of Anne of Green Gables. U of Toronto P \$29.95

Reviewed by M. Sean Saunders

I took great pleasure in reading *Anne's World*, a collection of compelling essays which situates the culturally familiar Anne Shirley within a range of perhaps unfamiliar and, at times, unexpected disciplinary and theoretical contexts. Engaging Anne's status as a "classic" and an international "brand," these contexts include fashion theory, early childhood education, clinical psychology and bibliotherapy, feminist ethics, cultural geography, and globalization studies. Linking such diverse critical perspectives is the volume's focus on the "expansion of [Anne's] world," both during the last century (into realms such as film and television, tourism, and post-war colonialism) and in the present, as Anne's expanding world carries her into new spheres of critical

inquiry, and new digital markets and media.

The careful curatorial work of editors Irene Gammel and Benjamin Lefebvre provides intellectual coherence to the book's diverse approaches, with several of the book's threads of inquiry appearing in Carole Gerson's opening chapter. For example, because Gerson is concerned with a century's worth of cultural and institutional interventions which helped to establish Anne as a Canadian icon, her work gives readers an initial glimpse into the creation of Anne as a "brand." Subsequent chapters return to this idea, including Benjamin Lefebvre's important theorization of the Anne brand and Jason Nolan's fascinating analysis of present-day "educational" uses of this brand. Nolan, first observing that Montgomery's fiction often displays well-informed support for learning environments that allow children imaginative scope and opportunities to challenge conventions, then asks whether Montgomery-related "educational" web sites reflect similar values. He includes in his analysis a social networking site which uses fingerprint reading to control user access, and he concludes that this site "appears designed to minimize the opportunities for the kind of rebellion that is at the core [of] Anne's personality in the novel," instead "entic[ing] participants into a culture of corporate surveillance [which] models both acquiescence and consumerism."

Another of the book's threads again begins with Gerson, who mentions the federal government's 1936 acquisition of the supposed "Green Gables" farmhouse, which required alterations (including painting the gables green) to align it with public expectations. Later, Alexander Macleod returns readers to the farmhouse and its environs, drawing connections between the ways that the fictional Anne re-visioned the landscape—as when she over-writes local place names with "romantic" names of her own devising—and the ways that

L.M. Montgomery's fictional world has, in turn, shaped the real-world landscape and social spaces of Prince Edward Island. Such implicitly colonial impulses receive explicit attention in other chapters, with Anne's presence in Nigeria, Iran, China, Japan, and Germany all receiving discussion.

Both Huifeng Hu and Andrew O'Malley, writing respectively on China and Iran, conclude, in contrast to earlier scholarly views, that Anne is popular with readers in these countries not because her rebellious qualities represent something that their own cultures "lack" (but which they nevertheless admire), but because these readers recognize their *own* cultural values in Anne's dedication to family and community. Such analyses offer opportunities to read Anne's popularity not simply as a "westernizing" influence, but to understand it, as O'Malley writes, through "an approach that tries to understand the adaptive and appropriate readings of Anne generated in the contexts of cultures elsewhere." By contrast, Ranbir K. Banwait provides a fascinating account of Anne's introduction into post-war Japan. During the Allied occupation, written material was strictly controlled, and literature—including *Anne of Green Gables*—was used as an ideological tool for disseminating American values.

While there is insufficient space here to acknowledge the work of all the contributors to this excellent volume, I cannot leave *Anne's World* without mentioning Helen Hoy's potentially contentious chapter, in which Hoy builds her argument from the initial observation that Anne's behavioural characteristics are consistent with what we now call Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). Although I was skeptical at first, as I read the chapter and better understood Hoy's project, I found her argument increasingly compelling, in large part because Hoy's interest isn't really in convincing her readers that Anne suffers from FASD. Rather, she foregrounds the extent to which

concepts of impairment are contingent and temporally located, thus suggesting that the possible presence of FASD in *Anne of Green Gables* helps to trouble “the all-too-familiar distinction between fully human people and deficient people,” and “highlights the degree to which the meaning of disability is a product of the social imagination.” Hoy’s chapter, then, reminds us that as “Anne’s world” begins its second century it remains a powerful tool for reading and understanding the realities of *our* world.

Corps à corps

Isabelle Gaudet-Labine

Entre l’acier et la chair. Noroît 14,95 \$

Paul Chamberland

Comme une seule chair. Noroît 14,95 \$

Marie Bélisle

Tout comme. Noroît 17,95 \$

Compte rendu par Emmanuel Bouchard

Le deuxième recueil d’Isabelle Gaudet-Labine place au cœur de son propos le partage (avec l’autre ou peut-être avec soi), un partage qui semble d’abord soumis à différentes formes d’empêchement : passivité de l’attente, poids du passé ou du temps, fantômes et blessures. C’est l’appel du corps et de la vie qui permet de briser les résistances; les deux sections centrales du recueil en témoignent. La redécouverte de l’insouciance et de l’abandon nécessaires à l’amour, le sentiment d’urgence, la poursuite de deux êtres, le constant renouvellement de leur rencontre et l’exploration du corps en forment quelques-uns des axes thématiques. Le ton intimiste des poèmes semble acquérir une certaine ampleur au fil du livre; il se pourrait que cela soit attribuable au déploiement de l’espace, qui agit sur les êtres autant qu’il constitue la toile de fond de leur relations : « tu te tiens sur une jambe // entre tes hanches la vie / te place en position / de départ // je m’appuie dans l’espace / que ton pied soulève ». Pour plus

de la moitié des textes du recueil, la poète, « humaine entre ciel et terre », s’est inspirée d’une œuvre d’art (Kiefer, Giacometti, Daudelin, MacEwen, Manessier, Goulet, Riopelle, etc.) qui, supposons-le, procure un cadre, un lieu où situer les corps.

Dans *Comme une seule chair*, Paul Chamberland poursuit sa réflexion sur les questions et les thèmes qui stimulent depuis longtemps son travail de créateur : l’horreur du monde et la barbarie des hommes, l’engagement et le désengagement, le voyeurisme et l’indifférence, la liberté, l’écriture, l’amour, etc. Le poète, dont les publications se comptent par dizaines, expose dans ce dernier livre le paradoxe d’une parole qui permet d’interpréter le réel, mais qui produit aussi sa propre réalité, à l’image du souffle dont l’homme se croit possesseur mais qui « ne [lui] a jamais appartenu ». Est-ce encore cette étrangeté du langage qui fait en sorte que « L’encre remonte le tube [du stylo] / Et . . . crache dans la bouche [du poète] / Une rafale de hoquets »? Il y aurait donc une forme d’autonomie du langage poétique qui devient, par endroits, la condition d’une expression débridée et musicale qui n’est pas sans rappeler les expérimentations formelles d’une époque à laquelle Chamberland a appartenu : « Sssrouvre / s’rouvre / en pleine chair / —accuse le coup— / la trouée la plaie, / l’hémorragie nous éclabousse / tous, / nous tanguons tous / et pas d’issue. » Un livre qui interroge les frontières de la parole.

Marie Bélisle a publié quatre recueils de poésie aux éditions du Noroît. Le dernier, *Tout comme* ou *Les conditions de la luxure*, se présente comme une suite de variations formelles sur le thème du corps et de l’amour. Les neuf parties du livre, dont les titres commencent par « comme », présentent chaque fois des textes de structures similaires d’où arrivent à s’échapper la force du désir (parfois contenu, parfois hâtif) et le désordre que peut susciter la passion amoureuse, et cela, malgré l’effet un peu artificiel

de la composition : « l'enlacement toutes ossatures imbriquées / lorsque s'oublie consumée la cigarette / éteinte dans la torsion lorsque quelque / (équilibre stable inclinaison bascule) / transgression de la loi de la pesanteur / réécrite porte à la limite le plan / vertical provoque comme une chute comme / obligée par l'attraction des corps ». De manière plus ou moins convaincante, la fin du recueil se plaît à jouer sur la parenté sonore entre le lux (la lumière) et la luxure évoquée dans le sous-titre. Si, par sa rhétorique particulière, ce livre parvient à disséquer quelques-uns des mouvements propres à l'amour et à la relation charnelle, il échoue à transcender la forme qu'il s'est imposée. Comme si celle-ci faisait écran au sens et à la poésie.

When She Has Crossed the Bar

Agnes Grant

May There Be No Sadness of Farewell. Vantage \$26.95

Reviewed by Lindy Ledohowski

Author Agnes Grant (nee Dyck) passed away in July 2009 just as her first novel, *May There Be No Sadness of Farewell*, was about to go to print. Grant was a lifelong educator, working in rural schools and then in teacher education at Brandon University, where she was a dedicated professor and administrator. She authored five non-fiction academic books. After retiring, she turned her hand to fiction, and *May There Be No Sadness of Farewell* is the posthumous product of that late-in-life shift in focus.

But was it really a shift in focus? Grant's academic work centred around oral storytelling traditions, with a particular emphasis on First Nations voices and post-residential-school recovery experiences. *May There Be No Sadness of Farewell* is a novel that tells the story of three women—Rita, Hanya, and Elizabeth—who share a geographical

proximity to one another in Saskatchewan but who come from very different cultures. It gives the narrative focus of historical events to the traditionally marginalized voices of women marked as “other.” In the words of Mary Froese's introduction, “the impact events had on Aboriginal and immigrant Canadians, especially the women, have rarely been examined as vividly as in this story.”

Each character develops through chapters that follow her particular story line, and these dedicated chapters flow chronologically and interweave with one another, giving the reader a sense of the simultaneity of the lives being narrated. The plots of each character's story tell the history of her particular ethnic or cultural group, with a specific focus on women's issues.

Rita is an Aboriginal orphan placed in a residential school. As an adult, she suffers abuse at the hands of her husband—a traumatized residential school survivor himself—and raises her children, ultimately becoming a recognized and wise elder in Regina who finally discovers her origins as a Cree of Poundmaker's tribe. As Rita rediscovers her own Aboriginal heritage, Grant offers her readers a brief First Nations history.

Hanya is a Ukrainian émigré who arrives in Canada's prairies, and as her husband dies, she raises their children and keeps their homestead going. When her children are grown and able to run the farm themselves, Hanya becomes a social activist and eventually a successful NDP politician, and through her Grant tells the history of Ukrainian immigration to the prairies and of the CCF and ultimately NDP.

Elizabeth is a Mennonite émigré escaping the Bolshevik revolution and arriving in Saskatchewan, only to suffer the vagaries of the Dirty Thirties. Elizabeth and her family watch helplessly as their soil blows away and she becomes more and more afflicted with “dementia.” While both Rita and Hanya blossom and continue to

develop after the deaths of their husbands, Elizabeth's story is inextricably linked with that of her long-suffering husband, Jacob. Part of the sections of the book devoted to Elizabeth and Jacob critiques the subordinate position that certain Mennonite ways of life demand of women. The toll of motherhood (and having only girl children) on Elizabeth's fragile mental state serves as a vehicle through which Grant tells some of the history of mental health practices on the prairies, while also creating a specific Mennonite religious and cultural context.

This technique of telling larger socio-historical narratives that include historical figures and events through the experiences of individual women is one of the book's greatest strengths and at the same time one of its weaknesses. It offers the reader a sweeping and engaging glimpse into nearly one hundred years of Saskatchewan history and is rich in research and detail to shed light on both well-known and little-known moments of this province's past. While this chronicling may be interesting, it is not necessarily narrated in an engaging manner intricately connecting dry facts and details to plot and/or character development; it reads as though the historical detail is merely incidental to the storylines themselves. As well, the narrating voice throughout the book remains constant, despite having chapters devoted to three separate women. Instead of developing a particular speaking persona for each of the sections, Grant maintains a rather dry (one might say academic) voice throughout.

Yet as this book charts the lives of three women and ends with each of their deaths, it also alludes to Tennyson's poem about his own approaching death. Published after the death of a woman whose own life story seems to have snuck into her novel in small ways—for instance, Grant focused her professional life on First Nations issues (like Rita); she was a life-long NDP supporter and political worker (like Hanya); and

she was born to a Mennonite family (like Elizabeth)—this novel is a testament not just to the lives of Aboriginal, Ukrainian, and Mennonite women who have lived and died across the prairies, but to the life of Agnes Grant herself.

Bringing APTN into Focus

Sigurjon Baldur Hafsteinsson and Marian Bredin, eds.

Indigenous Screen Cultures in Canada. U of Manitoba P \$27.95

Reviewed by Candis Callison

Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) recently received acclaim for its widely-cited investigative reports on clean water issues for Aboriginal communities and the role of Prime Minister Stephen Harper's former advisor Bruce Carson. Yet, mainstream media, in their follow-up stories, have been at loose ends in their efforts to characterize the rise and status of Canada's Aboriginal channel and its commitment to journalism. *Indigenous Screen Cultures in Canada*, edited by Sigurjon Baldur Hafsteinsson and Marian Bredin, steps into this gap admirably, providing context for how APTN emerged as well as a sense of what its future might hold.

Hafsteinsson, a cultural anthropologist who conducted an ethnography of APTN's news production during its first years of operation (1999-2006), convened a panel for a 2006 conference that forms the basis for this edited volume. The volume features established and emerging scholars, and situates APTN within a broader framework of Indigenous film, television, and to a lesser extent, new media. Theoretically, the volume primarily builds on Faye Ginsburg's work that sees Indigenous media as "processes of 'transformative action.'"

Divided into three parts, the volume begins solidly with essays by Lorna Roth and Jennifer David that deal with First Peoples' Television as a precursor to APTN

and APTN's approach to Aboriginal languages, a major issue for many communities who look to television to teach and reinforce language. While Roth is an established scholar who provides an authoritative overview of APTN's emergence, David is an Aboriginal consultant who adapts a report originally commissioned by APTN for her cogent, comprehensive chapter on Aboriginal languages and television. The second part features four chapters that include Hafsteinsson's research, Bredin's work on APTN's audiences, a critical look at programming and acquisition by Kerstin Knopf, and Christine Ramsay's interrogation of APTN's popular *Moccasin Flats*. This section provides dense, rich analysis, covering enormous terrain from urban Aboriginal culture and identity to APTN's journalism as "deep democracy" and the challenges of reflexively responding to diverse audiences and license dictates.

The three chapters that comprise the third part on "transforming technologies and emerging media circuits" are not as cohesively focused on APTN. Doris Baltruschat's lucid, engaging account of the production and implications of *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* hints at the rapidly changing media landscape now confronting both audiences and producers active in Aboriginal film and television. Mike Patterson and Yvonne Poitras Pratt's closing chapters on online communities don't address the current hybrid world of social, converged media, but instead provide a more historical view of broadband access and early cyberspace forays. Pratt's essay, in particular, provides rare and eloquent insight into what it means to be an Aboriginal researcher working in Aboriginal communities on communications projects.

Indigenous Screen Cultures is an accomplished and strong contribution to the growing body of scholarship on Indigenous media. By bringing together interdisciplinary research and analyses, the volume

sheds much needed light on the enormous challenges and successes of APTN and its ongoing mandate to cover issues affecting Canada's diverse Aboriginal populations.

Studying Canadian Studies in a Trans-Cultural Age

Dirk Hoerder

To Know Our Many Selves: From the Study of Canada to Canadian Studies. Athabasca UP
\$34.95

Reviewed by Karl E. Jirgens

Dirk Hoerder's *To Know Our Many Selves: From the Study of Canada to Canadian Studies* is an ambitious and comprehensive analysis covering years of detailed historical records. The purpose of Hoerder's analysis is to trace the history of Canadian Studies, which, according to Hoerder, began roughly in the mid 1800s. Integrating perspectives on sociological, cultural, and political phenomena, this book is divided into three major sections, including "I. Framing Research on Canada: Burdens and Achievements of the Past," "II. From Privileged Discourses to Research on Social Spaces," and "III. Perspectives." The latter section provides observations on the past, present, and future of Canadian Studies. Beginning with the colonial period, this analysis pursues European settlement from the arrival of Giovanni Caboto (1497) in Newfoundland, and proceeds to trace representations, interpretations, and perceptions of Canada up to the present day. Hoerder got his M.A. from the University of Minnesota and his Ph.D. from the Free University of Berlin; he served as President of the Association of Canadian Studies, and he currently teaches at Arizona State University. This book is inspired by Hoerder's desire to introduce students to links between teaching, academic research, and engaged scholarship, with specific reference to Canada and studies of North American cultural history.

This publication is available online, at no cost to the user, a fact that supports the book's open and trans-cultural position.

Hoerder's study incorporates a movement from nation-based to trans-cultural perspectives, and arises in part from colonial (or postcolonial) studies while demonstrating an in-depth awareness of Canadian scholarship, politics, economics, religion, class structure, civil rights, gender issues, Indigenous cultural matters, immigrant cultures, advances in communications, movements in education, innovations in science, as well as developments in literature and the arts. While reflecting on all such concerns, Hoerder examines in considerable detail our collective memory, and how what he calls our "master narratives" have represented us over the past five-hundred years. He points out that our earlier cultural history was written largely by Francophone or Anglophone men who were inspired by their connections to socio-cultural and political-economic views arising from France and Britain. He also traces how these self-defining histories were eventually rewritten to include broader trans-cultural perspectives. Hoerder is careful to define his own subject position, which arises out of post-World War II Germany, where the United States served as one of several liberators from fascism but then moved to the rebuilding of Germany, and became an Orwellian "big brother" or what Hoerder calls "a cultural hegemon." This book provides candid views of multiple colonizations, while elucidating and contextualizing Canadian studies within an interdisciplinary framework characterized by frequently contradictory discourses. Hoerder illuminates the dialogics of these contradicting discourses within a chronological framework. *To Know Our Many Selves* provides an interdisciplinary overview and a relatively "deep" sense of history including detailed references to First Nations peoples, Francophones, Anglophones, Allophones,

women's movements, waves of immigrants, and recent trans-cultural developments.

To strike a balance between manifold disciplines, multicultural viewpoints, as well as interactions between conflicting social groups, and an inexorable shift towards trans-culturalization is no mean feat, but Hoerder manages to be inclusive rather than exclusive throughout most of this analysis. He candidly admits that any attempt to examine Canadian Studies must be a "work in progress." If there are weaknesses here, they arise from the fact that some cultural nuances are not fully addressed. For example, with reference to literature, W. H. New's *A History of Canadian Literature* (1989), and Edward D. Blodgett's *Five-Part Invention: A History of Literary History in Canada* (2003) are considered, but other relevant literary studies by critical thinkers including Frank Davey or Linda Hutcheon receive only cursory mention. Other thinkers directly related to key perspectives in this book, including Barbara Godard, Nicole Brossard, Pauline Butling, and Susan Rudy receive no mention. Conversely, Hoerder's tracing of larger socio-political ideologies is more nuanced. Perhaps the greatest strength in this book lies in the tracking of various "master narratives" of Canada throughout history. While this is not an entirely complete study, it is remarkable in its ability to condense a broad range of information that will help us to know ourselves better. Hoerder successfully encapsulates clashes between older "nation-state" ideologies and emergent discourses of decolonization which recognize the women's movement, changing racial and cultural hierarchies, and processes of socialization in which cultural borders became fluid. In addition, Hoerder's *To Know Our Many Selves* helps identify historiographic, hegemonic, and obsolete master narratives, while recognizing Canada as a site of evolving socio-cultural identities that have begun to transcend political borders by merging with diverse global mores.

Versions of History

Drew Hayden Taylor

Motorcycles & Sweetgrass. Knopf Canada \$29.95

Anosh Irani

Dahanu Road. Doubleday \$29.95

Reviewed by Duffy Roberts

Motorcycles & Sweetgrass is set in the First Nations community of Otter Lake, an Anishnawbe community on the cusp of completion of a land purchase, one negotiated with municipal, provincial, and governmental authorities. The centre of the story is Chief Maggie Second's family—Virgil, her son, and Wayne, her brother—and how, on the death of her grandmother Lillian and a couple of years after a boating accident kills her husband, Nanabush the trickster rides into town on a vintage Indian motorcycle—Nanabush is male, and white, and laughs a lot, except when at war with the raccoons.

Motorcycles & Sweetgrass' prologue begins with an Anishnawbe woman and an Ojibway man swimming in a lake together, with fish. And while it may be "hard [for the fish] to lodge a complaint [against the human intrusion] given that balance of power," the woman must leave because a Residential School ("the Angry Place") wants to teach her about the "Battle of Hastings, dangling participles, and how to draw a pie chart," and, of course, "Jesus" ("what kind of a name is that?"). Implied by Taylor's prologue is that Christians are still so pissed off and disappointed by their removal from the garden of Eden that they project this mood-cum-failure onto the man and the woman in this story, removing them from *their* garden of Eden. It's not just that misery loves company, it's that in order to balance the scale of moods one must make another miserable. Residential School is where miserable happens: you couldn't speak your language of birth, Anishnawbe, "the forbidden language"; you couldn't

laugh; you had to memorize Shakespeare on threat of being locked into a box. The Residential School ultimately fails at Project Misery, at least for these characters, and laughter, play, and trickery overcome.

Motorcycles & Sweetgrass avoids misery, which is not to say that the novel doesn't deal directly and viscerally with the "gifts" of colonialism—alcoholism, marginalization, community decisions handcuffed by the Indian Act's *je ne sais quoi*. The novel also argues that colonization is viral, "work[s] its way into the DNA, the beliefs and philosophies and the very ways of life of the people being colonized [so much so that they're] indistinguishable from White people." But rather than have the oppressive weight of Residential Schools and the above history influence the tone and messages of this story's characters, they all muse on a changing First Nations' identity and Anishnawbe community, but not by arguing that that change is inherently shitty. Yes, the novel wants to bring forward some of the qualities in Maggie's mother's time, "a time when people still believed in mystical and magical things," but I think the Otter Lake community's voice, as articulated by Taylor, is magical: Nanabush is John Tanner, and John Richardson, and John Clayton, and John Matus, and John Smith, and threatens the raccoons he's at war with—"I invented roadkill, remember that"; women *do* do anything better than men "short of writing [their] names in the snow"; Nanabush tells Maggie's son Virgil, after Virgil complains about Nanabush's courtship of Maggie, *tikwamshin* ("bite me"); in this story, smiling is a dangerous weapon; Maggie's recluse brother Wayne comments on Maggie's son, Virgil—"you know, the more time I spend with you, the more I really appreciate having never really spent much time with you"; and the bathroom, washing machine, and Shake 'n Bake are the three greatest inventions of White people.

If *Motorcycles & Sweetgrass* concludes

(and it doesn't, at least singularly, and that's really cool), it might conclude with "never underestimate the need for some sheer silliness." It also claims that the exotic *can* exist inside one's own culture, because when Nanabush the trickster's existence is a possibility, that even maybe he's dating your mother or sister, "immediately the world bec[omes] a much more interesting place." This novel is so interesting, readable, and important, it'll hit one of my literature courses real soon.

Dahanu Road, a story that tells of the Irani family's journey from Iranian poverty and mistreatment to Indian chickoo fruit plantation ownership and wealth, begins with a prologue as well, but one that suggests that grief and loss are more powerful than fear, and that both fear and the threat of loss keep class systems and power intact. Love might make these rigid systems permeable, even bearable, but the novel's ending complicates love's potential energy.

Switching between the family narratives of the 1940s and 2000s, *Dahanu Road* is beautifully written—"Mahtre [dips] his thin lips in ink and writ[es] his grandmother's story in the finest calligraphy"—and makes interesting claims for the "asphyxiat[ing]" power of history over the imagination. I think the novel also balances the grief with a necessary humour and grace: "poverty's greatest gift to the rich . . . is no bra"; it offers place-specific metaphors like tools "forked like a cobra's tongue"; the Iranis' claim to uniqueness is that they are "pioneers [because] in an age where everything seems to be moving forward [they] simply refuse to evolve"; the novel offers a claim for reading being about being "perceptive enough to notice shadows on the wall"; hot weather people eat watermelons and place the overturned shells on their heads to cool down; and there is a place where dogs disappear because the circus is in town—lions and tigers, after all, "ha[ve] to be fed."

I think the novel's conclusions sadden, with the inevitability of limited choices offered by a world largely constructed and conditioned by poverty, tribalism, and a haunting regret for the histories we have created. And I locate *Dahanu Road* alongside Chimamanda Adichie's "Ted Talk" about the dangers of a single story to make a claim for its importance in the canon of Canadian literature, and because by understanding elsewhere, we can learn wonderful things about elsewhere *and* here.

Historic Heroines

Marthe Jocelyn

Folly. Tundra \$22.99

Sharon Jennings

Home Free. Second Story \$8.95

Reviewed by Rachelle Delaney

At first glance, Marthe Jocelyn's *Folly* and Sharon Jennings' *Home Free* appear to have little in common—aside from having been written by talented, award-winning Canadians. Jocelyn's *Folly* tells of a young girl turned away from her father's home by his new wife and forced to navigate her way through late-1800s London. *Home Free*, on the other hand, centres on an eleven-year-old aspiring Canadian writer stifled by 1960s rules and expectations.

It turns out, however, that Canada in the sixties wasn't as different from 1880s London as one might assume. At least, not for a girl.

Folly's heroine, Mary Finn, is only fourteen when her father's crotchety new bride insists she leave home to earn her living. She ends up working as a scullery maid in London, where she falls for a dashing young man who disappears when she announces that she's pregnant with his child. Refusing to house an unwed mother, her employers send her out into the streets.

Mary's narrative, told in a spirited, unpolished brogue, alternates with that of young

James Nelligan, an orphan whose mother left him at London's Foundling Hospital as a baby. Raised by a foster mother in the country, he returns to the Hospital at age six and must fend for himself among bullies, austere teachers, and arrogant Londoners.

Masterfully written in a memorable narrative voice, *Folly's* short, punchy chapters are full of suspense. The alternating points of view allow readers to witness misunderstandings between characters and anticipate the consequences. Both Mary and James are admirable, empowering protagonists who accept the hardships they've been dealt without self-pity. Young readers will cheer them both on while waiting impatiently for their stories to intersect.

Folly is an excellent work of historical fiction; the Foundling Hospital did indeed exist, and Jocelyn herself has a personal connection to it: her grandfather was left in its care aged nine months and raised in a similar manner to James.

Home Free, a finalist for the 2009 Governor General's Literary Award, is also a fine work of historical fiction, but for a younger, less mature audience. The narrator, Lee Mets, is a budding writer and an incorrigible romantic with a passion for *Anne of Green Gables*. When she learns that a "real-life orphan" will be moving in next door, she can't contain her excitement; orphans, she believes, always have the best stories. She also can't understand why her mother disapproves of their new neighbour—but then her mother disapproves of almost everything. However, the orphan Cassandra Jovanovich is not, to quote Anne Shirley herself, "an open book." She refuses to tell Lee her story no matter how much Lee prods.

As Lee introduces Cassandra to the neighbourhood, the beliefs and sensibilities of her community begin to unfold, particularly in regard to expectations placed on girls and women. What, the girls start to wonder, does it mean to be a "good" girl? Why are

girls encouraged to become nurses and teachers, but not writers or actresses? And why are certain women in the community shunned by others? What have they done?

Which brings us back to *Folly* and its parallel themes. For just as in 1880, an unwed mother in the 1960s immediately lost all respect, and her child—often sent away—would be forever seen as a lesser person. Placed side-by-side, conditions for orphans actually seem marginally better in Jocelyn's novel; at least the Foundling Hospital raised its children with the belief that they would succeed at something. Cassandra is made to believe she will never amount to anything.

Both Jocelyn and Jennings avoid sounding didactic as they paint their respective pictures of the conditions girls faced in the 1880s and 1960s. And both manage to leave readers with a sense of hope and empowerment. Neither Lee nor Mary's spirits (nor James', for that matter) will be quashed by the societies and circumstances into which they were born. If *Home Free* is, as Second Story Press has designated it, a "Gutsy Girl Book," then *Folly* is certainly a "Gutsy Young Adult Book." Both have excellent potential for classroom discussions about prejudice and women's rights.



(Re)presenting Culture in Canadian Theatre

Ric Knowles and Ingrid Mündel

"Ethnic," Multicultural, and Intercultural Theatre.

Playwrights Canada \$25.00

Reviewed by Sarah MacKenzie

True to the book's title, the essays in this volume map the history of "ethnic" and "multicultural" theatre in Canada, revealing the progression of minoritized performance from relegated "amateur status" to a position of prominence on the Canadian stage. To their credit, the editors contextualize the changing face of "multicultural" theatre as it exists within the fraught space of Canadian nationhood, pointing to the importance of "intercultural" performance as a mechanism of national cohesion.

In tracing the "critical histories" of minoritized theatre in Canada, the essays reveal that lack of access to funding has historically hindered the artistic success of groups deemed by the 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms to be "folkloric 'ethnicities.'" Funding for such groups was delivered through the Multiculturalism Directorate rather than the Arts Councils. While constitutional change initiated in 1988 did not necessarily increase the benefits showered upon "ethnic" theatre groups, it did put an end to the "binary" funding system that separated dominant (French/English) theatre from "ethnic" (all visible minority groups, including Aboriginal Canadians) theatre. Beginning in 1991, "multicultural" groups in Canada were entitled to seek funding from Canada's Arts Councils. The structural shift in the late 1980s provided minoritized theatre groups with more respect and agency, thereby establishing an increased presence of such groups at the professional level. Situated early in the anthology are essays by Carol Off, Beverly Yhap, and Mayte Gómez all of which, published in the late

1980s, touch upon issues of funding and professionalization.

The "ethnic" struggle for space in the realm of professional Canadian theatre illuminated, the essays contend with the question of represented identity in theatre, including concerns about the perpetuation of stereotypes. Given the historic misrepresentation of minoritized communities, playwrights need be cautious when "exposing divisions *within* their communities." Angela Baldassarre's piece deals with intergenerational conflict concerning identity, representation, and what ought not to be shown in public, while Guillermo Verdecchia raises further concerns about dominant culture audiences consuming minoritized theatre. Marie Annharte Baker stresses her discomfort with reoccurring portrayals of Aboriginal women as degraded victims. Lorna Gale and Christine Lenze observe the importance of audience and context, implying that active, responsible viewership on behalf of audiences is integral in "intercultural" contexts.

Jerry Wasserman's essay suggests that with increased stage presence, "ethnic" dramatists are provided enhanced opportunity to explore conceptions of cultural fluidity, destabilizing the boundaries between dominant and minority cultures. Wasserman argues that minoritized playwrights "work to undermine the unwritten restrictive covenants that threaten to delimit Canadian theatre and the Canadian identity." Rather than working to "pin down the specific contours of ethnicity," the essays deconstruct the very notion of "ethnicity." Ric Knowles explores the function of "cultural memory" in theatre, noting that "memory is performative" and "all cultural memory bridges difference." Knowles demonstrates the way in which cultural memory "plays itself out" in diasporic communities, transforming to become "*intercultural*." Paralleling Knowles, Joanne Tompkins depicts theatrical "interculturalism" positively as a conduit

to “cultural exchange across borders.” In the concluding essay, Michelle Laflamme asserts that theatre is particularly useful in destabilizing racial categories by highlighting the performative quality of mixed-race identity.

Ultimately, this volume provides a relevant and timely contribution to the body of literature pertaining to “ethnic” theatre in Canada. By portraying both the important role of theatre as a tool of cultural representation and as a reflection of the complexity of Canadian identity, the essays depict the artistic vitality of a range of cultures present in the “multicultural” Canadian landscape, while simultaneously emphasizing the socially transformative capacity of theatre.

Face à l'autre

André Lamontagne

Les fossoyeurs : Dans la mémoire de Québec.

David 20,95 \$

Kim Thúy

Ru. Libre Expression 19,95 \$

Compte rendu par Jean-Pierre Thomas

Accueillir l'autre ou être accueilli par lui : la différence peut sembler minime entre ces positions, que tout un univers sépare pourtant. Ce sont les retombées de ces phénomènes, dont la dynamique entraîne des attitudes et des répercussions distinctes, qu'explorent André Lamontagne et Kim Thúy dans leurs romans respectifs. Par l'entremise de narrations quelque peu singulières, les deux auteurs montrent de quelle manière et selon quels impératifs la relation à l'autre se construit, qu'elle soit souhaitée ou imposée.

Dans *Les fossoyeurs*, André Lamontagne présente le parcours d'un journaliste lancé dans une enquête visant à repérer les traces de la communauté chinoise établie à Québec au début du 20^e siècle. D'emblée réticent à laisser l'autre, en l'occurrence l'Asiatique, pénétrer dans son enceinte

sacrée, le personnage principal s'ouvre peu à peu et accepte la communion avec la différence. C'est en fait dans une quête des racines de la communauté chinoise qu'est lancé ce personnage, qui souhaite « accomplir un devoir de mémoire » en préservant le passé de l'autre. En parallèle avec ce récit narré à la première personne, le lecteur découvre l'histoire mystérieuse, racontée à la troisième personne, d'un pyromane qui, après avoir croisé la route du journaliste, aurait allumé l'incendie du Manège militaire de Québec. La particularité du roman consiste dans le traitement de ces deux récits qui se déroulent de pair, chapitre après chapitre. L'intérêt du lecteur est soutenu par l'entremêlement des intrigues qu'agrémentent des informations riches sur l'histoire de Québec. La ville, pour la circonstance devenue un véritable personnage aux airs de mystère, se laisse découvrir sous un visage peu connu, agrémenté de petits faits anecdotiques. En professeur de littérature habitué de se livrer à des recherches minutieuses, l'auteur a offert à son lecteur la possibilité de découvrir une histoire du petit fait obscur qui sous-tend l'Histoire officielle, allant notamment jusqu'à élaborer « un circuit touristique de la mort, une visite guidée de tous les cimetières de Québec, existants ou disparus ». Québec devient une ville-catacombe aux atours sombres : c'est comme si le passé commandait la réécriture du présent.

De son côté, Kim Thúy offre un récit alliant un regard critique sur l'Histoire (dans son cas, celle de la guerre vietnamienne dans les années 1960 et 1970) à des impressions tissées au fil de réflexions empreintes de sensualisme. Autofiction ou autobiographie? La frontière n'est pas clairement établie, ce qui n'empêche pas le roman *Ru* de prétendre au statut d'œuvre personnelle. De sa tendre enfance à sa vie d'adulte intégrée à son milieu d'accueil (un Québec perçu comme « le paradis terrestre »), Kim Thúy fait une chronique

des événements marquants de sa vie, où priment les impressions au détriment de la chronologie. De fait, les événements sont ici présentés sans souci d'ordre précis, l'auteure n'hésitant pas à cavalier entre présent et passé dans un chassé-croisé frénétique. Le point de vue adopté consiste en un mélange de lucidité et de cette naïveté qui est souvent la marque de l'individu en temps de guerre. À travers de courts chapitres reliés par des images évanescentes, Thúy s'efforce de rendre compte des événements qui ont marqué sa vie : la situation difficile d'un Vietnam ployant sous le joug du communisme, la fuite risquée hors du pays natal, la survie dans les camps de réfugiés, puis l'adaptation à un nouveau pays, à une culture différente. Ici aussi, l'accès à une Histoire non officielle, trop longtemps cachée par la voix dictatoriale du meneur, captive le lecteur. Le choc des cultures rend le périple de l'auteure coloré, ce dont rend compte l'adaptation difficile à l'Ailleurs : « Je n'avais plus de points de repère, plus d'outils pour pouvoir rêver, pour pouvoir me projeter dans le futur, pour pouvoir vivre le présent, dans le présent. » Comment ne pas être ému devant le regard sagace de Kim Thúy qui, à la vue d'un simple tatouage par exemple, relève l'écart qui sépare « une cicatrice désirée et une cicatrice infligée, l'une payée, l'autre payante, l'une visible, l'autre impénétrable, l'une à fleur de peau, l'autre insondable, l'une dessinée, l'autre informe » ? Ces deux univers sont-ils conciliables ?

Accueillir l'autre ou être accueilli par lui ? Deux options qui, au-delà de leur élan opposé, mettent en présence de la différence et donnent à percevoir la distance qui nous sépare toujours de l'Ailleurs tout en nous y réunissant. Par les mots d'André Lamontagne et de Kim Thúy, le lecteur fait l'expérience d'une réunion à soi.



Coming of Age in a World of Change

Leane Lieberman

The Book of Trees. Orca \$12.95

Margaret Buffie

Winter Shadows. Tundra \$21.99

Reviewed by Sarika P. Bose

The female protagonists of these young-adult novels are at turning points of their lives. At the brink of independent adulthood, they are aware that they have to think seriously about the consequences of their decisions. Mia, Beatrice, and Cassandra have extra challenges because of their dysfunctional families, and they feel isolated from their contemporaries, who appear to come from more stable and conventional ones. Their fathers' inability to emotionally support or protect them is the catalyst towards change in their lives.

In Leanne Lieberman's *The Book of Trees*, Mia's sense of emptiness in her life, deeply connected to both her breakup with her boyfriend and a desperate need for a consistent, loving relationship with her musician father, leads her to explore her Jewish heritage. Despite her liberal, activist mother's unease, Mia leaves Toronto with a post-secondary scholarship to study at an orthodox school in Jerusalem. Mia expects Jerusalem and the school to elevate her life and give it meaning and purpose. She is initially attracted to an orthodox Jewish lifestyle precisely because of its difference from what has been her former lifestyle, which includes casual sex and drug and alcohol use, and an upbringing that allows her much independence. She interprets her peers' rule-bound Jewish lifestyle and their families' controlling parental approach as gateways to self-fulfillment and manifestations of noble ideals. However, instead of giving her inner peace, Jerusalem provides an immediate and intense education in Middle East politics, and Mia quickly

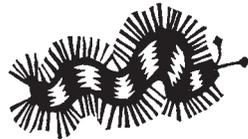
becomes disillusioned with her peers' self-absorption and narrow-mindedness. She is not convinced by her peers' vague logic about their rights to the land, and feels increasingly stifled by their assumption that to question those rights or the interpretation of Jewish law and custom is to declare one's opposition to them. The trees of the book's title represent the disjunction between the positive ideals of harmony in her Israeli and Jewish-Canadian community and the ugly reality of the Israeli-Palestinian relationship that she experiences.

The trees planted over a razed Arab village by Jewish settlers are superficial symbols of beauty and fertility, which fail in their goal to erase the reality of forcible relocation of non-Jewish communities. Those trees also literalize the superficiality of her peers' ideals, hiding what Mia sees as systematized dehumanization of Palestinians and the erosion of their rights.

Mia's decision to leave the Jewish school and community is perhaps expected, though the steps to her decision-making might not be so. After a night of sex and marijuana with a Canadian musician who resembles her previous boyfriend, Mia decides to join him and other foreign nationals in a grassroots movement that helps Palestinians rebuild their homes. The reader seems to be expected to share Mia's position as an outsider in both Jewish culture and in the Middle-Eastern situation, so that Mia's final decision seems logical and ethical. Mia's point of view is represented as open-minded, inclusive, and just. However, some readers might find the underlying assumption that drinking at bars, casual sex, and casual parental relationships is not just the norm, but *normal*, an equally unsatisfactory alternative to the rigid lifestyle represented by the Jewish community in Jerusalem. Yet the novel's open-ended resolution and its portrayal of a strong, critical thinker in Mia do promise a positive future for the character.

Margaret Buffie's *Winter Shadows* tells the intertwined stories of two Manitoba girls who are separated by time but united by parallel situations. Their timelines intersect at similar moments in their lives when they are trying to adjust to reconfigurations of their families, brought about by the remarriage of their fathers. The strained relationships with their stepmothers and stepsiblings form the bulk of the crises in the novels, and at moments of particular emotional distress, the girls have visions of each other that give them strength and encouragement; the past and future influence each other for the better. The modern Cassandra is worried she is losing her mind and seeing ghosts, but Beatrice, who lives in the nineteenth century (and is later revealed as Cassandra's ancestor), is closer to her First Nations roots and more open-minded about visions. Although the wicked stepmother paradigm seems to be followed initially, the novels move towards better comprehension of the stepmothers' characters, not surprisingly misinterpreted by the teenagers at the beginning. The novel's hopeful ending comes from more effective communication and greater understanding of others' positions, an understanding that leaves the protagonists with an improved, if not an ideal relationship with the stepfamily.

Mia, Cassandra, and Beatrice are sympathetic protagonists whose stories of eventual personal empowerment are thought-provoking. The well-told narratives and the argument that critical thinking leads to compassion and just action towards others make these novels attractive choices for young adults.



Me. Again.

Farley Mowat

Eastern Passage. McClelland & Stewart \$32.99

Margaret Trudeau

Changing My Mind. HarperCollins \$34.99

Reviewed by Katja Lee

Although the last decade has seen a glut of celebrity memoirs on the market, most have come from first-timers—relatively new faces seeking to solidify their celebrity with the narrative of their success or old, familiar faces finally weighing in on a lifetime of work in the public eye. But in and amongst the Justin Biebers and the Christopher Plummerts are our serial autobiographers, those hardy souls who return again and again to squeeze another text from the past, and if Farley Mowat is their reigning sovereign, then the return of Margaret Trudeau after a twenty-eight-year hiatus makes her something of a prodigal daughter. Both *Eastern Passage* and *Changing My Mind* return to re-narrate those formative years that rendered the authors public figures, but their approach to this project and, in particular, to the autobiographies that have come before, could not be more different.

Mowat makes no attempt to hide that *Eastern Passage* addresses a period (1937-1954) already covered in other works (no less than seven by this author's count). There are new narratives of his early years with his first wife and, strangely, stories wholly unconnected to Mowat (symptomatic, perhaps, of an author who has exhausted his own supply of drinking yarns). Of more interest are the new tellings of old narratives: in the revised rendering of his trip to the Arctic, Mowat has written back into the narrative the cast of characters originally excised. Beneath the rollicking pace and customary scatological scenes, however, it is clear that Mowat still resents the "attacks" on his Arctic tales and he makes space, for the first time in his texts,

to respond. Ultimately, this collection of anecdotal fragments is loosely bound by the drive to uncover the making of Mowat as we know him today: this is not about the development of the Mowat persona, but the genesis of the author and the great themes that would come to dominate his work for the next sixty years. *Eastern Passage* is not, however, a text for the uninitiated: it reads more like an appendix than an introduction to his work and is written for an audience that can fill in its gaps with information gleaned from previous works and recognize the significance of small incidents (like a chance run-in with a dying whale) within the larger scope of Mowat's oeuvre.

While Mowat has crafted a text designed to be in conversation with his previous texts, Trudeau seeks to overwrite her other autobiographies and change *our* minds about what it is that makes "Maggie" tick. Framed as a "cautionary tale" about the havoc that undiagnosed and untreated bipolar disorders can wreak, *Changing My Mind* is a far cry from the fairy-turned-emancipatory tale of *Beyond Reason* (1979) and a complete undoing of the maturity and "sanity" claimed in *Consequences* (1982). Trudeau is candid about the impact of her "rocketing brain chemistry" on her two marriages and offers a compelling portrait of full-blown mania and the extraordinary effort required to manage an incurable mood disorder. Complete with testimonies from health-care professionals, it is a text designed to support her work as a mental health advocate, but while *Changing My Mind* models a kind of empowerment enabled by medical discourses, it also suggests how dramatically these discourses can impact the life-storying project. Much of the text covers old ground, and these familiar narratives are now reframed as further evidence of the accuracy of the bipolar diagnosis. There is also a marked difference in Trudeau's narrative style—there is a sense of humour where there was none before—but

whether this is a function of her health, the years separating her from these events, or changes to her collaborative writing team, is difficult to say. Although the text ultimately seeks to supplant previous iterations of her life story, it is, arguably, through these twice- and thrice-told tales that we can trace the contours of a changing life with more depth and nuance. The same argument cannot be made for Mowat—there is little to distinguish the man who narrated events sixty years ago from the man who narrates today, and one cannot help but long for a book that does not return to the Mowat of old, but Mowat *as* old. Trudeau's return to autobiography reminds us that, in the serial autobiography project, it is not just stories that will change—we expect to see change in our storytellers too.

Capriccio vénitien

Marc Ory

Zanipolo. Triptyque 18,00 \$

Compte rendu par Chiara Falangola

Zanipolo est un roman bref—le deuxième de Marc Ory, marseillais d'origine et québécois d'adoption—écrit dans un style précieux qui s'adapte bien à la matière traitée et à l'esprit de l'époque évoquée. Il s'agit de l'histoire de Giovanni et Paolo, deux jumeaux siamois. Zanipolo, surnom vénitien de la Basilique des saints Giovanni (Zani) et Paolo (Polo), est aussi le nom unique que la ville donnera à cet être double. L'histoire se déroule au XVIII^e siècle à l'époque de la *Serenissima* : Giovanni et Paolo, mystérieux chanteurs d'opéra, arrivent dans une Venise mondaine et cruelle en manque de divertissement. Zani, timide et idéaliste, et Polo, impudent et hédoniste, feront cadeau d'extases et de tortures, de soupirs et de plaintes à la ville qui tour à tour les aimera et les condamnera.

La clé de lecture du récit de cet être double se trouve dans l'incipit même du

roman, dans le délire énigmatique du mourant Niccolò Guardi, frère du plus célèbre Francesco : « Monstres! Soyez remerciés de nous avoir montrés à nous-mêmes! Il a fallu qu'ils apparaissent, tel le Messie, pour que nous réalisions que nous étions simples et doubles. » Comme la statue équestre du Capitaine Bartolomeo Colleoni sur le Campo de San Giovanni e Paolo, les deux jumeaux s'élèvent au statut de mythe : ils deviennent figure en chair et os de la statue du célèbre condottiere du XV^e siècle, révééré comme un être double, mi-cheval mi-homme, recélant dans sa dualité la puissance des deux mondes.

Tout le roman se construit sur l'opposition et la réunion des contraires dans ce *capriccio* littéraire que semble être *Zanipolo*. L'émerveillement et l'horreur s'entremêlent au quotidien de Venise et s'écoulent dans ses canaux à l'aide d'une restitution verbale aux tons et aux dégradés des *vedute* de Francesco Guardi. Seul le sublime de la musique et des voix enchanteresses de Zani et Polo accomplit cette union du sacré et du profane, comme un hapax au milieu des tentatives impossibles de réunions des contraires dont est parsemé le roman.

Entre l'illusion du rêve et l'évocation analeptique de la réalité, le récit des frères Giovanni et Paolo est construit comme un récit enchâssé, dont le cadre est constitué par les chapitres un, deux, et trente-quatre. Ce dernier chapitre rejoint le premier dans l'ambiguïté de la frontière entre vision onirique et narration : Zanipolo a-t-il vraiment existé ou ne serait-il qu'une « étrange histoire », une hallucination collective?



Disappearances

Pascale Quiviger; trans. Lazer Lederhendler

The Breakwater House. Anansi \$22.95

Connie Gault

Euphoria: A Novel. Coteau \$21.00

Reviewed by Paul Denham

The Breakwater House is a book of family chronicles: Aurore tells her daughter Lucie stories of Aurore's parents, Jean and Kathleen, and her own absent husband. And Suzanne takes her daughter Claire (or rather, Lucie disguised as Claire) to visit her mother-in-law, Granny Cadieux, in the nursing home. The families converge as Aurore and Suzanne, though of different social classes, become friends, and as Lucie and Claire share clothes and even trade identities. When Lucie is fifteen, her mother Aurore deserts her for a female lover Maria. A fourth generation makes its appearance when Lucie has a baby—a girl, of course—named Odyssee, who dies in a childhood accident.

Women dominate these stories; the men, when they appear, function as sperm donors and then discreetly vanish. Indeed, Alambra, Suzanne's immigrant Latin American housekeeper, once had a husband who was arrested in her home country and made to disappear. That's what happens to men in this book—they disappear. Paul, the father of Lucie's child, won't accept his responsibilities, and Lucie does not expect him to. In Aurore's story of her absent husband, he wears "a coat of chain mail and a hood of white gold filigree" and is "upright, strong, and courageous, which is why he's in hiding." An invisible knight in armour makes a poor father. Suzanne's husband Gerald gets a little more time; Suzanne pictures him as "a punctured watering hose with very little water remaining at the spout, while she and Claire shrivel in plain sight like small potted flowers." Elsewhere

we hear that "her marriage is perfect and perfectly unhappy . . . [Gerald] pays for everything she wants in cash without complaining and is on the road three days out of four." Perhaps that's as good as it gets—punctured watering hose and all.

Untypically, Lucie's grandfather Jean, a *coureur de bois* (one of the hints that the story is to be read as an allegory of Quebec history), "enfolded [his Irish-Canadian wife Kathleen] in his male passion, threadbare cotton, capable arms, and perpetually untied bootlaces." He tries to rescue her from the persecutions of the villagers and fails. When Aurore tells this story to Lucie, Lucie asks, "Jean, my grandfather, can we go see him?" Aurore's evasively chilling reply is, "How about making some blueberry jam? What do you say?" And so Jean, the only heroic male and plausibly good husband in the book, is also made to disappear.

A kind of counterpoint to this story is the story of the Breakwater House, a strangely shifting seaside place bought by an anonymous woman who seems to be writing the stories of these characters in a series of notebooks. "It [the house] is the place concocted by whatever in me has retained the ability to see, to heal, to hope." It is, it seems, the house of fiction itself, and at the end, with her story completed, she can leave it.

There are likewise many disappearances in *Euphoria*, beginning on the first page when a mysterious young woman gives birth in Mrs. Ryley's Toronto boarding house in 1891 and then walks into Lake Ontario. Gladdie McConnell, a lowly domestic in the house, tries to take charge of the newborn girl, but her intentions are thwarted when the Children's Aid finds an adoptive home for her. The early part of the novel reaches back into Gladdie's early life—Margaret, her beloved first caregiver, vanishes; Gladdie herself deliberately disappears after some time in a sexually abusive home, and manages to secure a

place in Mrs. Ryley's kitchen. We can see that she could easily end up on the streets, but by sheer cunning and strength of will she manages to survive and become a kind of long-distance guardian to the baby, Orillia. Orillia's original father, Johnny Dabb, also disappears, but not completely; Gladdie keeps an eye on Orillia and reports to him even as he moves first to the US and then to England. Feckless and cowardly though Johnny is, one has to acknowledge that he is somewhat more than a sperm donor; he wants at least to know what happens to his child. Orillia thus has an adoptive family, but also a kind of secret mother in Gladdie, as well as a secret father.

In the early years of the twentieth century, Orillia and her parents move to rural Saskatchewan, and Gladdie, by this time ready to try something outside the drizzly winter twilight of Toronto, follows her. She and her friend Hilda look after Orillia after she is injured in the Regina cyclone of 1912, when her mother, widowed and remarried, is out of the country. Hilda even suspects Gladdie of being Orillia's real mother, but when Florence, Orillia's adoptive mother, finally turns up, they both acknowledge that she has the true claim. In the closing words of the book, Gladdie knows that "she had been right to let go. Florence Cooper was a mother, and love and respect were her due. She was haughty and cranky and less than ideal, but she was there, she was real, as real a mother as you could ever imagine stepping up to the door." The adoptive mother is the genuine article, and Gladdie, in spite of her unpromising origins, has made a success of her life.



Novel Ideas

Tom Rachman

The Imperfectionists. Dial \$29.95

Camilla Gibb

The Beauty of Humanity Movement. Doubleday \$32.95

Reviewed by Kit Dobson

These novels have little in common, besides the fact that both authors were born in London, England, and are Canadian-raised (in Toronto in Gibb's case; Vancouver in Rachman's). Beyond that, the two can best be compared as recent publications that are garnering interest. They are contemporary novels whose narratives move between the present tense (well, 2007 in Rachman's case) and a relatively brief historical period (within the memories of still-living characters, for the most part).

I would like to begin with the conversations that have been taking place about Rachman's debut novel, *The Imperfectionists*. Much of the conversation has centred around the front cover review by Christopher Buckley in *The New York Times Review of Books* from 10 April, 2010 (complete with illustration by Seth). Buckley's review is a rave, and has prompted a great deal of interest in the book (as I write, Brad Pitt's production company is rumoured to be completing a screenplay adaptation, and reviews have been published in major publications across the English-speaking world). While ambivalent reviews are out there (especially ones that respond to the *Times* review), there is a lot of praise to be found: "almost note perfect," declares Kevin Chong in *The Globe and Mail*; "a precise, playful fiction," states Ed Cumming in the *Times Literary Supplement*. This sort of reception is about the best-case scenario that a first-time writer could hope for. Rachman, a journalist who has worked in many countries and who currently lives in Rome, is likely happy with the results.

The next step, of course, is to consider the book itself. Why all the hype? The book is about an unnamed English-language daily newspaper published out of Rome. Founded in the post-war period, it persists into the present era as a faltering twelve-page daily paper with a slim subscription base of 10,000 readers and no Internet presence. The paper is the device that brings the characters in the book together; effectively, *The Imperfectionists* is a series of vignettes about people who work at the paper or are otherwise connected to it, like the aging, hapless Lloyd Burko, the Paris correspondent who is so desperate for a story that he exploits his son for leads; Winston Cheung, who knows nothing about newspapers but travels to Cairo to attempt to become the paper's correspondent; and Ornella de Monterecci, a loyal reader of the paper who obsessively reads each issue cover-to-cover, leaving her stuck in the mid-1990s. Each vignette tends to revolve around a short sequence of events in the focal character's life that leads to a change in her or his fortunes or otherwise. Between these vignettes, Rachman inserts a more historically driven narrative about the rise and fall of the newspaper from its founding by Cyrus Ott in the 1950s to its demise at the hands of Oliver Ott, his heir, who is given a vignette of his own. The younger—and clearly lesser—Ott is a weak man, more interested in his dog Schopenhauer than in human interaction. His inaction drives the paper into the ground, and the final action of the novel, in which his dog is killed by an employee of the paper, typifies the generally mean-spirited nature of the characters.

So, is it a good book? I can understand why newspapers have tended to review it well: a number of reviews comment on the book's "authenticity" in reporting the newspaper business. A book about the industry is likely to be good reading for those within it. I remain somewhat unconvinced, however. While the structure of the book,

interlacing the vignettes with the historical narrative of the paper's rise and fall, is intelligent, it also becomes somewhat rigid, forcing Rachman to portion out his text in even-sized chunks despite the material, which may warrant more variety. In other words, the form feels somewhat forced. That said, the deeply flawed characters are generally readable, even if a couple—like Rich Snyder, Winston Cheung's antagonist and competitor for the Cairo job—are caricatures of themselves. *The Imperfectionists* is, in short, a deeply competent first book, but it leaves Rachman room to grow.

Camilla Gibb's novel, *The Beauty of Humanity Movement*, on the other hand, shows an author whose experience allows range and flexibility. The novel is particularly anticipated given the success of her 2005 novel, *Sweetness in the Belly*, winner of the 2006 Trillium Book Award. *The Beauty of Humanity Movement* is set in Vietnam, and follows the lives of characters in Hanoi who have their pasts, presents, and futures altered by Maggie, who is born in Vietnam but raised in the United States. Maggie returns to Hanoi to work for the Hotel Metropole as a curator for the hotel's art collection. Her return to Vietnam is the result of a desire to discover what happened to her father through the years of colonization, political upheaval, and war that Vietnamese citizens have endured. The Beauty of Humanity movement itself is a fictionalized artistic movement that is violently repressed by the communist government for its failure to conform to its doctrines, and Maggie's father's participation in the group led to his internment and, it appears, his death. Maggie's access to this information is limited: she searches Hanoi for people who know this history, and discovers Hu'ng, an old Phở seller who used to serve artists as the communist regime in the north of Vietnam came into power. Little by little, Maggie, Hu'ng, and his friend Binh and Binh's son Tu' are able to help Maggie

uncover the layers of the past—and have their lives altered in the process.

Gibb's novel is keen-eyed, historically oriented, but not geared towards straightforward documentation. She observes in the endnotes that there is relatively little translated into English from northern Vietnam and, while a simplistic ethnographic fiction could be a temptation in this context, Gibb's character focus prevents the narrative from claiming any sort of authoritative perspective on Vietnam. Instead, Gibb writes an intelligent novel that is likely to be appreciated by its readers.

All Purpose Multi-tool

Jennifer Reid

Louis Riel and the Creation of Modern Canada: Mythic Discourse and the Postcolonial State. U of New Mexico P \$34.95

Reviewed by Mandy Barberree

Via a thorough presentation of the historical events surrounding the Métis uprisings of 1869-70 and 1885, Jennifer Reid methodically outlines her case for Louis Riel as *the* ideal unifying figure for Canadian identity because she believes adamantly that Canada desperately needs one. Reid argues that Canada is *so* fragmented that describing it as a *confederation* is more accurate than the use of the term *nation-state*. She believes that Riel's multicultural and multiregional background positions him as the ideal figure to bridge Canada's current postcolonial divisions.

Unlike postmodernists such as Linda Hutcheon, whom Reid sees as advocating the virtues of "fence sitting" in the matter of Canadian identity, Reid believes there is "a longstanding need for cultural unity" and that it is possible "to create a collective discourse appropriate to the Canadian situation that is equally specific to modernity." She challenges the idea of "Canada as a nation" by working her way down a grocer's

list of past and present customary symbols for Canadian identity, such as the north, the CPR, the RCMP, "The British Master Race," and the "Cultural Mosaic." More importantly though, she works with these familiar cultural gathering points to show their inadequacy and to build an argument that Canada is divided because it "obviously lacks a defining revolutionary moment" or "heritage."

Reid locates this heritage and "missing moment" by arguing that the events of 1869-70 and 1885 should be referred to as revolutions instead of rebellions. While this makes sense, it also leads her project into one of its most interesting moments, where she compares these events to the formational European revolutions of 1848. Reid argues that the Canadian revolutions, like those in Europe, "constituted a foundational moment of violence in the country's development into a postcolonial state." This is a bit of a stretch, but not much more than the leap she is making in her overall argument for Riel as the lynchpin of a stronger Canada. Ultimately, Reid's work digs down to the core of some of the most politically relevant issues in the contemporary discussion of Canadian national identity. Nevertheless, I question whether there is such a desperate need for one single unifying Canadian figure. More importantly, Reid ends up appropriating Riel for her own contemporary political concerns for Canada, without really considering if the concerns of Riel, or today's Métis population, would merge in any way with her own.

Riel's persona has been consistently used, and our image of him has been formed, by the various and historically shifting concerns of the authors who choose to write about him, so Reid's text does not stand alone in this endeavour, and she knows this. However, the extremely bold appropriative steps Reid takes only further mythologize Riel by once again propping him up as a symbolic tool for bridging the

political divides of a Canadian *confederation*. Ultimately, this does Riel a continued disservice; and because of this, Reid's project loses any potential it might gain by her methodical hard work and obvious admiration of the man.

Faire son chemin parmi les ombres

Lyne Richard

Marcher pieds nus sur nos disparitions. David 15,95 \$

Isabelle Gaudet-Labine

Entre l'acier et la chair. Noroît 14,95 \$

Compte rendu par Ariane Audet

Marcher pieds nus sur nos disparitions, troisième recueil de Lyne Richard aux Éditions David, fait partie de ces œuvres qui parviennent à donner une réelle valeur poétique aux images de la disparition. Parcours amoureux et érotique, épopée de l'intime, les corps désirants recueillent l'absence, la solitude et la mort : « la langue attendait / comme si le désir / seul / pouvait nommer les désordres ». À la fois lieu de passage et sépulture, la chair permet d'ouvrir les poèmes à une question plus universelle, qui dépasse l'intimité des sujets : comment ne pas oublier? La richesse des poèmes de Lyne Richard tient à ce qu'elle transcende cette simple interrogation. Elle fait « chante[r] [les] deuils », donne à ce qui disparaît le mérite d'être regardé, et à la disparition une valeur sacrée. Le corps creuset n'accueille plus uniquement l'individu, mais offre aussi l'hospitalité à tous les drames humains : « il faudrait . . . disperser les cendres des guerres / dans le bleu des fleuves / à l'heure où la main / caresse la mort sans méfiance ». Lucide et affirmée, la poésie de Richard donne envie de croire à ce jour où nous serons peut-être « immobiles et nus / à attendre une autre naissance? ».

Entre l'acier et la chair, deuxième livre d'Isabelle Gaudet-Labine, emprunte aussi le thème de la disparition. Entre la dureté

du métal et la fragilité du corps qu'annonce le titre, les poèmes se construisent autour d'une déchirure. Comme chez Richard, le corps permet de chercher des « preuves de vie ». L'érotisme et la sexualité sont présentés comme une porte vers « l'apesanteur », où la terreur des « nuits vacantes » pleines d'ombres et de morts n'est plus, et où les corps silencieux deviennent l'unique façon de communiquer. Parallèlement, on repère, on scrute : « un trou / un nid pour cacher des vœux / dans le mur ». Car la question revient : que pouvons-nous, « orphelins // sans paysage / pour nommer le monde ». L'héritage, obsédant, demande à ce qu'on le remette en cause : « peut-[on] encore / trouver quelque chose / dans l'espace qui reste ». Entre le désir de tout effacer et celui de laisser sa trace, les poèmes proposent de se battre contre le vide et le trop plein, pour parvenir à rester « à l'affût du monde ». Mais si le sujet s'empresse de saisir et de questionner le réel, il le fait par bribes : « ne prenons pas de risque / camouflons / encore un peu de vie ». Interrogateurs et elliptiques, d'une parfaite sobriété, les poèmes deviennent de petits espaces de lutte et de survie, des lieux de passage où l'on attend patiemment que la vie se régénère, dans un ultime constat de la fragilité du monde.

Exploring the Human Heart

Claire Holden Rothman

The Heart Specialist. Cormorant \$21.00

Reviewed by Wendy Roy

Claire Holden Rothman's novel *The Heart Specialist* has a fascinating subject: a Canadian woman doctor in the late nineteenth century, when many women were banned from the study of medicine. It begins with a compelling prologue: an adult narrator remembers the last time she saw her father, when she was five years old and he came into her bedroom in tears. And the book has a riveting first chapter: a thirteen-year-old

waits for an injured squirrel to die so that she can dissect it. The novel as a whole meets some, but not all, of the expectations provoked by this gripping opening.

Rothman's novel is loosely based on the life of Maude Abbott, one of Canada's first female medical graduates and a world-renowned heart specialist. Rothman's debt to Abbott's life story is acknowledged primarily through the epigraphs to many of the novel's sections, which consist of quotations from Abbott's writing. Like Abbott, the protagonist and narrator of *The Heart Specialist*, Agnes White, is a woman with a tragic family history: her father abandoned the family after being tried and acquitted of murdering his sister; her mother died when she was young and she was raised by a grandmother; and her sister suffered from a mental illness. Like Abbott, Agnes has a keen, if often thwarted interest in medicine: she wants to study medicine at McGill University, but is barred because of her gender and has to study instead at Montreal's Bishop's College; and she becomes a well-known specialist on cardiac disease after taking over the specimen museum at McGill and writing several well-received treatises on the heart anomalies she finds there. However, Rothman diverges from Abbott's life story in important emotional and psychological details. She makes White's father a physician who worked at McGill (Abbott's father was a minister), and she focuses on the heart in a metaphoric way, as an organ of love as well as life, taking as her starting point one of the comments made about Abbott, that "she did not realize she was loved."

Rothman's fictional portrayal of a woman fighting to make her way in a world that was often rigorously and systematically barred to women is fascinating. But the novel sometimes falters because of the choices Rothman makes in presenting this compelling story. The narrative intersects with Agnes White only at certain moments

in her career, and many times I found myself speculating about the other moments that might have been even more captivating. For example, Rothman skips completely over Agnes' training as a physician, choosing to end one section (dated 1890) with her rejection by McGill and her acceptance by Bishop's (which wanted to promote itself as a more liberal school), and to start the next section eight years later, in 1898, when Agnes returns to Montreal after postgraduate medical studies in Europe. The result of this choice is that the difficult and complex experiences and decisions that Agnes would have had to make as the first (and, in her time, only) female medical student at Bishop's, and in her later studies in Europe, are elided.

Another difficulty with the novel is the dialogue. Early in the story, it seems realistic and compelling, but as the novel progresses, the dialogue becomes at times verbose and wooden and at other times slangy and reversely anachronistic. In other words, the characters sometimes speak more formally and volubly than spoken dialogue should allow, or they paradoxically speak in a colloquial way that seems more appropriate to the early twenty-first century than to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For example, one of Agnes' friends, in a section dated 1890, outlines in detail to Agnes and her sister the context of McGill's opposition to women in medicine. The purpose of this speech is clearly to inform readers of the history of women in medical schools in Canada, but it comes across as an unconvincingly didactic statement to a friend. On the other end of the conversational spectrum, a few pages earlier, that same friend refers to a photograph of Agnes as a "mug shot." Although the word *mug* used to refer to the human face was common in 1890, the first reference I could find to photographs of criminals, and colloquially to bad photos of anyone, as "mug shots" was in 1950.

Despite my disappointment that these sorts of formal choices mean that the narrative promise of the first few chapters is not entirely fulfilled, the story itself is still a gripping one, and I read to the end with great interest. Rothman's portrayal of the one-sided relationship that Agnes White has with her mentor, Dr. William Howlett, who exploits her knowledge while at the same time promoting her work, is particularly intriguing (and is loosely modelled on Abbott's relationship with real-life pathologist William Osler). It was a wise choice for Rothman not to bind herself in too restrictive a way to the biographical details of Abbott's life. Thus Rothman invents a love interest for Agnes, but one that Agnes does not recognize because she is too obsessed by the love she feels for both her absent father and her distant mentor. The relationship between Agnes and the fictional subordinate who is devoted to her allows the metaphoric nature of the book's title to become abundantly evident. Agnes is someone who understands completely the mechanical and physical functioning of the human heart, but does not understand its figurative workings in terms of loving and being loved. That is the lesson that Agnes needs to learn, and one that she does learn in a satisfying way by the novel's conclusion.

Truth Embedded in Fiction

Johanna Skibsrud

The Sentimentalists. Gaspereau \$27.95

Reviewed by Jan Lermitté

In the months since Skibsrud's debut novel won the Giller prize, it has received as much attention for its design and for Gaspereau's unique printing process (which resulted in a shortage of available copies), as for the poet's success with her first work of fiction. Although the book recently won the Alcuin Society Prize for Excellence in Book Design in Canada, its aesthetic appeal

belies the sombre subject matter of this intriguing father-daughter story. Skibsrud's narrative, which combines family drama, humour, historical detail, and traumatic events, is loosely based on her father's life. Included in the epilogue is the transcript of Skibsrud's father's courtroom testimony about an incident he witnessed while serving in Vietnam, which underlines her desire to play with the genre of memoir through two key themes: the construction of history from layers of memory and truth, and the tragic effects of combat on trauma victims and their families.

The Sentimentalists is the story of Napoleon Haskell, a Vietnam War veteran whose declining health has prompted his daughters to move him from his trailer in Fargo, North Dakota to Casablanca, Ontario, to live with Henry, whose son Owen died in action in Vietnam and was Napoleon's best friend. Like Rick, the protagonist played by Bogart in the movie, *Casablanca* (which provides some of the narrative framework of the novel), Napoleon's life has been scarred by alcoholism and relationship breakdown. When Napoleon's daughter, the unnamed narrator, arrives in Casablanca because her own life has been derailed, he tells her his memories of Vietnam. However, after hearing his stories she admits, "my own sense of these things was only further confounded, and sometimes now I'm astonished by the audacity of any attempt, including my own, at understanding anything at all." This inability to make sense of the emotions and memories that are submerged beneath one's consciousness resonates in the image of the lake that was created when Casablanca was flooded during the creation of a hydro-electric dam in the '50s. Like the remains of the original town that lie below its surface, the memories and feelings that Napoleon and his daughter experience are often unclear and indistinct. Skibsrud's narrative style reinforces this sense of

confusion—especially through her unconventional use of long, rambling sentences and fragments.

Napoleon and his daughter are sentimentalists—people whose actions are often based more on emotions than reason. However, they also are profoundly affected by their sense of place, and the narrator details the spaces that define their lives. These places are marked by waiting: for action, for healing, and for death. As Napoleon faces his own mortality, he quips in his best Bogart voice, “I’m gonna die in Casablanca. . . . It’s a good spot for it.” Although he is sorry for the pain he has caused his family, sorry for allowing them into “the world that he also inhabited,” ultimately he remains emotionally unavailable to those he loves.

Skibsrud’s novel, which has been compared to Anne Michaels’ *The Winter Vault*, challenges the reader: the plot remains subservient to the language and character development; the rhythm of the narrative is poetic but occasionally ponderous; moreover, events are confusing and seen through the lens of the traumatic past. Although it could be described as a war novel, most of the plot does not focus on combat, but rather, sympathetically demonstrates the profound effect that trauma plays in the lives of individuals and their families. The histories we construct, Skibsrud reminds us, are full of gaps, losses and uncertainty, which must ultimately be faced or hidden.

Pomo Redux

Robert David Stacey, ed.

RE: Reading the Postmodern: Canadian Literature and Criticism After Modernism. U of Ottawa P
\$39.95

Reviewed by Kit Dobson

It is difficult for me to overstate the value of this book, the latest in the “Reappraisals: Canadian Writers” series published by the University of Ottawa Press, and the

result of the 2008 Canadian Literature Symposium at the same university. This book is a must-read for anyone attempting to understand Canadian literature since the 1960s, whether or not the primary writers studied in this book (many of the postmodern “usual suspects” and beyond) are the focus of one’s study. *RE: Reading the Postmodern* is an excellent resource for comprehending where Canadian literature has been in the past half-century, where CanLit is now, and where CanLit is going. It is the antidote to casual references to “the postmodern” as a shorthand for things that are weird, challenging, “avant-garde,” or that otherwise go “bump” in the night by those who are opposed to the literary experimentation that has taken place in recent history. Robert Stacey’s collection adds a great deal of specificity, weight, and intelligence to the postmodern in Canada—as a term invested with a particular history, set of practices, and outcomes. The essays collected in this volume are wide-ranging, frequently in disagreement with one another, and altogether important in helping readers gain insight into this area of CanLit.

After Stacey’s critical introduction to the book, four sections govern the structure: “Retrospections,” “En Garde! Traditions, Counter-Traditions, Anti-Traditions,” “Historicities,” and “Publics.” Stacey begins his introduction by noting the historical nature of the term: “at one time in the academic and intellectual life in this country,” he writes, “‘postmodernism’ was a powerful word.” This power has declined, and the postmodern is now, by and large, something away from which CanLit has moved (without any single dominant paradigm to replace it). Ranging from his personal account of first encountering the term through Linda Hutcheon’s work—especially *The Canadian Postmodern*, a book that is a touchstone for many writers throughout *RE: Reading the Postmodern*—to historical overview of the tensions entailed in

understanding the postmodern, Stacey makes a convincing case for the need for a wide-ranging debate of the term, a debate from which “no single understanding of Canadian postmodernism will emerge.” The understandings are particularly vexed, Stacey observes, in part because of a sharp critical divide between the study of prose and poetry. Stacey notes the self-conscious tension of historicizing a term that itself contests the telling of history, all the while providing a broad genealogy for postmodernism beyond Canada, through the work of thinkers like Jameson, Hayden White, Derrida, and beyond.

The first section, “Retrospections,” includes important essays by Robert Kroetsch, Frank Davey, and Linda Hutcheon. These three contributors are essential for a book on the topic, and each essay delineates a different aspect of the postmodern: Kroetsch discusses his intervention, via *boundary 2*, into postmodernism in Canada; Davey’s shuffle text essay aphoristically challenges our preconceptions of the postmodern; and Hutcheon’s essay notes the historical dimension to her contribution to the debate via *The Canadian Postmodern* through a discussion of changes that have taken place since. The second section of the book, “En Garde!,” situates and debates the contributions of the key figures in Canadian postmodernism. Adam Carter begins by tracing tropes of postmodern irony through Hutcheon’s work, and Christian Bök argues for a definition of the postmodern in Canada that, in opposition to Hutcheon’s well-known definitions of historiographic metafiction and ex-centricity, is situated within an avant-garde experimental practice. Stephen Cain works in this section to produce a generational shift in Canadian postmodernism by identifying what he sees as a “second wave” in writers like Daniel Jones and Lynn Crosbie, while Alexander MacLeod works through Robert Kroetsch’s regionalism in tandem with his

understanding of the postmodern. Gregory Betts completes the second section via a discursus into sound and visual poetry that replaces a notion of the avant-garde with a notion of decadence.

The subsequent section, “Historicities,” begins with a contemplation of the role, specifically, of historical fiction within Canadian postmodernism by Herb Wyile that notes an ebb in experimentation within such fiction, an assertion that Jennifer Blair tests indirectly in the subsequent essay through a complex examination of *The Englishman’s Boy* via Deleuze and Bergson. Deborah C. Bowen follows Blair’s analysis with one on *The Stone Diaries*’ use of the photograph and parodic effects of the real in a fictional context, while Jenn Stephenson offers a take on metatheatricality onstage at the turn of the millennium. Sylvia Söderlind concludes the section by offering a reading of “ghostmodernism” and the spaces between the modern and postmodern. The final section, “Publics,” offers a reading of George Bowering’s less-often studied *A Short, Sad Book* by Jason Wiens as a response to the frequent focus on books like *Burning Water*; a clear account of a cross-generational shifts in Canadian poetry from Pauline Butling that argues for an ongoing tradition of radical innovation; and concludes with a call from Susan Rudy for a “poetics of enactment” that she reads through the work of Erin Moure, Jeff Derksen, and Nicole Brossard, and that she ends with one of my favourite passages from bpNichol’s *Selected Organs*.

Pauline Butling notes in her paper that the original conference “did not elicit much response from feminists, writers of colour, or gay and lesbian writers” and notes that this problematic is a particularity of the postmodern, which has been a project that has attracted writers / critics vested with cultural privilege. Butling notes that the conference organizers nevertheless did a good job of balancing these tensions, and

RE: Reading the Postmodern attempts to do so as well. At the end of the day, this volume lives up to Stacey's assertion in the introduction that it "represents the most significant attempt to address the question of Canadian postmodernism across a multiplicity of genres ever published, and the only anthology of Canadian postmodernist criticism to be published in Canada."

Sit, Stay, and Play

Richard Teley, ed.

The Exile Book of Canadian Dog Stories. Exile
\$24.95

Priscila Uppal, ed.

The Exile Book of Canadian Sports Stories. Exile
\$24.95

Reviewed by Owen Percy

Richard Teley's thorough and surprising introduction to *The Exile Book of Canadian Dog Stories* provides an excellent contextualization for the anthology's very existence in the first place. Teley's historical acumen pits Argos as the first dog of significance in Western literature (a notion reconfirmed by Stan Dragland's story "Penelope's Dog" more than 200 pages later), and points to the appearance of CanLit dogs in texts as early and as canonical as Radisson's journals and Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush*. This collection, it quickly becomes apparent, wrestles with and exults in the uncertainties and mutabilities that might be said to characterize CanLit as a field in the first place; identity/belonging, place/space, wilderness/nature, etc. So what is a Canadian dog story, then? "Simply put," Teley insists, "it's any story by a Canadian about the rich and complex and mysterious bond between dogs and humans." Note the emphasis on the complex and the mysterious.

Teley takes pains to resist the pull of the romantic or the nostalgic in his selections. There are, of course, several predictably loyal and protective Lassie-like dogs like the

titular Bingo in Ernest Thompson Seton's "Bingo, The Story of My Dog" and Marie-Claire Blais' "Homage to Scheila," but Charles G.D. Roberts' gothic horror "The Stone Dog," which opens the anthology puts to rest any lingering assumptions that this collection might be an exercise in anthropomorphism or romanticism designed for the "Gift Ideas" rack at your local bookstore. For every reliable four-legged companion in *Dog Stories*, there seems to exist an uncanny *doppeldog* that proves, Teley himself notes, "as far removed from sentimental representation as anyone could imagine." And it is, to be clear, not necessarily the dogs in these stories that evoke eeriness, but the craftiness of authors like Leon Rooke in "Painting the Dog" or Claire Dé, whose title, "A Devouring Love," proves throughout the story to be referential, not simply metaphorical.

The twenty-eight stories here from some of CanLit's most recognizable figures (Leacock! Montgomery! Gallant! MacLeod! Coady!) are not really about dogs, of course. Or at least they are not singly about dogs. They assume, instead, that our pets are "the background of our lives" in that they often become the markers of how *we* understand (and operate in) the world. Teley makes the case for this anthology very simply, then: "In a very basic way, we reveal ourselves in the regard we have for our dogs, and good writers know this and show it." And the good writers here prove his point in kind. Excellent stories by P.K. Page ("Unless the Eye Catch Fire"), Jane Rule ("Dulce"), and Timothy Taylor ("Smoke's Fortune"), become eloquent musings on ecology, sexuality, and violence respectively, and come across as the strongest of a strong bunch of Canadian canine chronicles.

In addition to sharing certain authors, *The Exile Book of Canadian Sports Stories* also shares *Dog Stories'* penchant for both the markedly literary and the liberal strictures of its focus as a themed anthology. Priscila Uppal's introduction also hearkens

back to ancient Greece for the building blocks of its genre, citing Ronald J. Meyer's assertion that *The Iliad's* funeral games qualify Homer as the world's first sports writer. Sport, like Teleky's pups, is a literal referent in these texts, but "it is also metaphor, paradigm, a way to experience some of the harsher realities of the world, a place to escape to, an arena from which endless lessons can be learned"; it is, then, some might argue, the very stuff of literature itself. Uppal opens the collection with "The Sociology of Love" by the criminally underappreciated Clark Blaise—a narrative that is about a dozen different things before (if?) it is about tennis at all—and never looks back.

Scholars of CanLit will cover much familiar ground in these twenty-six stories. In addition to Moodie's "Brian the Still-Hunter," we get the Kinsella, Bowering, and Richler baseball stories ("Diehard," "October 1, 1961," and "Playing Ball on Hampstead Heath" respectively), the Leacock fishing story ("The Old, Old Story of How Five Men Went Fishing") and the Roch Carrier hockey story ("The Hockey Sweater" *sans* illustrations). But thanks to Uppal's assiduous editorial hand we also get some surprising gems like Dionne Brand's "I Used to Like the Dallas Cowboys," Marguerite Pigeon's extreme-sport tale "Endurance," and Katherine Govier's "Eternal Snow" about a ski-gondola ride gone wrong. Other highlights include Brian Fawcett's "My Career With the Leafs," wherein a poet with weak ankles and no experience makes the roster of the Toronto Maple Leafs, and Craig Davidson's "The Rifleman" which takes the "soccer mom" model to a pathetic extreme in a "basketball dad." As with any anthology, there are some surprising omissions (Andrew Hood, Paul Quarrington, David Adams Richards—most of whom Uppal accounts for in her introduction), but none are glaring given that the anthology does not aspire to any degree of comprehensiveness.

As in Teleky's anthology, most of the short stories stand up as well-wrought literary texts indifferent to their at-times-tenuous relationships to the thematic worlds by which they are apparently organized. These collections *are*, of course, highly marketable gifts for bookish canine-ites and arm-chair quarterbacks, but they will also have much potential weight to throw around on current and future syllabi (CanLit, ecocriticism, sport and literature, etc.) as Canadian literature continues to re-articulate and reorganize itself in new ways.

Theatrical War Zones

Judith Thompson

Such Creatures. Playwrights Canada \$16.95

Anusree Roy

Pyasa & Letters to My Grandma. Playwrights Canada \$16.95

Sky Gilbert

I Have AIDS! Playwrights Canada \$16.95

David Yee

Lady in the Red Dress. Playwrights Canada \$16.95

Reviewed by Moira Day

Such Creatures amply demonstrates Thompson's lyrical, imagistic gift for exploring the complex nuances of human love, hope, and redemption in the midst of the most brutal, dehumanizing circumstances. In this short chamber work showing two intertwining monologues over three scenes, two female characters confront three very different "war zones." Sorele, fifty-five, is facing her third consecutive battle with cancer; Blanda, fifteen, has challenged another girl and her gang to a fight to ward off the fatal consequences of being labeled a "snitch" in a rough lower-class Toronto of drugs, violence, and family dysfunction, where a single wrong look or word may be your last. The unlikely bond between them becomes Sorele's remembrance of her own fifteen-year-old self in Auschwitz. A fight for physical survival in all three

worlds eventually becomes a search for the kind of unlikely “miracles”—transcendent encounters with the Virgin, with Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*, and the souls and ghosts of family, friends, and past selves—that finally allow one’s soul and life to prevail, and connect unexpectedly with those of fellow pilgrims on converging paths. In those magical moments of meeting and recognition, suggests Thompson, we do indeed “defy augury.”

Calcutta-born Anusree Roy’s small, intimate chamber dramas, *Pyasa* and *Letters to My Grandma*, also deal with women struggling to move beyond simple physical survival to take control of their own lives and souls in the psychic, physical, or social war zones surrounding them. However, Roy’s one-woman shows portray female lives further complicated by the dynamics of race, language (the characters shift easily between English and Bengali), culture, and religion whether the action takes place in India or Toronto. In both plays, the characters are strong, intelligent women who rely on humour, resourcefulness, and strong inter-generational family bonding to survive in “brave new worlds” that at once do not change nearly fast enough, and yet change all too quickly around them. Tragedy occurs in both plays when the only options open to mothers to save their daughters or give them a better life lead to disaster either for the child herself or someone else’s mother and child. *Pyasa*, which focuses on the situation of Untouchables in present-day India, is particularly disturbing when the only “happy ending” available to its eleven-year-old protagonist is marriage to a much older man prepared to accept a bride already “devalued” by her employer’s rape provided she bears sons. *Letters to My Grandma* is a more complex examination of the struggle between generations to understand and hold on to each other, as time, place, and values shift. Grandma’s resourcefulness during the war saves her daughter’s

life, but when the family’s search for a better life takes them to Canada without her, the old woman finds herself increasingly isolated, not just physically but psychically from her increasingly “Canadianized” granddaughter. At its simplest, Grandma’s final reconciliation with Mallabee’s marriage to a young Moslem seems to revolve around her acceptance of a new world she does not understand. More profoundly, though, it comes out of the older woman’s final, painful confrontation with her own past, and the realization that if she does not accept Mallabee’s marriage now, her granddaughter will simply be the next victim of the same anti-Moslem hatred that caused Grandma to heedlessly lie and destroy the family of her Moslem nurse, when the latter was a child little older than her own daughter. Grandma chooses instead to break the cycle of intolerance with a final act of love, generosity, and expiation that will hopefully open better paths for the new generation. Again, as in Thompson’s play, the play ends on a bittersweet note of meeting and recognition between women as pilgrims on an unexpectedly converging path.

Survival, physical or otherwise, takes on quite a different meaning in Gilbert’s savagely funny black comedy, *I Have AIDS!* Things have changed, Gilbert suggests, since the days when AIDS was always fatal and its victims almost always said to be gay, making the definitive AIDS play a powerful tragedy or melodrama centred around the gay protagonist’s inevitable death. Cleverly parodying the final tragic death scene in many earlier AIDS dramas, Gilbert, through his protagonist, Prodon, suggests that death is actually rather dull, commonplace, and predictable, since everyone dies at some point; it is life and an individual’s psychic, personal, social, and political response to a heightened sense of one’s own mortality in the face of a now-chronic but manageable disease that are dramatic, unique, and full of human complexities, not only for the

sufferer, but the friends, kin, and partners accompanying him on the journey. Prodon and his partner, Vidor, lead us on a wild Brechtian journey—sometimes horrifying, sometimes moving, sometimes hilarious—through the five common stages of reaction to the news that “I have AIDS”: denial, partying, loss of control, religious conversion, acceptance, and death. The ending of the play on a question mark, rather than the “death scene,” however, suggests that AIDS, rather like the AIDS play itself, has become an open-ended question mark of human possibilities.

Dedicated to the 81,000 Chinese who paid the Head Tax and “died building the foundation of this country only to be disavowed and forgotten,” *Lady in the Red Dress* is an epic play that suggests that what we disavow and forget about the past says much about what we choose to forget and disavow about our deepest selves and those closest to us. Yee’s unlikely and deeply flawed Everyman, Max Lochlan, a government lawyer, initially sees the redress settlement as a clean-cut legal, financial problem from the past that can be fixed by a clean-cut, legal, and financial “deal” in the present. He learns differently upon a bourbon-fuelled collapse in his office, when the enigmatic Sylvia arrives to send him on a dark, violent, *noir* voyage to 1923 to discover the hidden psychic, physical, historical, and intercultural inter-twinings of her family roots and his. When Max returns, it is with a profound awareness of the futility of solving the “problem” of the past without reference to his own full human complexity and that of others. One might similarly say about the play itself that its final destination is less important than the satirical, poetic, and imagistic richness of the journey behind a much-humbled Max’s picking up the phone to begin again.



Monumental in Their Own Right

Tony Tremblay

David Adams Richards of the Miramichi: A Biographical Introduction. U of Toronto P \$32.95

Reviewed by Cynthia Sugars

After finishing my Master’s degree in English in the late 1980s, I worked as a sessional instructor for one year at Okanagan College in Kelowna, BC. The year before, David Adams Richards’ *Nights Below Station Street* had won the Governor General’s Award, and I decided to put it on the course list for my English literature class. Having grown up on the Miramichi, the same stomping grounds as Richards himself, I was eager to hear students’ thoughts on a writer I had long admired. To my surprise, many students took exception to the book. When I asked them why, I got a variety of responses, the main one being that the world of the novel was too “regional.” It had never occurred to me that the world depicted in Richards’ text was particularly out of the ordinary. This was the world in which I had grown up. When I lived there, it had never struck me that there was anything radically foreign or strange about the place (other than a teenager’s sense that all the world is such). The experiences of Richards’ characters, it seemed to me, were comparable to people’s concerns elsewhere: they struggle to do what is right; they live with regrets; they make mistakes; they show flickerings of courage; they curse; they love; they hurt. If we could comprehend the oddballs in Robertson Davies’ itinerant carnivals, surely 1970s New Brunswick couldn’t be that foreign. When I suggested the potential for some element of universality in the book’s characters, the line of protest took a somewhat different tack. The characters, I was told, were “unliterary.” They were mediocre, crude, working class, unrefined. I quickly realized that the problem lay not with the book itself, but

with what we had been taught was suitable subject matter for works of literature. At the base of this sentiment was a sociological judgment as well as a literary one: the students looked down on Richards' characters; they considered them unworthy.

Tony Tremblay's groundbreaking biography of David Adams Richards relays the struggles Richards had, and continues to have, in being taken seriously as more than a "Maritime" or "regional" writer, and he does so by giving Richards the kind of serious biographical and literary critical treatment that is long overdue. The book provides an integrated combination of biography, New Brunswick socio-cultural history, and illuminating close reading to produce a study that truly does justice to its subject. On one hand, Richards' lifelong goal has been to achieve a "decolonizing" of regionalism. As Tremblay puts it, for Richards "regional" was not a pejorative but a circumstance of birth to be celebrated." As part of this, Richards wanted to combine the highly local substance of place and history with a sense that "a life of the mind was possible even in remote places." Richards' concern with human frailties and "small heroics" easily gets lost in a critical regimen that is incapable of seeing the forest for the region's trees (and vice versa). Or, as Tremblay writes, the error is "to misread an inquiry into psychology as a problem of sociology." The irony is that Richards has been made to carry the reputation of Maritime cultural regionalism on his shoulders. The curse of the "regionalist" author, however, is compounded in Richards' case by the controversies that stalk him, largely due to his unpopular sentiments about political correctness, religious faith, and the university academy. As Tremblay argues, few people have been indifferent to Richards' work.

It is for this reason that this book is so important. It helps to clarify many of these controversies, while explicating, in wonderfully perceptive close readings (I would want this book to hand whenever I teach

these novels from now on), the vision in the work. At the outset, Tremblay sets Richards' ethos in the context of the socio-cultural history of the Miramichi. While this does not relegate Richards to the "boonies" of regionalism, it helps to situate his ethics and aesthetics in terms of a kind of historical memory. Tremblay aptly outlines the "social and psychic ennui caused by the deflation of expectations" that is so much a part of the history of this place (and undoubtedly many others like it across the country). From there, the book charts Richards' early years as a young boy with a physical disability in one leg, carrying us forward to the teenager whose "principled rebellion" informed his dreams of writing his way to public notice. It was during high school that Richards developed his talent for deciphering social and moral pretension, an ability that is evident throughout his writings. Richards acquired a special antipathy for teachers and psychologists, whose high-minded pose of moral superiority and "institutionalized benevolence" he felt masked a profound disdain for the people in their care. This obsession extended to academics, sometimes to Richards' detriment, whom he felt used their credentials to enforce a form of aesthetic and ethical conformity. The split reception of *The Coming of Winter*—and of so many Richards novels that followed—confirmed this. Reviewers consistently emphasized the novel's outmoded realism and existential defeatism. Tremblay sees this as a "*misreading of the book's realism*," an approach based in "schooled ignorance" that insisted on the book's portrayal of regional disparity rather than its basic "sympathetic faith in human life." "I'm not writing about [characters] to make a statement about bad times in the Maritimes," Richards told Chris Morris in 1988; instead, he wanted to show that his characters are worthy of attention, "monumental in their own right." William Connor's account of Richards' reception echoes this perception:

This initial tendency to place Richards in the important Canadian tradition of regional realism was natural in view of his talent for capturing the details of life in his region, yet is unfortunate that Richards' success in depicting the surfaces of his characters' restricted lives should have caused so many critics to miss the psychological and symbolic depth beneath these surfaces.

Tremblay takes us through various stages in Richards' life and writing career, from his early chapbook of poetry *Small Heroics*; to his enrolment in St. Thomas University and his membership in UNB's "Ice House" club; to his friendship with Alden Nowlan; to his subsequent notoriety following the publication of *The Coming of Winter* with Oberon Press (whose editor had surreptitiously cleaned up the speech of the novel's characters); to his battles with alcoholism; to *Road to the Stilt House*, perhaps Richards' darkest novel, yet one which Tremblay argues exacts the most perspicacity from its reader; to the Governor General's award for *Nights Below Station Street*. Richards has published numerous novels since then, including his Giller-winning *Mercy Among the Children*, but Tremblay concludes on a kind of cliff-hanger. One cannot assess the legacy of Richards' post-1990 fiction yet. Instead, Tremblay leaves us to measure our own readings of Richards against this newly opened-up assessment and elucidation of the author's vision. Janice Kulyk Keefer places Richards among those writers whose "sentiments we prefer not to hear [for] they do not belong to the Canada of our patriotic imaginings." There is some truth to this. Richards' novels are not easy. It is tempting to fall back on the much-touted assertions of his reactionary politics, but it may be that Richards, in refusing to pander to fashion, asks for a kind of listening which critics pay lip service to but don't always practice. With an ear finely attuned to psychological nuance and literary precision, Tremblay challenges us to attend to the textual and moral complexities of Richards' work.

Blaze of Glory

J.A. Wainwright

Blazing Figures: A Life of Robert Markle. Wilfrid Laurier UP \$38.00

Reviewed by Tanis MacDonald

The title of J.A. Wainwright's *Blazing Figures* is an allusion to an article written by the biographical subject, painter Robert Markle, as well as a reference to Markle's arresting depictions of mostly nude, mostly female subjects that made his reputation in the Toronto art world for three decades until his accidental death at the age of 54 in 1990. But it is Markle himself who cuts the most incendiary figure in this book. Wainwright takes on the daunting task of translating to the page Markle's bigger-than-life public persona and linking the brash, fierce, often rude and dedicatedly libidinous artist to the tough but sensitive art instructor, and finally to the private man. To do so, Wainwright necessarily tackles the swirl of gender and identity politics that surrounded Markle, for it would be impossible to discuss Markle's erotic depictions of women without discussing art, sexism, censorship and the conservative social mores of Toronto in the 1960s.

Equally impossible to ignore are Markle's Mohawk heritage and his artistic response to his late-life rediscovery of it—like 1979's "Indian Blood" and 1988's neo-folk art "Creation Whirligig"—though it must be noted that Markle was wary of the restrictions of being regarded as an "Indian artist."

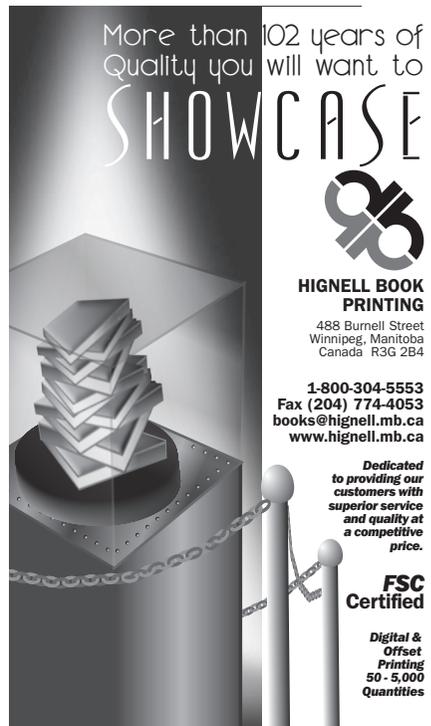
The impulse to tell "a life" as a cohesive narrative is by definition a kind of folly, and so-called "great men" biographies have sounded strained since the 1980s. That said, such biographical folly is often necessary to risk the encounter with history as a story, and Robert Markle may indeed be a great man. Certainly the beautiful colour reproductions of his works that burst from the pages of *Blazing Figures* suggest a visionary spirit and a passion for understanding the strength and

vulnerability of the human body, its intimacy and its fierceness, that make the 1965 pornography charges laid against gallery owner Dorothy Cameron for mounting a show with Markle's work look like so much old-Ontario fogeyism. One of the missteps in this biography is Wainwright's frequent insistence that feminists objected to Markle's work when in fact Cameron supported his work and male government officials brought charges against her. A rhetorical weakness is Wainwright's justification that Markle's respect for women kept his work from being pornographic, which is unfortunately an argument used by pornographers from Larry Flynt forward, leaving Markle unintentionally—and unjustly—damned by a flawed defence.

Blazing Figures is most successful in discussion with Markle's individual paintings, and the best of Wainwright's writing offers attentive readings of the paintings as visual text. The book also notes the evolution of Markle's technique and a compelling narrative of the burgeoning Toronto art scene of the 1960s and 1970s, complete with energies and antagonisms. The biography does err on the side of exhaustive worshipfulness. Chapters on Markle's famous friends seem out of place; sections on Markle's hockey and jazz pursuits are lightweight. Even the debate about the dividing line between pornography and erotica seems flattened out by the difficulty negotiating the temper of the times; at times, Wainwright recreates the misogyny of the times in the name of verisimilitude. Markle, it seems, can do no wrong, and a little of this kind of justification goes a long way. Artist Joyce Wieland is unjustly portrayed as the resident feminist harpy, and the biographer's third-person appearances as "naïve young poet" Andy Wainwright, hovering on the edge of Markle's charmed beery circle, are a bit too coy for a biography of this scope. Wainwright's interviews with dozens of people who knew Markle balance this out; Markle's legacy includes his instruction of a generation of

visual artists who studied under him at both the Ontario College of Art and at the alternative Art's Sake, and Wainwright wisely includes measured and thoughtful responses from many of Markle's students. Also welcome are generous samplings from Markle's published articles and private journals, enough to suggest that an anthology of Markle's written work would be of interest.

In the end, the images have their say, and the muscular, brilliant toned or deeply charcoaled limbs and curves of the bodies on Markle's canvases speak loud. The ecstatic attention paid to them by Markle's eye and Wainwright's prose overcomes all arguments about the biographical rhetoric in *Blazing Figures*. Robert Markle emerges as a figure who wrestles with the angel of art and is blessed through his willingness to risk damnation.



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Editing “Old Ladies”

Margaret Avison, P.K. Page, Miriam Waddington, Suzanne Rosenberg, and Jane Jacobs

Richard Teleky

“Old” is a curious word. In a culture where people try to convince themselves that sixty is the new forty, “old” can be problematic—harsher, say, than “senior” in “senior citizen.” “Ladies” I’ll save for later. “Editing” was once my livelihood. For fifteen years, as Managing Editor of Oxford University Press Canada, I searched for, commissioned, and edited a wide range of books, both trade and academic. And during that time I had the good fortune to edit some of Canada’s finest writers. I want to discuss only a few of them here—the poets Margaret Avison, P.K. Page, and Miriam Waddington, and prose writers Suzanne Rosenberg and Jane Jacobs—as well as some possible connections among them.

We’re often told by lifestyle journalists that older North American actresses have a difficult time finding appropriate roles and that women of a certain age dislike becoming invisible. Fortunately, women who write seem to be the exception to such limitations. They explore new subjects, publish the results of their efforts, win literary prizes, and continue on in the work of their lives. The writers I want to discuss were all around seventy years old when I first met them and were all born between 1915 and 1918, a short span of time during the

First World War. A significant part of their identities, their early years, and educations were shaped by parents and teachers who had come to maturity in the decades before that war, a cataclysmic event that shaped the consciousness of the next generation at a time when women were finally obtaining the right to vote in Canada and the United States. While British novelist Virginia Woolf suggested that Western civilization changed dramatically in 1910, when she believed the modern age began, it probably took the First World War and women’s suffrage to make such a change clear to a population broader than Bloomsbury’s.

The management at Oxford University Press Canada kindly allowed me to spend a day in April 2011 looking over old files related to the writers I’ll discuss here. This was a great help in refreshing my memory and shaping it with greater accuracy. It was strange to read the thin pink-tissue copies of letters I’d sent, some more than thirty years ago, and there were a few surprises.

Margaret Avison (1918–2007)

Margaret Avison’s *Selected Poems* came to me in 1990, late in my career at Oxford, and the year before I left publishing to teach and concentrate on my own writing. Already familiar with her work, I was eager to meet the poet I considered to be Canada’s finest. For reasons I can’t recall, I expected her to be difficult. Something austere in her work—not the style but the vision behind it. We’d been in touch the year before when Avison had telephoned me about a young

illustrator she admired, a woman named Karen Reczuch whom I'd hired to illustrate Jane Jacob's children's book. I'd asked about Avison's future plans, we exchanged letters, and by April 1990 she had signed a contract with Oxford. In a letter of April 20th to the poetry editor at McClelland and Stewart, who objected to Avison's signing with Oxford, she wrote that she liked the fact that I would make the selections for her book, include only the poems (no introduction), and ask her only to approve choices and omissions, "without any demanding PR from me." She also noted that I had suggested the *Selected* before anyone else thought of it, that her experience at M&S had not been happy, and that when I heard about one of her former publishers' interest in the book, I deferred to any prior rights it "may have established."

Avison was anything but difficult. "Pure" is the right word, even if it's oddly vague and unhelpful. Our meetings took place in her small apartment in Fellowship Towers, a high-rise building several blocks north of Toronto's Bloor and Yonge intersection. Fellowship Towers is run by the Baptist church; its residents have access to on-call medical help, as well as a dining room for those who can't, or won't, cook their own meals. Avison had been suffering for some years from lupus, a chronic nerve disease, and she couldn't always predict the state of her health. She explained this matter-of-factly, almost without interest, but I heard the subtext of her words, and understood that she wasn't going to commit to much in the way of book promotion, which most of the writers I'd worked with had enjoyed. Her apartment on the twelfth floor was a spartan affair, simply furnished with low shelves of books along one wall, but it had a fine view looking east, over the Rosedale Valley ravine, which seemed to be Avison's only luxury. She reminded me immediately of some of the older women teachers in my high school's English Department, the kind

of women once called "spinsters," a word that no longer has legs. But there was nothing spinsterish about her.

We spoke almost at once about books—what we were reading, what we liked. She recommended a novel by an unfamiliar American writer, Jane Vandenburg's *Failure to Zigzag*. I read it eagerly, curious to understand her taste, and was surprised to find a story about a smart-mouthed teenage girl and her troubled mother—a mental patient and carnival ventriloquist. What had I expected? That she'd recommend something like Georges Bernanos' *Diary of a Country Priest*? Avison's Christianity informed her poetry, but she was not simply a religious poet, nor a mystic. She was, I came to understand, a truly worldly person, though in a way that alters the meaning of "worldly"—of the world, but not *in* it. Discussing the reception of her first book, *The Dumbfounding* (1966), she recalled hearing from Norton's New York office that they were accepting her book. (It was, then, less common for Canadian poets to publish outside of Canada than it is today). "Like it or lump it," she said, with a wry smile, "recognition matters."

Work on her book went smoothly. She considered my selections sound; we made a few additions, and that was that. (By then I'd already edited selected poems by Patrick Lane, Daryl Hine, and P.K. Page.) Avison agreed to include several splendid translations of Hungarian poems that she'd made for a Canadian anthology published in 1963, and I was pleased because I'd been studying Hungarian for several years (it was the language of my grandparents, remembered from childhood). Most friends regarded these studies as an eccentricity—literary multiculturalism was only starting to catch on in the late-1980s—but Avison said she'd loved hearing the language, it reminded her of the Tagalog spoken by Filipino friends. I saw her book through its last stages of production and then left the press to begin

teaching at the start of the 1991 academic year. When I first told people that I was striking out, most warned of the risks; not Avison. She called my idea a good one and agreed to let me interview her for a book I was planning about Hungarian culture. We also spoke of caring for aging parents; Avison had lived with, and looked after, her elderly mother, and I was increasingly drawn into my father's health problems.

Avison's translations for *The Plough and the Pen*, edited by Iлона Duczyńska and Karl Polanyi, let me know her better. The anthology, introduced by W.H. Auden, contains his much-quoted dictum that a writer's only political duty is to translate the work of other writers. Avison enjoyed remembering her introduction to its editors by Marshall McLuhan, in the Chinese courtyard of Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum. She was drawn especially to Iлона, and working with the couple meant a great deal to Avison (I always called her Ms. Avison) in the years after the Hungarian uprising of 1956; she had passionate sympathies with oppressed people everywhere. Avison particularly liked the Hungarian poems for a quality she called "direct utterance," though she never discussed this term, as if its meaning was self-evident. I've often thought about it since, and believe she was referring to poems where the mind and the heart (to use those almost old-fashioned terms) came together, especially in strong images. (I've written about the technicalities of her translations in an essay called "The Poet as Translator" that first appeared in *Canadian Literature*, and later in my book *Hungarian Rhapsodies*.)

When we spoke of Avison's Hungarian translations, she mentioned that Bartók's string quartets had, more than anything, keyed her to the rhythm she wanted to achieve in her versions. Avison is not often thought of as a particularly musical poet, so I was interested to find in Oxford's files a photocopy of a letter to her from Glenn

Gould, dated September 14, 1962. Gould wrote to thank her for a letter regarding a recent concert, and noted her approving remarks about early Hindemith and William Walton. Most current classical-concert goers have yet to catch up with Avison's sophisticated ear. (How did this letter get into Oxford's file? In 1991 I was about to serve as the press' editor for Glenn Gould's selected letters, and I must have mentioned this to Avison, who probably let me copy the letter as a possible inclusion.) Today I still keep in my top desk drawer the tape recordings I made of those afternoon conversations with her.

In subsequent years, Avison kept in touch with notes about the books I'd written. I was initially surprised, and touched, that she took the time. But she remembered the encouragement she'd given me, and took it for granted that she would write. When she won the Griffin Poetry Prize for *Concrete and Wild Carrot* in 2003, I was on holiday in Maine, but as soon as I heard the news I sent a card with congratulations, and when I returned to Toronto she telephoned with her thanks. (Occasionally she phoned with publishing questions, or about a proposed biography that she didn't want written.) "Direct utterance" is not a technique or style, it's a way of seeing the world and relating to it. Not quite a vision, it comes from a particular slant or angle that can't be faked. It has to do with life, not lifestyle, and the belief that words can trap us and free us, so they must be used with great care, but without study, without thought for anything but the truth. Direct utterance is what I mean by the word "pure" for Ms Avison.

P.K. Page (1916–2010)

P.K. Page told me that her poems came to her through the top of her head, as if they'd been dictated, and all she had to do was type them up. They were complete, whole, already themselves. This fascinated me, and made a kind of sense for a poet who

had written a much-anthologized early poem called “The Stenographers.” I saw her poems only in their final typed form, and have no idea what the drafts looked like, or if there were any.

P.K. was introduced to me by a mutual friend, Rosemary Sullivan, a professor of English at the University of Toronto best known for her literary biographies. P.K. had just completed a new collection of poems, which became *The Evening Dance of the Grey Flies*; she was unhappy with her previous publisher. She liked the interest of a younger generation of readers, and after our first meeting her book was mine. There were enough poems for a short collection, perhaps a chapbook—not Oxford’s style—but I’d read Page’s futuristic short story about a woman and her dog, “Unless the Eye Catch Fire . . .” and suggested that she break the book into three parts and use the story at the centre, making a triptych. We debated—did the story seem too influenced by Doris Lessing?—and I pointed out that Elizabeth Bishop had included a prose memoir as the middle section of a recent collection. Page remembered Bishop from her time in Brazil as an ambassador’s wife, and my idea now appealed to her. *Evening Dance* came out in 1981, and she was pleased enough by its reception to make Oxford her future publisher.

Like most of the poets I’d worked with, P.K. enjoyed sharing books and ideas about art; she urged me to read Julian Barnes’ *Flaubert’s Parrot* and Kathleen Raine’s wonderful essay “The Use of the Beautiful” in her *Defending Ancient Springs* (“It is nearly my bible,” she wrote to me on November 9, 1981), and I recommended something in return. We were both fascinated by Doris Lessing, though I had little interest in Sufism, or the version of it promulgated by Idries Shah. When Lessing came to Toronto to read at Harbourfront, P.K. had arranged to meet her (they’d corresponded, about Sufism), and I offered to drive P.K.

from Oxford to Lessing’s hotel. When she invited me to join them I was delighted, and amazed by her generosity, since Lessing had been one of my favourite writers for at least twenty years. We met her for tea in the hotel dining room. Lessing was tempted to order a fruit salad, but decided it was too expensive; she recommended several writers to me, including an Indian mystic named Sri Aurobindo; and I was in bliss. After half an hour I excused myself so that the two women might have a private talk. Later I realized that P.K. had actually been quite nervous about meeting Lessing, and I’d been a kind of ice-breaker—my good fortune. I began to sense P.K.’s insecurities.

We next worked on a new collection that was ultimately called *The Glass Air: Selected Poems* (1985). P.K. had already published a selected edition of her poems with McClelland & Stewart, in 1974, and there weren’t enough new poems to justify another book. I suggested that we make her new book into an event, and include two short essays by P.K. that had appeared in *Canadian Literature*: “Questions and Images” and “Traveller, Conjuror, Journeyman.” As well, during a visit to P.K.’s home in Victoria, I’d seen some of the drawings she’d done while living in Brazil, and suggested that we also include a selection of her Dufy-like work (we settled on nine images) and use one of her paintings on the cover. Several of her friends objected to her proposed title, *The Glass House*; she still wanted to keep the word “glass” so we dropped a poem called “The Glass Air” and used its more elusive title for the collection. The visual and prose additions gave the book a comprehensive quality that P.K., and the reviewers, appreciated.

P.K. loved the literary lifestyle (the public attention from readings, interviews, book promotion), though I doubt she would have admitted it. She also liked having an entourage, and seemed to need her courtiers—all women—for second and third

opinions about everything that touched her career. She encouraged their romantic dreams with stories about the great love of her life, the married Frank Scott, and continued to lament his loss. After meeting P.K.'s husband, Arthur Irwin, and watching her solicitous treatment of him, I was puzzled by the seeming disloyalty. Much of P.K.'s life (her travels, her start at painting, her elegant home and garden) came from Arthur, and if he was a stiff and conventional partner, she'd chosen him. There was a tension in P.K. between the former ambassador's wife—the gracious lady—and the wild romantic or free spirit she was afraid to become, and I saw that this wasn't the source of her poetry's strength but of its exquisite limitation. P.K. needed to be courted. She was annoyed that her work was ignored in the United States, but she didn't take the risk of submitting it and facing rejection. Her lack of confidence was almost touching. Since Rosemary and I were close friends, P.K.'s entourage was at first fine by me (Rosemary has good judgment), and I liked Arlene Lampert, but the list also included Connie Rooke. Connie insisted on being present when I made the initial mock-up of *The Glass Air* in my Oxford office, and though she had nothing to contribute, I knew she was P.K.'s envoy and had to be accommodated.

Our next books were P.K.'s fairytale, *A Flask of Sea Water*, and a revised edition of *The Glass Air* (1991). The long debates about an illustrator for her children's book, and her dithering over the bright work of Laszlo Gal, one of Canada's prominent illustrators, seemed unhelpful. I was also troubled by her notion of a natural aristocracy of "blue blood," as she called it, in the fairytale. Perhaps there was something Sufi about this, but the idea reminded me of the unfortunate title of one of her poems, "The Yellow People in Metamorphosis," which I'd previously questioned—the entourage thought it okay. When P.K. sent me

a twenty-page sample of the manuscript that was to become *Brazilian Journal*, I was intrigued but not as enthusiastic as she might have wished. The marketing department, with more Page backlist in the warehouse than they liked, took against the project from the start; I had no choice but to reject it. Not long after, I left publishing. P.K. continued to send me her new books, and I brought her to York University for a campus reading, but our relations were never the same. When I edited *The Exile Book of Canadian Dog Stories* (2009), I was glad to include P.K.'s "Unless the Eye Catch Fire . . ."—it was the last thing I could do for her. I wonder if she saw the book before she died.

Miriam Waddington (1917–2004)

Miriam Waddington appeared in Oxford's lobby wearing a full-length dark mink coat, old jeans and black Reeboks. She'd just come from an afternoon swim and was glowing with enthusiasm for life—coupled with endless complaints—that made up her unique style. She was curious about everything on one hand, and frustrated on the other. I felt in complete sympathy with her, and said that she looked like a Broadway actress late for rehearsal. Miriam made perfect sense to me. Later we figured out that I shared a birthday with her eldest son (not only the day, but the year) and joked that we had a special connection because of that. Maybe it was true.

Miriam had been an Oxford author long before I got to know her. Bill Toye was her poetry editor, but as he concentrated more and more on reference books, she needed a new advocate. In 1987 I suggested that she bring together her essays for an Oxford series I was developing, *Studies in Canadian Literature*, which went on to include books by Adele Wiseman, Robert Kroetsch, Janice Kulyk Keefer, and Linda Hutcheon. Since Miriam lived not far from the office in Don Mills, in a mid-century split-level on

Yewfield Crescent, I fell into the habit of almost weekly Friday lunches with her. The house was filled with books and magazines, art work gathered over her travels, some by old friends, like the wonderful Montreal painter Phillip Surrey, Danish modern furniture, and Mexican weavings and bibelots, all making a welcoming hodgepodge. There was usually a homemade soup, an Israeli salad, fresh challah. And endless talk—and gossip—about books and movies, mutual friends, and Miriam's old times: her childhood in Winnipeg and Montreal, the Depression, the coming of World War II, the growing years of Canadian literature, her various love affairs with some prominent men, including the art critic Harold Rosenburg, an early champion of Abstract Impressionism, and a few well-known macho writers. It was the old times that won me over.

I convinced Miriam to put down some of her stories, to write about the Yiddish circle of her childhood, her immigrant parents, her years as an undergraduate. At the same time, I read her published essays and newspaper articles—a portrait of the Yiddish Canadian poet Rochl Korn, reflections on A.M. Klein and John Sutherland, and accounts of her own writing. I even took several short review articles (on Anaïs Nin, Violet Leduc, Hannah Arendt, and Simone de Beauvoir) and combined them into a longer essay. Miriam, who loved good talk, liked my editing, and the manuscript that became *Apartment 7: Selected Essays* grew out of those lunches. She would talk about her lovers, but I couldn't convince her to write about them—a sentiment that seems almost antediluvian today. That her book received splendid reviews was a bonus.

Oxford was known for its literary anthologies, usually a sure money-maker, and I next urged Miriam to compile an anthology of short stories by Jewish Canadian writers. My only stipulation was a gender balance (it turned out to be twenty stories—ten by

men, ten by women) and Miriam agreed at once. But she was hesitant about including a story from her own collection *Summer at Lonely Beach* (1982)—a rare modesty in anthologists, who are usually all too eager to include their own work—so I chose Miriam's "Breaking Bread in Jerusalem." While we worked on these collections, she read some of my own short stories and encouraged me to concentrate on my writing. She knew of my Hungarian studies, which didn't seem odd to someone who was a gifted translator of Yiddish writers and very much interested in the act and art of translation. Her enthusiasm for Central and Eastern European writers was rare among my colleagues. Sensitive to the undercurrent of anti-Semitism in the Canadian literary world, and justly so, Miriam didn't feel appreciated by the Toronto establishment (it rankled when she saw her work left out of college anthologies, while arty younger poets received attention), yet she gave a shrug to it all, and planned another of her trips. Some of the best advice she gave me about writing—advice I've since passed on to my own students—was this: "Just do your own work and hope that taste will improve, though it probably won't."

My final project with Miriam before leaving the press was her collection of poems *The Last Landscape*. It's one of her best books, and when it was published in 1992 I was pleased to find that she had dedicated it to me. Of course I continued to see her after I changed my life—lunches now became dinners—and I still remember the sad day when she announced that she was selling her house and moving to Vancouver to be closer to family. Most of her friends objected to the decision, and I think we were right to believe that Miriam would feel cut off from a world she'd taken a lifetime to create. When I learned that one day she'd stopped eating, had in effect turned her back on life, I could only admire her courage while hearing her say softly, after one

of our lunches, “My father’s spirit is always with me.” I remember helping her pack before her move. For an afternoon I sat on her basement floor and tore up boxes of old bills and cheques, some dating back to the 1960s (a time before shredders). Of course we spoke on the phone after her move, but that was no substitute for meals that could meander with a life of their own. I’m not sure if Miriam’s work is much read today—it deserves to be—but when I think of her, I miss those long lunches.

Suzanne Rosenberg (1915–1988)

One spring afternoon in 1987 I was staring out of my office window onto a large expanse of lawn when I noticed an elderly woman in a navy-blue dress, spotted with white polka dots, tentatively crossing the grass towards Oxford’s drive, as if she was lost. A few minutes later my secretary came into my office with a manuscript, bound in string, which she set on the slush pile of unsolicited projects. The manuscript, it turned out, had just been dropped off by the woman in the polka-dot dress. Curious, I asked to see the manuscript. In no time I realized I had an important book in my hands.

Suzanne Rosenberg’s memoir *A Soviet Odyssey*, which Oxford went on to publish in 1988, is a horrific account of her life in a totalitarian state. The Canadian connection was her youth, in Montreal, where she’d settled with her immigrant parents, and brother, before her mother decided to return to Russia with her family, in 1931, to help make a Communist utopia. As if the Montreal childhood wasn’t enough Canadian content, along with the fact that Suzanne was a cousin of Mordecai Richler on the maternal side of her family, her first love, in high school, turned out to be the young Irving Layton (he wrote his own account of their bond in his memoir *Waiting for the Messiah*, 1985). But before accepting Suzanne’s manuscript, I sent it to Robert Conquest, one of the leading North

American specialists in the Stalin years. He encouraged publication and also wrote this jacket endorsement:

Suzanne Rosenberg’s book is one of the most remarkable autobiographies of our time. It covers the whole Soviet period, and at levels from the intellectual world to the labour camps. Above all, it is the most valuable perspective on the whole Soviet phenomenon ever to be published by someone who can rightly be described as both an extraordinary and an ordinary woman.

When Suzanne submitted her manuscript, she was living in London, Ontario, and teaching Russian language classes as part-time faculty at the University of Western Ontario. My first visit there remains clear in my mind. It was a grey autumn day, and during the cab ride from the train station to her apartment, I spotted a florist’s, stopped the cab for a moment and went in to buy some flowers, a dozen long-stemmed red roses. Suzanne blushed when she saw them, and said it had been a very long time since a man had last brought her flowers. To refresh me after the trip she offered a glass of old Georgian brandy from a bottle that had belonged to her late husband—a good beginning. Her small, spare apartment had only a few mementos of Russia, but its bookcase with glass-doors had an old-world quality to it; the table where we worked, I recall, was a fold-up card table that suggested a temporary student dwelling. Suzanne’s manuscript needed little shaping, but as we talked, I encouraged her to develop several sections of it, and urged her to add more about the composer Prokofiev and other artists who had managed to continue to create under appalling conditions.

Working with Suzanne was a rare experience. I brought to it a love of Russian literature, which I’d studied at university, and Suzanne had worked as an English translator in Russia, so we had some wonderful talks about books. She was particularly proud of her translation of the

short stories of Vladimir Korolenko, a nineteenth-century writer I didn't know (she gave me a copy of her translation, published by Progress Books in Moscow). We shared a fondness for Leo Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, a novel unmarred by some of his ideological concerns. My upbringing and education had made me Eurocentric, and Suzanne was the kind of person whose history, intellect, and gracious manner appealed to my imagination. When I mentioned her to Miriam Waddington over lunch, she almost jumped. It turned out that Suzanne was a friend of hers but hadn't mentioned submitting her manuscript to Oxford, although she must have heard my name from Miriam. Miriam suggested that she would have been glad to make an introduction; however, I already knew enough about Suzanne to understand that she would never trade on friendship, that she wanted her work to speak for itself. Which of course made me admire her all the more.

During her book's production, Suzanne was diagnosed with terminal cancer. She lived to hold her book in her hands, but when I drove her to a bookstore launch in Toronto she had to stretch out across the back seat because of the pain. The reviews of *A Soviet Odyssey*, both internationally and in Canada, were everything I'd hoped for. Oxford sold the paperback rights to Penguin, a film was discussed (films were always being discussed), and I helped arrange for a Japanese translation with Iwanami Shoten of Tokyo—it's the one book I own in Japanese.

In July 1988 I received a phone call from Suzanne's daughter, Vicki, who was teaching economics at McGill University. Following the instructions of her mother's will, she was about to mail a package to me. I wondered what it might contain, and after opening the parcel lifted out several jars of the finest Russian black caviar, which had been cold packed. That night I toasted Suzanne with vodka after vodka,

and enjoyed her lavish bequest. Of all the books I brought out in my Oxford years, I'm proudest of hers.

Jane Jacobs (1916–2006)

While at my desk one summer day in 1987 I received a telephone call from Jane Jacobs. She lived in Toronto's Annex, next door to my friend Frieda Forman, a feminist researcher and also a Yiddish translator (Frieda had started up a small group of Yiddish translators who were all women, and it included Miriam Waddington—the world can sometimes seem like a small place). Jacobs was writing a children's book and wanted to talk about it. Though I wasn't a children's editor, I had been responsible for several books associated with the genre (by Joy Kogawa and P.K. Page), so Frieda made the connection. When I mentioned Jacobs' call to my colleagues they hoped that we might become her regular publisher, but I saw from the start that she was only interested in finding a home for her children's project. Still, any book by Jane Jacobs . . .

Of course I'd seen Jane on the front porch beside my friend's house, and knew that she presented as the neighborhood eccentric. Her unkept yard would have drawn complaints had she not been the local celebrity, and large old cardboard boxes and other such rubbish often graced the porch. Jacobs, however, didn't cultivate eccentricity; it was something in her blood, almost genetic. A cult figure to city planners and environmentalists, she was admired for her influential study *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961). She had immigrated to Toronto during the Vietnam War, settled in the Annex, a neighbourhood bordering on the University of Toronto, and, in her own way, held court. Stooped over, with a beaky hen's face and short greyish hair that looked like someone had set a bowl on her head and trimmed around its edges, she resembled the archetypal granny in Hollywood movies about the Depression, someone out of *The*

Grapes of Wrath. (By the way, my comment about her haircut isn't an exaggeration. Apparently that's how Jane's son cut her hair.)

After several meetings I signed up Jane's project. Intrigued by her persona, I enjoyed her stories about her background. The daughter of a well-off Yankee family—her father was a doctor—she exuded the self-assurance of someone who had long ago decided not to question her views about the world. As a child she remembered going along with her father on his house calls, and claimed that that was when she'd learned about life. Her parents had such faith in her that they left her alone. If she didn't go to school one day, and no one in the family knew where she was, her parents assumed she'd gone to the library, and weren't worried. Not exactly patrician, she reminded me of a certain generation of women, like the actress Katharine Hepburn: if she had an opinion it had to be the only right one. Jane wasn't one of the house-proud Annex types, and she had furnished her rooms with a funky style—against one wall of the dining room stood a real working telephone booth, glass doors and all, like something lifted off the street.

As usual, we talked about books other than Jane's own. Yet she spent more time praising her neighbourhood, and seemed oblivious of the fact that people sometimes refer to its inhabitants as "Annex ethnics" because they can seem smugly insulated in their enclave from many of the stresses of urban life. In Jane's case this insulation was intensified by early recognition, a long and loving marriage, and a happy family life, which harmonized with what appeared to be an essentially cheerful nature. Jane wasn't caught up in her celebrity, just used to it; people were kind to her because of her fame, and in return she treated them kindly. After her death in 2006, the detached house she lived in was sold for well over a million dollars, and gutted for renovations.

Editing went smoothly. Jane knew that a

children's book by her might cause a stir, and she didn't want any publicity until she was satisfied with the text and the illustrations. In August 1987 I asked Sheila Egoff (the Oxford author of *The Republic of Childhood*) for her general reaction to the manuscript, and she said that it suited "ages seven to ten." On May 5, 1988, Jane wrote to me, saying that I might notify the Toronto press about her forthcoming book: "It's all right now, as I've been in touch with everyone I wanted to let know personally, first." And she was enthusiastic about Karen Reczuch's illustrations, making only a minor suggestion about one of the characters, in a letter of November 12, 1988: "Slap looks a little *too* genial." The book appeared on the spring list of 1989, ahead of schedule.

Whenever Jane's books are mentioned, *The Girl on the Hat* is rarely included in the list. It's a fifty-page novel about a girl named Ernestina who is so small she can fit inside a peanut shell. A Tom-Thumb-like fantasy, it is based on stories Jane made up to entertain her children who, when grown, urged her to set them down for her grandchildren. Ernestina, who lives in a drawer, is nicknamed Peanutina, and called, for short, Tina. Her adventures lead her to find an identity working as a photographer, and the importance of the right work—that old Yankee ethic—is the crux of the book. It's easy to see that the tall, gawky Jacobs, who may have felt like an outsider as a child, was, in part, writing about herself. Before showing the manuscript to me, she'd asked Frieda to read it for feminist content. At that time Jane had become interested in feminism, and wanted to know how her book accorded with feminist principles.

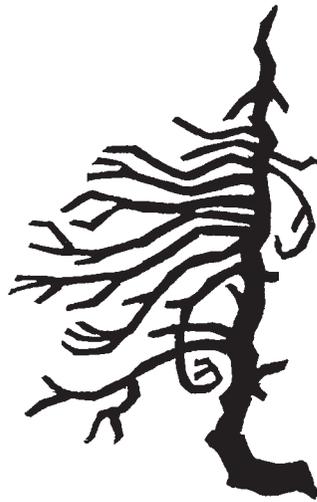
Jacobs' name is often invoked by progressive politicians and think-tank aficionados, yet when I read their remarks I recall not only the best of her writing but also one of her last books, *Dark Age Ahead* (2004), a grim but familiar lament about the sad state our civilization has fallen into and the

failure of the elite to do much about it. Jane almost seems to acknowledge some of the nonsense attributed to her, or done in her name, and the book is less hopeful than her previous work. She was eighty-eight when that book was published—an encouraging thought.

Why do I write about these five women? I'm not a feminist looking for ancestors. I knew them mainly as an editor, someone who acted in a courtly manner they enjoyed, who cared for something about their work, someone from a younger generation who had an eye on what kept them going, on the future. In my work I represented their interests to the press, my employer, and the press' interests to them. I was a go-between, the editor's tricky balancing act, but I think they knew that their interests were what mattered the most to me. Miriam I counted as a true friend, Suzanne as a model of the moral imagination. They were all "ladies" in a sense—women from another time, when their achievements cost in ways we barely understand today, no matter how we try. Yet their sense of themselves as women and as writers, at least as I saw it, was something they had learned to carry with grace—a grace I associate with the outmoded word "lady."

Each one helped me understand something about the nature of a writer's life. Unlike the male writers I knew, who too often seemed, even as they aged, to concentrate their energies on sex, alcohol, and sexual nostalgia—all invitations to bitterness and regret—these writers had a lively interest in the present. Their work, good or not, was partly about possibilities. Though I knew her last, Avison's emphasis on direct utterance mattered the most to me, reinforcing my values about writing and what my work in publishing had taught me: the literary life gets in the way of creation, yet many writers who admit this are addicted to it. P.K. Page and Jane Jacobs were in their own ways committed to their personas,

yet despite this, each continued to create new work. Miriam Waddington's counsel to keep writing no matter what came from the deepest part of her sense of self, and is good advice to anyone in the arts, where disappointment is inevitable; while Suzanne Rosenberg's courage, fortitude, and generosity of spirit before unimaginable suffering still amaze me, and have left me with the wish to show her my own books over some old Georgian brandy. Not long ago I read an interview with Doris Lessing where she remarked that she and her friends, all in their eighties, were learning Russian. The idea appeals to me because that's the one language I would still like to be able to read. Maybe some day, I tell myself. Though too late to speak a few words to Suzanne in the language she loved.



Celebrating Robert Kroetsch (1927–2011)

Laura Moss

A disclaimer: This is not a biography. It is a gesture toward a portrait, which I take to be quite a different kettle of fish.

When Robert Kroetsch died in a car accident in June on his way home from the Artspeak Festival in Canmore, Alberta, the Canadian writing community collectively mourned. Kroetsch was a poet, novelist, critic, trickster, teacher, mentor, friend, and father. He was an immensely important figure in the development of Canadian literature because of his own award-winning poetry and prose and because of the support he gave others. On hearing the sad news of Kroetsch's death, critic and mystery writer (and my father) John Moss responded that "Robert Kroetsch was the singular most influential Canadian writer of the twentieth century. Not as celebrated as some, nor as widely known, he was a writer whose voice echoes through the poetry and fiction and criticism of innumerable others, who sometimes in spite of themselves picked up his profoundly whimsical cadence, his startling syntax, his innovative and illuminating turns of logic, his radiant capacity to make story from the world we live in and turn everyday experience into astonishing poetry." I agree. Kroetsch's sense of place and sense of play have permeated Canadian writing, for the better.

In the sadness of his passing, it is comforting to think of how fitting and even beautiful it is that Kroetsch was celebrating literature and being celebrated until the final days of his life. He had just spent five days at a writers' retreat with emerging and mid-career poets. For someone invested in digging through the sedimentary stories of place, particularly Alberta, it seems fitting too that he died not many miles from where he was born. I think Kroetsch would have appreciated the symmetry.

Growing up in the farming community of Heisler, Alberta, Kroetsch once remembered how he "loved listening in on adult conversations. In a rural area there was a great oral tradition of tall tales, gossip, that kind of continuous flow of language that came to fascinate me." Those tall tales infused his fiction and informed his poetry. He made an art of eavesdropping, quotation, ventriloquism, and gossip, but he also drew on a vast knowledge of world literature: classical, canonical, experimental, and doggerel. His writing is replete with intertexts, mythic resonances, magic realism, and parodic undertones. Kroetsch could put Homer in Alberta, Foucault on the prairies, or Aritha van Herk in designer jeans, without dissonance.

It is hard not to be self-reflexive when thinking about the man Linda Hutcheon called Mr. Canadian Postmodern. I wrote part of my Master's thesis in the early 1990s at the University of Guelph on "historiographic metafiction," Kroetsch, and *Badlands*. I still remember the jolt of recognition when I read "On Being an Alberta Writer" (I am from Ontario, but still . . .), especially his take on the "model of archaeology, against that of history." Kroetsch argued that "it is a kind of archaeology that makes *this place*, with all its implications, available to us for literary purposes. We have not yet grasped the whole story; we have hints and guesses that slowly persuade us towards the recognition of larger patterns. Archaeology allows the fragmentary nature of the story, against the coerced unity of traditional history. Archaeology allows for discontinuity. It allows for layering. It allows for imaginative speculation." I embraced the fragment and the speculative (it was the 90s after all) and started to dig through what Kroetsch called "particulars of place: newspaper files, place names, shoe boxes full of old photographs, tall tales, diaries, journals, tipi rings, weather reports, business ledgers, voting records."

Through this process, Kroetsch introduced me to the local archive, post-structuralism, print culture, thing theory, and the idea we are surrounded by stories, all through his Albertan archeological deposits. Kroetsch could tell the lived experience of a place through an object: a stone hammer, a seed catalogue (especially a seed catalogue), a ledger, a lemon, a crow, a bee, a studhorse.

In speaking with several literary friends in the days after his death, I heard Kroetsch's generosity mentioned repeatedly. Nicole Markotic, who emailed me and a group of writers to tell us the sad news, wrote that "Kroetsch was infinitely important to writers across Canada, and some of us were lucky enough to know him personally. He was ever supportive of others' writing, and constantly engaged in an investigation and celebration of the word." He showed the process of the engagement and reciprocity in his own work. In "January 11: After a Visit to Nicole's Manuscript Class" in *The Snowbird Poems*, for instance, he chews on the line "the mountains wear a diadem of lambent sky" for the rest of the poem as he draws together the Rockies, Persian miniatures, a memory of his mother, and a pen-hoarding coffee barista. We see the archaeology of thought in action.

I once watched Kroetsch watch a young man give an academic paper on Kroetsch. It was mesmerizing. Instead of having an objective or even dismissive face (as I have, on occasion, seen on other authors in the same position), he beamed his infectious smile the whole time. It wasn't that it was a particularly laudatory (or even good) paper. It was that Kroetsch seemed to genuinely enjoy watching this young person engage with his work. He got a kick out of it and he took it seriously. Dawne McCance once lovingly described him as "a man of great optimism, one who offers encouragement in many ways." About his own writing, Kroetsch has said, "For me, to rewrite is to re-imagine the possible poem. I doodle.

I dawdle. I dare." I think he must have appreciated the daring of anyone who made him- or herself vulnerable through the act of public writing.

How do you grow a poet?

My friend Angela Chotka was introduced to Canadian literature as an undergraduate student at the University of Manitoba in a class taught by Kroetsch. She remembers that he "brought real living authors into the classroom to read to us and talk about their writing. Wonderfully unpretentious, he enthusiastically encouraged creativity and freedom. Literature and those who created it? They are alive!" This perhaps is one of his most important legacies. He wanted to bring Canadian creativity to life, to share it with others, and, as he said, to make it real.

Kroetsch was also a friend to *Canadian Literature*. He first published a poem in our journal in 1981 and continued to publish poetry with us for the next two decades. He also published an article ("The Grammar of Silence: Narrative Patterns in Ethnic Writing" in 106 [1985]) and a note ("Dorothy Livesay, 1909-1996" in 155 [1997]). In 2009 when Matthew Gruman was creating CanLit Poets, he worked with Kroetsch on his entry. When the site was awarded the 2009 Canadian Online Publishing Award for best cross-platform, Matthew sent out a bulk email to the featured poets telling them about the award. Kroetsch wrote back with: "Matthew, Congratulations. You are original, being originating, showing poetry into the new, rewriting the writing into the writing. Thank you. Robert." As Matthew said, "it was a thrilling and humbling response from someone of his calibre. In every email he thanked me for the archive, even though he was the one giving us his time and work." A man of generosity, originality, and enormous talent, Robert Kroetsch will be missed by us at the journal and by the whole Canadian literary community.

Articles

Alan **Filewod** is Professor of Theatre Studies at the University of Guelph. His books include *Collective Encounters: Documentary Theatre in English Canada* (1987), *Performing "Canada": The Nation Enacted in the Imagined Theatre* (2002), *Workers' Playtime: Theatre and the Labour Movement since 1970* (with David Watt, 2001), and *Committing Theatre: Radical Theatre and Political Intervention in Canada* (2011). He is a past president of the Association for Canadian Theatre Research and of the Association for Canadian and Quebec Literatures/Association des littératures canadienne et québécoise, and is a former editor of *Canadian Theatre Review*.

Erica **Kelly** earned her PhD in English from the University of Western Ontario in 2010. Her research examines the influence of histories and theories of social justice on Canadian poetry and questions the relationship between poets and societal change. She teaches for the Department of English at Brescia University College in London, Ontario.

Anouk **Lang** is a Lecturer in English Studies at the University of Strathclyde in the UK. She is a co-applicant on the Editing Modernism in Canada project, for which she is working on an edition of correspondence between Canadian writers and editors. Her research interests include anglophone modernist literature and culture, postcolonial writing, contemporary reading practices, and the digital humanities. She has an edited collection on reading in the twenty-first century forthcoming from the University of Massachusetts Press.

Annette **Hayward** is Professor Emeritus at Queen's University, Kingston. A specialist in Québec literature, she is the author of *La querelle du régionalisme au Québec (1903-1931): Vers l'autonomisation de la littérature québécoise*, which was awarded the Prix Gabrielle Roy and the Governor General's Award for Non-Fiction in French in 2007.

Mark **Benson** est professeur agrégé au département d'Études françaises au Collège militaire royal du Canada. Il enseigne la littérature canadienne-française et la littérature française du Moyen Âge. Ses domaines d'intérêt comprennent le conte et le roman québécois, l'expression de la guerre dans la littérature québécoise, et la représentation du sport dans la littérature.

Len **Early** is Associate Professor of English in the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies at York University, Toronto. He is co-editor, with Michael Peterman, of Isabella Valancy Crawford's novel *Winona; or, The Foster-Sisters* (2007) and her *Collected Short Stories* (2009).

Alastair **Morrison** is a doctoral candidate in Columbia University's Department of English and Comparative Literature. He works on twentieth-century British and Anglophone literature, and is writing a dissertation on poetic form and religious imperatives to community in early twentieth-century England.

Richard **Teleky** is a Professor in the Humanities Department of York University. His most recent books, forthcoming this fall, are *The Dog on the Bed*, a study of the human/dog bond, and *The Hermit in Arcadia*, a new collection of poems.

Laura **Moss** is Associate Professor in the Department of English at UBC and an associate editor at *Canadian Literature*. She is also the editor of *Is Canada Postcolonial? Unsettling Canadian Literature* and, with Cynthia Sugars of the University of Ottawa, of *Canadian Literature in English: Texts and Contexts* (2 vols.) (2008, 2009).

Poems

Salvatore **Difalco** and Adrienne **Weiss** live in Toronto. Jesse Patrick **Ferguson** lives in Sydney. Jim **Johnstone** lives in Toronto. Todd **Swift** lives in London, England. Blair **Trewartha** lives in Sudbury.

Reviews

Ariane **Audet** lives in Montreal. Mandy **Barberree** and Jan **Lermitte** live in Vancouver. Sarika P. **Bose**, Candis **Callison**, Chiara **Falangola**, Duffy **Roberts**, and M. Sean **Saunders** teach at the University of British Columbia. Emmanuel **Bouchard** lives in Quebec City. Nicholas **Bradley** teaches at the University of Victoria. Liz **Czach** teaches at the University of Alberta. Moira **Day** teaches at the University of Saskatchewan. Rachele **Delaney** teaches at Vancouver Community College. Paul **Denham** lives in Saskatoon. Kit **Dobson** teaches at Mount Royal University. Caroline **Dupont** teaches at Cégep de Rimouski and the Quebec Maritime Institute. Elizabeth A. **Galway** teaches at the University of Lethbridge. Karl E. **Jirgens** teaches at the University of Windsor. Adrienne **Kertzer** teaches at the University of Calgary. Lindy **Ledohowski** teaches at St. Jerome's University. Katja **Lee** lives in Toronto. Tanis **MacDonald** teaches at Wilfrid Laurier University. Sarah **Mackenzie** lives in Ottawa. Travis V. **Mason** lives in Halifax. Owen **Percy** teaches at the University of Calgary. Linda **Quirk** lives in Kingston. Ian **Rae** teaches at King's University College. Wendy **Roy** teaches at the University of Saskatchewan. Cynthia **Sugars** teaches at the University of Ottawa. Jim **Taylor** lives in Antigonish. Jean-Pierre **Thomas** teaches at the Glendon Campus at York University. Hilary **Turner** teaches at the University College of the Fraser Valley.



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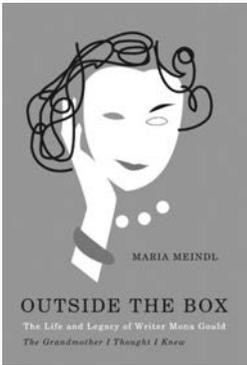
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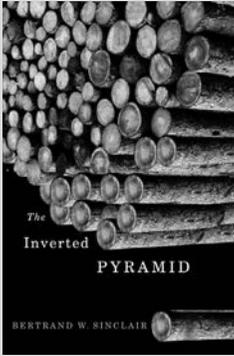


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