

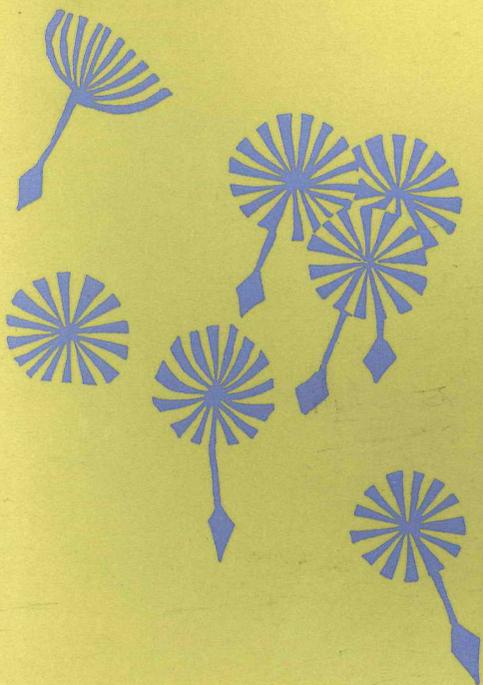
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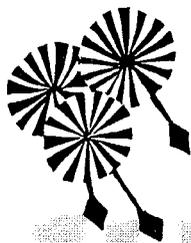
A Quarterly of Criticism and Review

Spring 1998

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Canadian Literature

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Quebec Again¹

Margery Fee

Lately, Quebec English has received considerable media attention (e.g. Ingrid Peretz, "Anglo may 'verify' her fuel tank," *Montreal Gazette*, 20 Aug. 1997) and has started to get some of the scholarly attention that Quebec French has had for years. What does it mean to say that Quebec English is a distinct regional dialect of Canadian English (or, in our post-structuralist mode, to construct it as one)?

Although most of us might not be able to pick the Montrealer out in a cross-Canada talk show, there are perceptible differences between Quebec English and the English spoken in Canada west of Kingston. First, Quebec English speakers sound different from Canadian English speakers from Kingston to Victoria, according to a study done by Henrietta Hung, John Davison, and J.K. Chambers called "Comparative Sociolinguistics of (aw)-Fronting." Without getting into the phonological gory details, I will summarize their conclusions: English-speakers in Quebec are not as homogeneous linguistically as English speakers in Victoria, Vancouver or Toronto. The results indicate that Montreal did not have a cohesive linguistic community of English speakers in the past, which the researchers feel probably indicates a parallel lack of a cohesive cultural community. When one thinks of the differences between the Jewish communities depicted by Mordecai Richler, the upperclass denizens of Westmount and the Mohawks, say, this suggestion gains force.

I suspect, however, that this lack of cohesion has changed over the past two decades, as the anglophone minority has found itself constructed as a

problem by successive provincial governments and has had to rise to the challenges of increasing 'francization.' Evidence that Quebec anglophones have done so can be found in their English: they use a different vocabulary, or use words in different senses, from those used by their counterparts elsewhere. In Quebec the difference in usage is primarily derived from the familiarity of English speakers with French. This familiarity derives from the language laws that have since the 1970s gradually shifted the working language of Quebec from English to French. The distinctiveness of Quebec English rests largely upon this fact. Quebec anglophones take their children to the *garderie*, buy their milk at the *dépanneur*, and get caught speeding by the *Sûreté* on the *autoroute*. This sort of borrowing is the most obvious. Then there are the cases where words are taken from French that have different senses in English, for example, *primordial*, which to English-speakers means dating from the earliest times or untouched, while in French it means essential. Thus, the comment "The freshness of the fish is primordial" could go unremarked in Montreal, perhaps, but certainly would cause a certain amount of confusion elsewhere. Further, Quebec is not an officially bilingual province, which means that there are no official translations for the names of provincial institutions, so English speakers get used to talking about the *Sûreté* instead of the police, and SAQ (*Société des Alcools du Québec*) instead of the liquor store.

Well, this is all very cute, but what does it mean? Why did the media find the idea that Quebec English was distinctive so entrancing? In part, I think because of its political implications. But it's a little harder to figure out what these are. Certainly the appearance of Quebec English indicates a shift from the past, when English in Quebec (except possibly at the phonological level) was much like English in the rest of Canada. Now the English-speaking community can be distinguished quite easily from the rest of Canada. One might argue that this community has been formed into a minority by linguistic discrimination; certainly there is evidence that English Quebecers have started to see themselves as a minority in Quebec rather than as part of the anglophone majority in Canada—the election of four Equality party members to the National Assembly in 1989 is evidence of that.

But one also has to think about the characteristics of this community. Although anglophones are distinguished from bilingual francophones by census questions that ask what language they first learned in childhood and

still understand, and by another question that asks what language they speak at home, what their English reveals is that many of them are bilingual. These are the people who (for the most part) chose to stay, language laws or no, when anglophone out-migration surged between 1976 and 1981, and are, one has to assume, in Quebec because they want to be there. Census figures from 1986 give the number of Quebeckers who speak English at home as almost 800,000, 12.3% of the total population of Quebec. Most (60%) of this group lives in the Montreal area. This is a small but concentrated group, and it consists of those English Canadians who identify with or at least know Quebec. One has to assume that their use of French words and expressions in their English, to the extent that it is conscious, reflects a pride in their decision to live there. However, their attachment to Quebec cannot be taken for granted: in a 1991 survey, only 35% of Quebec anglophones said they would stay if Quebec achieved sovereignty; 44% said they would not, and the remaining 21 percent did not know or did not respond (McRoberts 176). Further, surveys and actual referenda votes make it clear that this group does not support sovereignty-association or independence for Quebec. As a result, it has become a focus for argument by those who feel Quebec has gone too far in its language policies, and the government of Canada too far in supporting French outside of Quebec: "The English-speaking majority in Canada is showing a reduced willingness to support an official languages policy that promotes the use of French in all parts of Canada, but that, rightly or wrongly, is perceived to be indifferent to the decline of the anglo minority in Quebec" (Joy 5).

However, to regard the anglos of Quebec as an oppressed minority is to forget rather quickly that the institutional resources and educational facilities available to them are for the most part far better than those available to French speakers outside Quebec. The francophones of Quebec, despite their overwhelming majority in the province, have only recently managed to ensure that they do not out of economic necessity have to become bilingual to work in their own province. It is surely inconsistent to assume it is all right to control linguistic rights through economic exigency (English-speaking bosses can prefer English-speaking workers, even in a province where the majority speaks French), but not all right to do so through government policy (although the latter comes under public scrutiny, judicial control and, through the ballot box, some sort of democratic control).

Mordecai Richler writes, in his *Oh Canada! Oh Quebec!* that “if I thought for a moment that Francophone Quebecers were oppressed in Canada, I would be out there in the streets demonstrating with them” (239). However, it’s not clear what he means by oppression. The loss of a community’s language, however gradual and apparently voluntary, is often the result of small, almost imperceptible shifts in prestige and economic fairness. The existence of Quebec English does show that the prestige of French has risen in the province along with the shift of power in business and government to francophones. It could be regarded as a reversal of the process by which joul—a Quebec French working class dialect heavily influenced by English—was created, when rural Quebec francophones who moved to Montreal and other urban centres in the 1940s and 1950s had to learn English in order to work. But although at one point I felt that this shift in Quebec English was evidence enough that French would survive in Canada, even without language laws, I am no longer so sure.

In a nation that works by majority rule, the fewer francophone Quebecers there are, the less likely the language will be supported fully enough to guarantee survival. Demographic studies show that the proportion of francophones in Canada is declining (it is now less than a quarter of the total population), and that this decline is likely to continue. Studies also show (see Termote) that the proportion of francophones in Quebec is likely to begin to decline in between 25 and 40 years, depending on fertility rates and immigration. Studies like this encourage a feeling of desperation in Quebec nationalists, and even in those francophones who are federalists, particularly since the population of the island of Montreal is already very close to having fewer than 50% francophones.

Although I sympathize with this feeling, on reading the studies and related news stories that evince near-panic at the thought that the urban heart of Quebec was somehow being taken over by outsiders, I think the panic is exacerbated by insisting on the hard line between an anglophone and a francophone. Clearly there is a huge difference between the stereotypical BC anglophone who is affronted by French on the cereal box and someone who lives in Quebec and speaks French all day at work. Why is it so surprising that Quebec anglophones still speak English at home, particularly in a city and a country where English television, radio, and newspapers are all readily available? True, fluency in English means that one can

pack and leave with far less cost than someone who is fluent only in French. But as long as anglophones and allophones persist in speaking their first languages at home, no matter how fluent their French or strong their passions about Quebec, they will be counted in these immensely detailed demographic studies as, at best, provisional Quebecers.

The desire of demographers to define populations clearly is understandable, but dangerous. For example, Richard Joy concludes his study, *Canada's Official Languages: The Progress of Bilingualism*, by suggesting that it would be easier to compile data on language in Canada if, instead of "encouraging multiple responses to census questions on home language, mother tongue, and ethnicity" the census asked "every Canadian his or her preferred official language" (117). This sort of demand ignores the possibility that in the new multicultural urban centres of the world, a different sort of culture is growing, one that fits poorly into traditional ethnic or linguistic categories. To take an example from another large bilingual city, here is Jeanine Treffers-Daller's account of Brussels:

The Brusselers consider themselves to be different from the Walloons and the Flemings. For them, being bilingual is only natural, and they laugh as much about Flemings who refuse to speak French as about Walloons who refuse to speak Dutch. However, a genuine Brussels view of the linguistic situation in the city is not represented in the literature. In the nineteenth century, a genuine Brussels view of the linguistic situations could be found among the Brussels Flamingants, who saw in the mixed nature of the Brussels population, the "*solution inespérée* 'unexpected solution'" to the linguistic problem of Belgium. As a consequence of the growing polarization between the Flemish and Walloon communities in Belgium, the development of a distinct Brussels analysis of the situation turned out not to have any chance. (6)

Perhaps we should hope that a genuine Montreal perspective on the situation might be possible, one produced from a perspective where bilingualism is seen as something other than a negative symbol of either traitorousness or oppression. In a sense this group is the canary in the mineshaft for Canada-Quebec relations, whether Quebec achieves independence or not. As Pierre A. Coulombe points out in his *Language Rights in French Canada*, "we, in the political realm . . . make the truth by moral agreement: it is our narrative" (158). Perhaps at the centre of this narrative should lie the ideas of Quebec anglophones, who are, as their language proves, at the cusp of two cultures.

NOTE

- 1 In this editorial, certain variations in spelling have been maintained and accents left off in an effort to reflect the linguistic variety of Quebec writing.

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from The Poems of Emily Montague

With such spirit such a mind as hers must love.

— Frances Brooke, 1769

“You stand behind these wanting words
and speak them as you would your own.
Fanciful friend, we are alone,
there are no voices ‘cept this one
and it is silent ‘till you come
to close upon me with your tongue.”

— E.M.

Passage

Now, here is a story

A man gazes through a high window at
the awesome splendor of the world.

Well, here I am, he recalls.
And there it is.

His right hand reaches up into the light.

His left hand grips his lover
in a small spoil of earth.

Sentences For A White Church

White church even to speak of perfection
is to fill the mouth with soil.

White church who restores you
when graves break open like packing crates?

Your stones in a passing thought
become stones.

My fingers linger down the face of an angel.
Tears collect beneath my nails.

I read your hymnal with my one blind eye.

White church the arms
of winter grass the immigrant grass
shame me O liar.

Here is a haven for the dreams of a clown
and flaming stairs for the frostbitten girl
who loves you white

church but neither of us
is coming in.

Straight or Bent

Textual/Sexual T(ri)angles in *As for Me and My House*

Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House* (1941) has long been considered an icon of English-Canadian fiction, as numerous critical analyses testify. Those collected in two volumes of essays (edited by Stouck 1991 and Moss 1992) illustrate the wide range of approaches adopted to this enigmatic diary novel and the variety of interpretations proposed. Yet Keath Fraser's recently published (1997) memoir of Ross has put into question all the preceding studies, by speaking openly and directly for the first time about Ross's homosexuality and its bearing on his most famous novel. The questions raised are not limited to the meanings previously assigned to the text: they concern also the apparent conspiracy of silence around this dimension of Ross's writing. This aspect seems to be a classic example of the "open secret" that Eve Sedgwick associates with the institutional treatment of discreetly homosexual writers whose work, or at least its literary value, is supposed to have little to do with their sexual orientation. The author "may very well have been homosexual—but it would be provincial to let so insignificant a fact make a difference to our understanding of any serious project of life, writing or thought" (Sedgwick 1990: 53). Many critics situate Ross's novel in a corpus of "Prairie fiction" characterized by its depiction of small-town hypocrisy, where what is hidden is usually expected to be related to illicit heterosexual relations. Most appear not to consider the possibility of homosexuality existing in such a milieu, and if they suspect it, they choose to ignore it.¹ However, Ross's novel can be read differently, by dissociating it from its English-Canadian connotations,

and placing it in the comparative context of the diary-novel as a genre, particularly in France and in Québec, where this type of narration has often been associated with the questioning of gender identity and sexual orientation (Raoul 1993). This focus will, I believe, confirm that the interest of Ross's novel extends well beyond its regionalism.

The author most clearly representative of the French diary-novel tradition is André Gide. Lorraine McMullen (7-8) informs us that Ross was very fond of French novels, especially those by Gide and Proust, and that he read them in the original when he was living in Montreal. Admittedly, this does not necessarily mean that at the time of writing *As For Me and My House* Ross already knew Gide's most famous diary novels² (*La Porte étroite* 1909; *La Symphonie pastorale* 1919; *L'École des femmes* 1929). He may well, however, have already read a novel he considered important, Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point* (McMullen 8), which was published in 1928 and has many similarities to Gide's *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* (1925), including the use of notebooks. In Gide's novel, extracts from Édouard's diary discuss his attraction to an adolescent boy. Even if there was no direct influence, Ross must have recognized a strong textual and sexual affinity when he discovered Gide's fictional journals. Like Gide's texts, Ross's novel functions as a palimpsest, by means of the diary form which allows the author both to hide and reveal a subtext related to his forbidden sexual orientation. In fact it is striking that, deliberately or not, Ross incorporates into one book elements that appear in several of Gide's fictions. As in *La Porte étroite* (and its companion novel, *L'Immoraliste*), the plot concerns a marriage between a man who appears not to be attracted by women and a woman who loves him. As in *La Symphonie pastorale*, the story revolves around a hypocritical pastor, whose wife sees more clearly than he does regarding his unacknowledged physical attraction to an adopted child (a blind girl in Gide's novel). Mrs. Bentley's diary, like Éveline's in *L'École des femmes*, conveys the disillusionment of a gifted pianist married to a man who refuses to communicate with her because of his own false front. Although Ross is less direct than Gide in *Geneviève*, the sequel to *L'École des femmes*, he also broaches the problem of how to combine homosexuality (or a *mariage blanc*) with parenthood.³ The fascination of Ross's text, like that of Gide's *récits*, results from the need to assess not only what the main characters realize about their own sexual orientation, but also what their partner can be assumed to know about it, and whether they know what (or that) their partner knows.

This guessing game is inseparable from the form and function of the diary novel, which reflects within the fiction the author-actor-reader triangle that produces the novel. The fictional diarist adopts all three roles: the narrating “I” of the moment of writing is identified with the narrated self-as-character in the unfolding story, and in a supposedly private journal the writer is also the immediate (and potential future) narratee and decoder of the text (Raoul 1980). This triangular structure is often duplicated in a fictional editorial frame. In *L'École des femmes*, for example, “Gide” explains how he came by Éveline’s diaries, and invites the reader to join him in assessing them. Such a mediatory pre-text is conspicuously absent in *As For Me and My House*, where our acceptance of the diary as Mrs. Bentley’s, in spite of the male author’s name, is a straightforward case of suspension of disbelief. Nor does her diary play a part in the plot, as in many fictional journals. Its destiny remains unknown: Mrs. Bentley does not re-read her text and “discover the truth,” as does Gide’s Pastor, and Philip does not gain access to the diary, like Jérôme in *La Porte étroite*. Mrs. Bentley never recognizes that she has produced a novel (see Woodcock 78), as do the narrators of self-referential diary fictions, beginning with Sartre’s *La Nausée* (published in 1938, the year before Ross was writing his novel, see Fraser 45). On the contrary, this “purloined” diary remains concealed, and the reader is left wondering whether its hidden meaning (obvious once seen) is known to her, to Philip, or to Ross himself. For once one has recognized the homosexual subtext, it is impossible to ignore it, indeed it appears as textually overdetermined.

A closer look from this perspective makes it difficult to believe that Ross was not *de mauvaise foi* himself, when he claimed not to have consciously thought of this novel as a depiction of homosexuality (Fraser 32, 40). The triangular narrative structure based on changing roles or angles is reflected in the shifting pattern of relationships in which the Bentleys are implicated, each occupying in turn the position of desiring subject, desired object, and analytical (jealous) observer, or third person apparently excluded. Yet the relationship of rivalry draws two conflated rather than contradictory desires together, revealing the attraction of the same—the homoerotic—in competition with that of the other, the different or heterosexual. These patterns illustrate Eve Sedgwick’s model (1985: 21-27) for the mediated *rapprochement* between potential same-sex partners, camouflaged by the presence of a third person of the opposite sex who serves as

both decoy and link. A series of such triangles produces the “tangles” faced by Mrs. Bentley, the knots which she attempts to unravel to establish a semblance of the only acceptable trio—an oedipal family composed of mother, father and son (see Buss). In spite of their irreconcilable differences, the Bentleys do not renounce the desire to found a “house,” a lineage, although the line is bent rather than straight. The false fronts that provide a dominant metaphor throughout the text are not removed, but slanted: the masks are askew, just enough to reveal that not only Mrs. Bentley’s femininity is a “masquerade,” to use Irigaray’s term (80), but so are Philip’s masculinity and the maternity and paternity that both will claim in the end. Heterosexual gender and generation must appear to remain inextricably entwined, but constantly risk disconnection. A closer examination of these two aspects—gender as masquerade and reproduction as counterfeit—will pave the way for a return to the comparison with diary fiction in French, and in particular the image of genderless self-engenderment in Québec diary novels.

The gender-blurring that permeates Ross’s novel begins, as Helen Buss (193) has shown, with Ross’s choice of a “feminine” form (the private diary) and a female narrating voice, to produce a text in which the male author is nevertheless assumed by most critics to identify, not with Mrs. Bentley, but with her husband, Philip.⁴ Robert Kroetsch’s influential early study (reprinted in Stouck ed.) established the “house/horse” opposition as central to this novel, and to Prairie fiction in general. It is based on a polarisation between two genders, each defined in opposition to what the other is supposed to be. The woman’s house connotes stability, continuity and containment as the result of sexual activity. The man’s horse represents the opposing values of movement, change and freedom: sexual promiscuity for the sake of discovery and self-indulgence, rather than reproduction, responsibility and respectability. A similar dichotomy appears in Québec fiction as “une route, une maison.”⁵ The title *As For Me and My House* raises the initial question as to *whose* the house is, in the Bentleys’ situation. In fact, it belongs to neither of them, but to the Church that they despise. Both are equally excluded from ownership, and the shingle they hang up is strictly temporary. Mrs. Bentley is not really a housewife, any more than Philip is a genuine Father of the Church.

Mrs. Bentley is certainly aware that as the Parson’s wife she must maintain a certain standard of housekeeping, just as she must wear a certain

style of hat, but it does not come naturally to her. She repeats numerous clichés about “a man’s way” and “a woman’s way,” echoing her friend Mrs. Bird, even claiming to accept the necessity of becoming a “parasite” or an “empty shell” (99, 199) in order to appear to be a successful wife. Yet her relationship with the house is hostile. Like many female diarists, she resents her imprisonment and fears it may drive her insane.⁶ It is she, not Philip, who feels a constant need to get outside, and walks along the railroad tracks, whatever the weather. However, Mrs. Bentley does subscribe to the belief that being a “real woman” necessarily entails motherhood. Because she is barren, she perceives herself as old at thirty-four and unattractive, in spite of evidence to the contrary. She attributes her frustration (and Philip’s) to the lack of a child, as much as to their common abandonment of artistic ambition. She has had a stillborn baby, and her present apparent sterility is presented as the reason for Philip’s failure to become a father, rather than the reverse. She provides no explanation for the absence of any subsequent pregnancies. The childless home is blamed for Philip’s refusal to grow up. His “broodless” (6) wife has constantly to fight the temptation to mother or nurse him (46-47, 50). Although she claims that this annoys him, he in fact appears to offer little resistance. Philip is actually the one who adopts a type of narcissistic withdrawal typical of many diarists, closeting himself in the womb-like refuge of his study to make his drawings and sleeping a great deal.⁷

The mainstay of Mrs. Bentley’s self-construction as feminine is that she must “let him be the man” (5), but it is all too apparent that the only way for her to do this is to *act* for him, in both senses of the term. Since he is not good with his hands (except at art), she wields the pliers and chops the wood, or secretly finds someone else to do it. Yet her own hands are those not only of a woman but of a pianist. She is no more “naturally” inclined to manual labour than he is. And he, in his turn, is quite capable of it, when it does not involve doing it for her. It is around Mrs. Bentley that Philip cannot perform “like other men” (175). With her he is reduced, in spite of his size, to the helpless womanly role of passivity, seclusion and being spoken for (in sexual as well as verbal terms). In spite of numerous references to his rigid straightness and uprightness in public, this seems to be as much of an illusion as his simulated religious convictions. On the one occasion when he acts in a “manly” fashion (at the time of the fire), his wife informs him that he is not dressed for the part (170).⁸ We are con-

stantly reminded that Philip is playing a role and that he is (according to the narrator) a poor actor (22, 192). He can only “be himself” on his own behind his study door, where the “artist in him” (6, 25) can abandon the simulation of both pastoral piety and virile efficiency. His attempts at conventional masculinity are just as much of a masquerade as his wife’s femininity. As Mrs. Bentley points out, “It doesn’t follow that the sensitive qualities that make an artist are accompanied by the unflinching, stubborn ones that make a man of action and success” (135). She claims that his study knows “what he really is,” but (like her) “won’t let slip a word” (61). Since she is quite willing to show his pictures to others, it does not seem to be only his artistic “bent” that is being concealed.

The definition of the Bentleys as “artists” is inextricably bound up, in this small-town conservative context, with doubts as to their conformity to dominant gender roles, and by extension their sexual orientation. Fraser informs us that Ross’s mother deflected questions about her son’s failure to marry by citing his artistic character. In French novels of the 1930s and Québec fiction of the 1940s and ’50s there are numerous male diarists with mundane jobs like Ross (a bank clerk), who dream of becoming writers or artists, and who see this tendency in themselves as in conflict with the masculine image they wish to preserve.⁹ The originality of Ross’s novel lies in its juxtaposition of two characters, one of each sex, who have both apparently sacrificed their artistic ambitions (and sexual fulfilment) in order to conform to the “norm,” and who both ultimately blame the other for this choice. It can only be justified by the production of a child who will redeem them by succeeding where they have not: failure in art and life can be compensated by self-reproduction, but the latter appears to be dependent on a successful heterosexual relationship.

At the ranch, Laura immediately perceives Philip as effeminate, someone who “draws little pictures” and is “not the right kind of man” to bring up Steve (123), the adolescent boy they plan to adopt. Philip dresses up like one of the (cow)boys, but in spite of his name he does not share their passion for horses, and when his wife flirts with one of them he is not disturbed. Fraser’s discussion of the homosexual subtext in *As For Me and My House* focusses mainly on the role played by Steve, whom Mrs. Bentley describes as “ominously good-looking” (54).¹⁰ That she is afraid Philip will be drawn to Steve by something more than fatherly affection is indicated by her otherwise unreasonable fear and jealousy of the boy (“There was

something rankling in me that reason couldn't justify," 56). It seems not to be the first time that a similar situation has arisen, since she assumes that Philip's infatuation will not last, reminding herself that "if history repeats itself it may not be so very long" (70). Other references imply that Philip has a past history of dalliance with female members of former congregations, but among Philip's old drawings she finds one of "a handsome lad" (201). This otherwise superfluous reference indicates that there may well have been earlier attachments to young boys, since Philip's private drawings depict those who "draw" him (in *Horizon*, Steve and Judith). She is afraid that Steve may have "the looks, mind and imagination" to "make Philip's marsh-fire a long one" (100), but encourages herself with the thought that Steve will change, and Philip will see him "as he really is" (70).

That Philip is attracted to young men rather than to women is mutely trumpeted by a copious trail of clues throughout the text. We know that he was reluctant to marry (44, 157), and did so when the woman in question seemed the least "womanly," closer to the androgynous artist figure. His wife mentions that he does not care for women (85), that he loves her as much as he could any "of her kind" (15), that he cannot forgive her for being "just a woman" (31). She states explicitly that he "likes boys" (9), and that women are "not as necessary to him as to most men" (22). While he may have a passing and trivial interest in a female, he remains "out of the reach of a woman" (23). Later, she remarks that "[Steve] wasn't really a rival. He belonged to a part of Philip's life that was always barred to me anyway" (164). Yet she is overtly jealous when Philip prefers to be alone with Steve (60, 84). She also notes on no less than seven occasions that Philip, who usually recoils from all physical contact with her (117), likes to touch Steve, to "press against him" (70) and stand with his hands on his shoulders (a gesture that Ross recognized as typically homosexual: Fraser 59). All these references initially appear "innocuous" in their context, but the accumulation is insistent. Although Philip is no horseman in the concrete sense, this "lover of horses" is said to "have taken Steve for Pegasus" (see Fraser 48), as a means to dream. Mrs. Bentley sees that "Steve is to do the things he tried to do and failed" (70). As Fraser emphasizes, there is a narcissistic identification on the part of Philip with this younger version of himself, marked like him by "the tangle of his early years" (153), especially the absence of a real father (66). This last element not only reflects Ross's own experience, but corresponds to the conventional Freudian pattern for

male homosexuality, as does Philip's desire to relive his own life through a younger version of himself.¹¹

It is the episode at the ranch, which marks the half-way point in the diary, that speaks the most openly to the sexual frustration of Mrs. Bentley (surrounded by pictures of stallions or prize bulls and randy cowboys), who confronts an alternative model of female behaviour represented by the androgynous Laura. Philip appears to be "out of it," but is in fact becoming even closer to Steve. While his wife flirts with a cowboy ("hoping that Philip might see me" 128), and Paul looks jealously on, Philip is "sprawling on one of the benches" with a sleeping Steve, "supporting his shoulders to keep him from slipping forward" (129). It seems that Mrs. Bentley has reason to fear that Steve has "taken Philip from her" (69), that he means more to him than she does (99), and that this affection confirms that he was never really "hers" (145). It is certainly made abundantly clear that Philip is reluctant to have sex with his wife, or even to kiss her (Banting 37). Her "amorous attentions" have never been welcome (102), and he is constantly pretending to be asleep when she goes to bed. When he does occasionally "want" her, it is conspicuous by its rarity and perceived as a favour or concession to her. The most that she can really hope for is that he "won't mind," she cannot expect eagerness on his part (158), and when they do make love it leaves no feeling of "consummation" (199). Mrs. Bentley admits to feeling "queer" and describes herself as "a queer one" (203), but the term seems to apply more obviously to her husband. He would dance with her if he knew how (64), but he does not. The text encodes Philip overwhelmingly as a man whose sexual preference is not for women.

Steve is dressed up by Philip and Mrs. Bentley to look like "the preacher's son" (90), but he refuses to accept the role, preferring to keep his Catholic religious images and masculine tendency to brawl. He never appears to reciprocate the attentions that Philip bestows on him. One critic supposes that he resents Philip's "fatherly" attitude (Woodcock 97), but it is equally plausible to attribute Steve's reticence and his turning to Mrs. Bentley to an intuition of something else. Their house is full of "little closets" (18). Philip is constantly closeted in his study, but it is Steve who draws our attention, through his drawings, to the symbolism of the "leaning tower of Pisa," the square, straight water closet whose angle becomes increasingly precarious, until it is finally blown down.

Mrs. Bentley's attitude to Steve is ambivalent. She mediates a relationship between him and Philip, only to break it when it threatens her own relationship with her husband. Seeing Steve through Philip's eyes, she admits his attractiveness, and there is one occasion when she seems as close as Philip to succumbing to it: "I sat down beside him on the cot. . . . we looked at each other; then I went sentimental for a minute, and he let me. I didn't know anything like this could happen to me" (90). Here she speaks of Steve as if he were Philip. He even has Philip's "white lips," and like Philip "lets her" show her emotion. She can love him only through or as Philip, with a "twisted, hybrid love" (145). She and Steve are rivals for Philip's attention, which she tries to attract by showing that she could seduce Steve by her piano playing (as she had Philip). This result depends, however, as it did before, on her desexualisation. The effect is only to intensify the "conspiracy" between Philip and Steve against the matrons of Horizon, particularly Mrs. Finlay, who, one at first assumes, is responsible for having Steve removed. This explanation later appears less likely. Would she join in the fond farewell party at the station, if that were the case? The anonymous "someone" who denounced them (152-53) may very well be Mrs. Bentley herself (see Hinz and Teunissen), since she admits to her diary that she is glad he has gone, only to wonder later if they should have kept him a little longer (160). This may be her last resort, to keep hidden the "dark, strange, morbid passion" (153) that she believes Philip to have for Steve, whose presence has become as dangerous to their false propriety as the lack of faith which Steve's observation also makes difficult to conceal: "Philip, Steve and I. . . . it's such a tough, deep-rooted tangle that it hides. And none of them knows" (80).

The addition of Steve to the Bentley dyad initially enables them to establish a simulacrum of the conventional oedipal model (they repaint their shingle), but it cannot last, because Steve is seen by Mrs. Bentley as a rival for Philip's desire. Two other triangles are suggested as alternatives: both function by setting up another rival for each of the Bentleys, one who might possibly enable one of them to produce a child. The first is suggested by Philip's drawing on the school blackboard of himself, his wife, and the schoolteacher, Paul. The second is introduced when Mrs. Bentley, while playing the organ in church, sees in the mirror that her husband's gaze is fixed on Judith as she sings.

If Philip does not like women and definitely prefers adolescent boys, why does he have an affair with Judith? It seems that he is not attracted to her

because she is a woman (although she “dresses up” to gain his attention), but in spite of it, because of her youth, her voice and love of music, her physical strength and energy and her rebelliousness. These are the qualities that drew him to Mrs. Bentley when they first met, and that also attract Mrs. Bentley herself to Judith. When Mrs. Bentley believes that they have slept together, she interprets it as “on the rebound”; it happens just after he has received a cold letter from Steve, and she surmises that Judith is serving as a substitute for the boy in Philip’s affections (164)—and in Steve’s bed. At the time she is also replacing his wife, who is too ill to take care of the house. Mrs. Bentley may have been instrumental in bringing Judith and Philip together, but it seems to me difficult to deduce from her diary, as some critics have implied, a scheme on her part to use Judith as a surrogate mother and then dispose of her. Judith’s death is indeed too convenient, but it would be more convincing, in my view, to propose that she may have willed her own death, having recognized Philip’s immunity to female seduction, than that Mrs. Bentley is somehow responsible for it.

Judith and Mrs. Bentley become closer because of their shared desire. Mrs. Bentley identifies with the younger woman, even feeling sorry for her because she will discover, as she herself has, that Philip is inaccessible: it may well be this that Judith is at first not aware of and then “knows” (120-21, 160), rather than her own desire for Philip. Judith appears in many ways as a younger Mrs. Bentley, especially because of her love of music, and in this the attraction between the two women is parallel to that between Philip and Steve. Mrs. Bentley expresses surprise when she first notices Judith’s breasts, deploring in the same breath that she herself has “never got along with women very well” (102). She claims that before meeting Philip, she was “impatient of what seemed their little rivalries and infatuations,” and that since then she has been “afraid” (102). Is she afraid that they might attract Philip? Or afraid of female homosexuality, since she has become aware of Philip’s orientation? She was also disturbed by glimpsing Mrs. Bird’s nakedness through her dressing gown (79), and strongly attracted to Laura. The “queerness” she ascribes to herself may represent her own repressed sexuality, which nevertheless seems to be frustrated primarily because of Philip’s coldness.

It is finally Mrs. Bentley who replaces Judith, as mother to her child, and the substitutions end up being in the realm of generation rather than gender. I am assuming (unlike Hinz and Teunissen) that Philip did sleep with

Judith (if not, how would he know that she “slipped just once”? 193), but that Mrs. Bentley is right in thinking that it “didn’t mean anything” (163, 177). I also find it unlikely (as did Ross: Fraser 32) that Paul could be the father of Judith’s child, although there is certainly some room for doubt as to whether it is in fact Philip. Paul is away at the ranch at the time when the child is conceived. More importantly, unlike Philip he is concerned for authenticity. He wishes to explain why he goes to church although he is a “pagan” (111), and is obsessed with naming and the “true,” “original” meaning of words (including the association of “fuschia” to “Fuchs,” and the description of the easel he gives Philip as a “little ass”: see Mitchell and Banting). If Philip’s name is “Bent” (probably his mother’s rather than his father’s), Paul Kirby’s is “curbing” (Compton 65) rather than “curved”: he represents a straight schoolteacher’s line, and masters his horse. Mrs. Bentley’s “what if . . . (she had married someone like Paul)” scenario (209) concludes that Paul would not, like Philip, have presented a “heedless wall.” Unlike Philip, Paul would have been a suitable father, a legitimate one who maintains (however ironically) that “patriarch” is a “noble word” (213). If he were the father of Judith’s baby, he would have married her. The combination of Judith and Paul, like that of Judith and Dan, the farmer who courts her, or Mrs. Bentley and her old flame, the violinist Percy Glenn, provides only a shadow triangle, one that cannot happen because of Philip’s seduction.

Paul is a potential substitute for Philip in the Bentley triangle,¹² one who could enable Mrs. Bentley to retain the feminine position of object of desire, and possibly provide her with a child—the message of the rompers (205), which he buys and gives to her. Unlike Philip, he knows how to dance and is eager to be her partner (128). He tries to “befriend” Philip (112), and admires him in a “clear, firm, simple way” that contrasts with Philip’s likes and dislikes, which are always “troubled and smouldering” (168). The fact that Philip is so upset and apparently jealous at the effect of Mrs. Bentley’s piano playing on Paul might, of course, indicate another possible permutation: that Philip is secretly attracted to Paul. This possibility cannot be ruled out (a homosocial unit is created by Paul, Philip and Steve sharing a tent at the ranch, 125), but it seems that Paul would not respond. He might, however, have been aware all along of “what [Mrs. Bentley] was sure [she] was keeping secret” (213): not that the baby is Philip’s, but that Philip is an unlikely father.

Whether or not Philip is actually the father of Judith's baby, its presence enables the Bentleys to establish a semblance of the patriarchal oedipal triangle. The child must be a son (204, 207), in order that he may bear Philip's name and be confused with him, continuing the winding and tenuous Bentley line. This line is actually matriarchal, engineered by Mrs. Bentley as Philip's mother's successor. Paul's explanation of the origin of words like "father" is the most fanciful of his etymologies: "it was imitation of just such a little wail as this that had given us some of our noblest words, like father, and patriarch, and paternity" (213). Mrs. Bentley "shakes her head": she is more likely to believe that the word for "mother" will emerge from the child's first vocalisations. Mr. Bentley "gives his wife a son," rather than the reverse, but it is as a result of her desire ("I want it so," 216). She allows him to be the father, but becomes a mother through her own efforts.

Fraser comments, as had earlier critics, on the relationship between Ross and his mother as a model for that between the Bentleys. Philip's misogyny, his resentment of his wife's control in spite of the fact that he benefits from her organisation of their life, echoes the complaints of a number of male diarists in Québec novels written before the Quiet Revolution. In a colonized society dominated internally by an alliance of the Church and older women, they perceive themselves as rendered impotent (though not castrated) by phallic mother figures whom they blame for depriving them of fathers to imitate (Raoul 1993). In a number of texts, their feelings of helplessness are accompanied by a fear of homosexual tendencies. The result in some later diary fictions, such as those by Hubert Aquin, may be the rape or murder of a woman, as the final proof of virility. None of these characters "comes out" as a homosexual, as in Gide's *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*. Rather, as in *As For Me and My House*, the appearance of conventional heterosexuality must be maintained at all costs. Whereas in Gide's text the counterfeit money is exposed as a fraud, in Ross's, as in the Québec examples, the wobbly false fronts cling tenuously on.

Many diary novels in the Québécois corpus end with a symbolic birth, which may, in the case of male narrators, represent the ultimate vengeance on the mother. Whether or not an actual baby is involved, it is usually the (re)birth of the diarist that is implied (Raoul 1993: 167-68.). The diary-writing period is seen as an incubation, a necessary narcissistic withdrawal prior to emerging as separate from the (m)other. Often the "birth of the book" (as the diarist recognizes the separate existence of the diary as text)

evokes the reincarnation of the diarist as Author/Writer. Although some critics see Mrs. Bentley's diary as a means for her to survive, or even to be "self-engendering" (Buss 196) or "self-born" (Compton 69), it seems to me that, compared to many other diary novels, this one avoids this conclusion. Here, the diarist emerges as a fake mother, rather than as a born-again speaking subject. Furthermore, not only is the baby illegitimate (and in a sense stolen from Judith at the cost of her life), but the diary/book is still-born like Mrs. Bentley's first child or Philip's abortive attempt at autobiography. We do not know what becomes of it. It remains hidden (within the fiction), replaced by the books of others in the store that is to substitute for the parsonage as a somewhat larger closet. The second-hand bookstore in particular is the locus of redistribution for pre-established knowledge and ideas (out)lived by others. Mrs. Bentley has already shown a predilection for the covers of books over their contents (209). This store to which they escape will be another false front and as much a prison as the religion which has dominated the Bentleys' lives so far.

It is illuminating to recall as a last point of comparison one of the best known Québec diary novels: Gérard Bessette's *Le Libraire*, which was published in 1950 and ostensibly set in the '40s, but like Ross's novel depicts a setting frozen in the '30s (the map of Saint-Jérôme dates from 1936). Like Philip in his study, Jodoin hides behind the books in the bookstore where he works, seeking to escape the gaze of the inhabitants of a Québécois Horizon. Equally stifled by religious hypocrisy and puritanism ("Her-eyes-on"?), Jodoin shares with Philip a shady past (he has also had to leave previous employment for unexplained reasons), an attraction to adolescent boys, and a reluctance to sleep with the "trivial" woman in his life (Raoul 1993: 170-78). However, the end of *Le Libraire* is spectacularly liberating: the hidden books related to free thought and sexuality will be released in the city, the false front replaced by the "libre air" of a new era, the Quiet Revolution (see Raoul 1993: 170-80).

Nothing of this nature occurs in *As for Me and My House*. There are two images in Mrs. Bentley's diary that may be read as representing a pregnancy, a "countdown" to release and renewal. The first is that of a balloon waiting to burst (150): it culminates in the release of wind, in the storm along with which Steve "blows over" (70). The calm that follows leads to a second "build up" (around Judith), this time described as an "abscess" (195) that needs to be lanced. Yet the violent scene of denunciation between

the Bentleys at the end is inconclusive. When Mrs Bentley cries “Your baby!” and Philip replies “she told you—” (214), she cuts him off in a gesture of verbal castration whose effectiveness is demonstrated by his silence. We cannot know for sure whether he was about to confirm or deny his paternity. What is clear is that at this point it suits them both that they should appear to believe in it. Mrs Bentley has succeeded in providing an appearance of “normality” in their relationship, and this result is what counts. It turns “the tangle grown between [them]” (186) into a neat and tidy marital knot, averting the danger that Philip might choose to join “his own kind,” who are “reckless, spendthrift, bawdy” (135-36).

Fraser’s memoir reveals just how difficult it was for Ross to join “his kind” publicly, even when he had the opportunity. He remained reluctant to bring his homosexuality out into the “limelight” and was willing to divulge his sexual experiences only in private, albeit as a means to posthumous exposure. In his life, as in his novel, the triangles that represented homosexuality in Europe in 1941 remained safely camouflaged behind a façade of “four-square” heterosexuality. Yet in *As For Me and My House*, as in the game of cat’s cradle, a neat pattern of squares can be revealed as one of triangles, when the structure is “turned upside down,” following Philip’s advice (202), to show inversion as the right angle.

NOTES

- 1 More critical attention has been paid to the less hidden homosexual elements in some of Ross’s short stories: see Andrew Lesk, “Something Queer is Going On Here: Desire in the Short Fiction of Sinclair Ross,” *Essays on Canadian Writing* 61 (1997): 129-41.
- 2 Thanks to David Stouck for pointing this out to me.
- 3 Gide’s *récits* were based on his *mariage blanc* to his cousin Madeleine, at a time when he hoped his homosexuality could be “cured.” It has been discovered that parts of his wife’s real diary are included in *La Porte étroite*. *Geneviève* provides a transposed account of a request he later received from a young woman to father her child (which produced a daughter). Fraser mentions that Ross did adopt an Italian boy, for a short time.
- 4 Fraser quotes Ross as stating that he meant to tell Philip’s story, but became taken over by “her.” Protean like Gide, Ross wove parts of his own life into Paul and Judith, as well as both Bentleys. One wonders whether experience or fantasy was at the root of *Teddy Do*, an abandoned novel about an incestuous father-son relationship, discussed by Fraser.
- 5 Studies of women writers (Germaine Guèvremont, Gabrielle Roy) particularly exploit this distinction.

- 6 Like the narrator of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's fictional diary, "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1895), Mrs. Bentley feels exposed to the "eyes" of the wallpaper, as well as to the leaks from the ceiling. She has to reassure herself that she is sane and envies Philip his sanity (86, 166, 182).
- 7 Dubanski shows that Philip's drawings function like a diary.
- 8 Fraser comments on this, and on the various phallic symbols (pipes, hoses) scattered throughout the text (60). Ralph Sarkonak (personal communication) has also pointed out to me the homosexual connotations of cowboy paraphernalia (e.g. chaps).
- 9 These range from Duhamel's Salavin to Gabrielle Roy's Alexandre Chênevert (see Raoul 1980, 1993).
- 10 Richard Cavell commented earlier on this remark, interpreting it as a symptom of Mrs. Bentley's own fear of being inappropriately attracted to Steve.
- 11 See Lewes and Sedgwick for critiques of this theory.
- 12 Lorna Crozier, in her poems attributed to Mrs. Bentley, posits a secret affair between the narrator and Paul.

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WHAT HE OWNS

... owns him
when objects break down.
The alternator in the car
dead now, useless modern junk
he must pay his mechanic to extract
and replace.

The old Volvo at least
did not die on the freeway but chose
a lane close to home to blink its lights
at him, dashboard growing dim.
He has been stranded before,
in former lives.
He sits again,
his rage nicely controlled;
no point fuming
at metal, the factory flaw,
the nation-state he glides through
(mostly) cushioned
against every bump and dive.

Out of India, millennia ago, he first
moved, wanting to own
where he stood,
but a neighbour had already claimed
where he was—and so he sprawled
over passes, oceans
until every bit of earth
was accounted for, written up
in legal plots and lots.
He steps out of his car now, closes the door,
automatically locking it,
and begins to walk.

The Politics of Cyborg Communications

Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan,
and *The English Patient*

A postcolonial reading of Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* would start from the colonized subject's resistance to a "tremor of Western wisdom" (284)—the ongoing threat of nuclear apocalypse—which brings the novel to a climax and the Second World War to a close. Trying to imagine "The death of a civilisation" (286), Kirpal Singh closes his eyes and "sees the streets of Asia full of fire. It rolls across cities like a burst map, the hurricane of heat withering bodies as it meets them, the shadow of humans suddenly in the air" (284). Bitterly, he concludes that Western (and not Asian) imperialism is solely to blame: "All those speeches of civilisation from kings and queens and presidents . . . such voices of abstract order. Smell it. Listen to the radio and smell the celebration" (285). "You stood for precise behaviour," he says to his former mentor, the burned English aviator who may not even be English. "Was it just ships that gave you such power? Was it, as my brother said, because you had *The Histories* and printing presses?" (283).

The sapper from India who has spent the war in Kent and Sussex disposing of German bombs comes to see the Bomb itself as another instrument of Western hegemony, like the ships, the printing presses, and written history, all tools of "a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged" (Said 8). Ultimately, Kirpal Singh sees the Word itself, the Judaeo-Christian Bible, as a source of imminent imperialism and of imminent apocalypse; for, in a literal as well as a figurative sense, it has authorized his own erasure from history.

Repudiating “The voice of *The English Patient* [which] sang Isaiah into his ear as he had that afternoon when the boy had spoken of the face on the chapel ceiling in Rome” (294), he thus refuses the master narrative which has brought the West to dominance, and now to the verge of destruction: “For the heavens shall vanish away like smoke and the earth shall wax old like a garment. And they that dwell therein shall die in like manner” (295; Is. li.6). So Ondaatje, it would seem, “writes back” on Kirpal Singh’s behalf to undo the hegemony of Western knowledge and language and power.

Yet there is more in this idea of Western hegemony than a Eurocentric will-to-power which subordinates non-white races. For the terms of the indictment—progressing historically from the West’s possession of ships to printing presses to radio to the atomic bomb—suggest that the West has to a considerable degree been determined by its technologies of communication. As Marshall McLuhan wrote in 1964, “Since our new electric technology is not an extension of our bodies but of our central nervous systems, we now see all technology, including language, as a means of processing experience, a means of storing and speeding information. And in such a situation all technology can plausibly be regarded as weapons” (*Understanding* 299). McLuhan has even claimed that a novel like *A Passage to India* is “a parable of Western man in the electric age, and is only incidentally related to Europe or the Orient. The ultimate conflict between sight and sound, between written and oral kinds of perception and organization of existence is upon us” (30). With much more justification, *The English Patient* can be seen as a novel about the consequences of technological change, where the meeting of the West and Orient on the ruins of Europe at the end of the Second World War raises crucial questions about the shaping effects of media on the individual, on gender, on social institutions, and ultimately, upon the state and its exercise of power.

And yet the better gloss on the ships, the printing presses, the radio, and the bomb which Singh identifies as agents of Western domination is to be found not in McLuhan but in the work of Harold Innis, his predecessor at the University of Toronto. For Innis, who had fought in the Great War, began to see after the collapse of France in 1940 that such total war was part of a deeper struggle to correct a cultural and political imbalance brought on by changes in the forms of media. “The rise of Hitler to power,” Innis argued, “was facilitated by the use of the loud speaker and the radio. By the spoken language he could appeal to minority groups and to minority

nations. Germans in Czechoslovakia could be reached by radio as could Germans in Austria. Political boundaries related to the demands of the printing industry disappeared with the new instrument of communication. The spoken language provided a new base for the exploitation of nationalism and a far more effective device for appealing to larger numbers" (*Bias* 80). By the end of *The English Patient*, it is Kirpal Singh who has adopted such pessimistic conclusions about the age of radio.

But where the fictional figure had begun in 1940 to help dismantle the material weapons of imperial aggression, Harold Innis began in that year to dismantle their theoretical matrix. "By 1945 he had completed a 1000-page manuscript on the history of communications from which he drew his startling and exploratory essays on the ways in which various technologies of communication *Biased* the cultures in which they were embedded" (Berger 187). His enabling assumption was "that the available media of communications strongly influenced the social organization, institutions, and cultural characteristics of society" (Berger 188). So, for example, rivers, one of the earliest systems of communication, helped to shape centralized civilizations. Even the difficulty of transporting clay and stone, which were the material media of cuneiform and hieroglyphics, supported centralized bureaucracies and hierarchical temple structures. Papyrus, on the other hand, together with the alphabet allowed for a diffusion of power, and for decentralized bureaucracies which greatly extended the range of political *Empire* in space. But "Innis was very conscious of the hidden and revolutionary effects of the supercession of one medium of communication by another; the loss to the Roman *Empire*, for example, of its source of supply of papyrus and the supercession of papyrus by parchment subjected that *Empire* to stress and structural change" (Patterson 33).

The reason why all such changes in the method of communication seemed revolutionary to Innis was because each medium *Biased* a culture towards time or space. "A concern with communication by the ear assumes reliance on time," whereas "the *Bias* of paper and printing has persisted in a concern with space" (*Bias* 106, 76). Thus, there is a "tendency of each medium of communication to create monopolies of knowledge" (*Empire* 141). For example, the durability of parchment, a "product of a widely scattered agricultural economy suited to the demands of a decentralized administration and to land transportation," could be effectively adapted in rural monasteries to the problem of time, contributing to "the development

of a powerful ecclesiastical organization in western Europe" (*Empire* 140, 149). And yet this same "monopoly over time stimulated competitive elements in the organization of space. The introduction of paper from China to Baghdad and to Cordova and to Italy and France contributed to the development of cursive writing and to the organization of space in relation to the vernaculars" (*Bias* 124). Subsequently, the printing press "emphasized vernaculars and divisions between states based on language without implying a concern with time" (*Bias* 76). In this century, the lasting "*Bias* of paper towards an emphasis on space and its monopolies of knowledge has been checked by the development of a new medium, the radio" (*Empire* 216).

And yet the great "disturbances which have characterized a shift from a culture dominated by one form of communication to another culture dominated by another form of communication whether in the campaigns of Alexander, the Thirty Years' War, or the wars of the present century point to the costs of cultural change" (*Bias* 141). In our era, the cost of electronic technology is most apparent in the rise of global warfare: "The Second World War became to an important extent the result of a clash between the newspaper and the radio" (*Empire* 209). Inevitably, each new medium of communication upsets a civilization's balance economically, politically, socially, and psychologically. So Innis finds it necessary to establish a new equilibrium between printed methods of communication based on the eye and electrical methods of communication based on the ear. As he concludes prophetically, "Stability which characterized certain periods in earlier civilizations is not the obvious objective of this civilization. Each civilization has its own methods of suicide" (*Bias* 141).

The news of Hiroshima in *The English Patient* offers a startling image of the explosive effect of communications in our century. As Innis put it, "The sudden extension of communication precipitated an outbreak of savagery paralleling that of printing and the religious wars of the seventeenth century, and again devastating the regions of Germany" (209). If in Kip's crystal set there is a reminder of Hitler's (and even of Pound's) use of the radio in the 1930s, it is the voice of Allied radio which explodes his faith in the values of Western civilization, justifying wars of racial conquest and of economic expansion: "Listen to the radio and smell the celebration" (285), he says of the events leading up to V-J Day. Ultimately, what "Britannia"—or Anglo-Saxon civilization—rules are the air-waves.

Similarly, the nurse who "listened as the Englishman turned the pages of

his commonplace book and read the information glued in from other books” imagines the conflict in terms of such monopolies of knowledge. The “great maps lost in the bonfires and the burning of Plato’s statue, whose marble exfoliated in the heat, the cracks across wisdom like precise reports across the valley as Poliziano stood on the grass hills smelling the future” (*English* 58), are obvious tropes for a “new interest in space” in the age of print, newly “evident in the development of the mariner’s compass and the lens. Columbus discovered the New World, Magellan proved the earth a sphere, and in astronomy the Ptolemaic system was undermined especially after the invention and improvement of the telescope” (*Bias* 128). For his part, Poliziano, the great translator of the *Iliad* into Latin, with ties to the Platonist school of Ficino and Pico and to Lorenzo’s artistic circle in Florence, was one of those who resisted the monastic Savonarola and his anti-humanism. Poliziano, better known as Politian, “wrote a great [vernacular] poem on Simonetta Vespucci . . . He made her famous with *Le Stanze per la Giostra* and then Botticelli painted scenes from it” (*English* 57). And yet such dedication to the new medium of printed paper did not immediately replace an older monopoly of knowledge over time: “And then came Savonarola’s cry out of the streets: ‘*Repentance! The deluge is coming!*’ And everything was swept away—free will, the desire to be elegant, fame, the right to worship Plato as well as Christ” (57).

In the longer historical perspective of Innis, Savonarola would only be defending a monopoly of knowledge built up in rural monasteries where parchment had for centuries been the dominant medium. But in the end, the world of Poliziano and Lorenzo would carry the day, because “Paper ‘permitted the old costly material by which thought was transmitted to be superseded by an economical substance, which was to facilitate the diffusion of the works of human intelligence’” (*Empire* 168). In 1485, “Pico and Lorenzo and Poliziano and the young Michelangelo . . . held in each hand the new world and the old world” (*English* 57), bringing together opposing epochs of manuscript and print.

Two great epochs are opposed once again in 1945, the nurse and her patient holding in each hand a fixed world of print and a world of more fluid boundaries. For the effects of electronic text now appear in the breakdown of boundaries in the commonplace book kept by *The English Patient*. And yet this expanding codex, which Almásy has “brought with him through the fire—a copy of *The Histories* by Herodotus that he has added

to, cutting and gluing in pages from other books or writing in his own observations—so they all are cradled within the text of Herodotus” (16)—also suggests a more hopeful critique of the technology of *Empire* than Singh’s final pessimism can allow. For the formal challenge to print in *The English Patient’s* fluid text adumbrates his larger challenge to social and political boundaries, whether borders are defined in terms of nation or of social institutions: “We are communal histories, communal books,” Almásy says in what are virtually his dying words. “We are not owned or monogamous in our taste or experience. All I desired was to walk upon such an earth that had no maps” (261).

Other boundary breakdowns show up as well in the novel, beginning with what is left of the ruined villa: “There seemed little demarcation between house and landscape, between damaged building and the burned and shelled remnants of the earth” (43). So, too, “In the desert,” Almásy tells his nurse, “it is easy to lose a sense of demarcation” (18). In a desert geography of no particular place, amidst a text which contains “other fragments—maps, diary entries, writings in many languages, paragraphs cut out of other books” (96)—there occurs a textual annihilation of space equivalent to cyberspace. Even *The English Patient’s* revisions to *The Histories* work, as we shall see, to revise the codex form by making us question the fixity of print. But if it seems that the book has to change in a world of electronic text, so may the self: “For many people,” as McLuhan notes, “their own ego image seems to have been typographically conditioned, so that the electric age with its return to inclusive experience threatens their idea of self” (*Understanding* 253).

For Innis, the more far-reaching disturbance in an era of rapid expansion of communications is likely to be political, leading to the overthrow of nations and even of *Empires*. And yet Ondaatje’s novel differs from *Empire and Communications* (1950) by refusing to make *Empire* its centre of reference or even to prolong imperial hegemony by seeking a balance between competing monopolies. Although Singh gives up on Europe and goes home to India at the end, the novel does not envision any limit to technological change. Where Innis had complained that in our time, “The form of mind from Plato to Kant which hallowed existence beyond change is proclaimed decadent” (*Bias* 90), Almásy’s fluid text suggests that some form of instability might be useful to stave off the threat of entropy and the collapse of civilisation. His experiment in this “new” medium would even

suggest an antidote to technological determinism. And yet how far can another medium take us in rejecting both the claims of *Empire* (stability) and of apocalypse (entropy)?

Judith Stamps reminds us that *Empire*, for Innis, was merely “an institution within civilization—one that threatened the latter’s survival because it had no awareness of its own limitations” (71). And so there is some ambivalence between his epochal view of the material reasons for imperial collapse, and his quest for a “stable compromise” (*Bias* 96) which would preserve the hegemony of the larger civilisation: “A bureaucracy built up in relation to papyrus and the alphabet was supplemented by a hierarchy built up in relation to parchment. The consequent stability was evident in the continuity of the Byzantine *Empire* to 1453” (*Bias* 117). Graeme Patterson concludes with some justice that Innis’s media theory “boiled down to a proposal for a sort of stasis in a world in which, as he himself pointed out, all things were subject to change” (Patterson 20).

This formal tendency to contain the apocalypse is evidently shared by other theorists of the era, most notably by literary modernists who make form a bulwark against apocalypse. In *The Sense of an Ending* (1967), Frank Kermode describes “the admittedly apocalyptic tenor of much radical thinking about the arts in our century” (93). But “if one wanted to understand the apocalypse of early modernism in its true complexity,” he says, “it would be Eliot . . . who would demand one’s closest attention. He was ready to rewrite the history of all that interested him in order to have past and present conform: he was a poet of apocalypse, of the last days and the renovation, the destruction of the earthly city as a chastisement of human presumption, but also of *Empire*. Tradition, a word we especially associate with this modernist, is for him the continuity of imperial deposits; hence the importance in his thought of Virgil and Dante. He saw his age as a long transition through which the elect must live, redeeming the time” (111-12). And yet, when Kermode tries to discriminate among early and later modernisms, seeking to define what we would now call postmodernism, he sees only “a nihilistic, schismatic quality” in the latter. “Each reacts to a ‘painful transitional situation,’” he writes, “but one in terms of continuity and the other in terms of schism. The common topics are transition and eschatological anxiety; but one reconstructs, the other abolishes, one recreates and the other destroys the indispensable and relevant past” (122-23).

Evidently, the poet’s desire “to have past and present conform” is shared

by the theorist himself. For Kermode's own faith in "fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and to poems" (7), is at base a faith in tradition. In the end, the continuity of tradition and formal coherence are used to convert an ending which is imminent into something which is immanent, as if the end itself were synonymous with the beginning and middle, or as if all three could be occurring simultaneously in space. Kermode none the less worries about the possibility of cultural mutation: "If what is happening" among the postmodernists "is not a continuation but a mutation, then everything I say is wholly wrong. All these talks may be so much waste paper devoted to the obsolete notion that there is a humanly needed order which we call form" (123).

In *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962), Marshall McLuhan does find evidence of such a cultural mutation, noting that "Harold Innis was the first person to hit upon the *process* of change as implicit in the *forms* of media technology," and so claiming "The present book" to be nothing more than "a footnote of explanation to his work" (50). Though Carl Berger has determined that "McLuhan's own works were less an extension of Innis's ideas than an inversion of them" (194), there are none the less several essays in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964), most notably "Roads and Paper Routes," which elaborate Innis's thesis precisely in terms of the social effects of communications technology on institutions and culture, though without any further reference to Harold Innis or his work. *Understanding Media* develops the idea that a conflict between sight and sound in various monopolies of communication has been disastrous, not only for Western societies but also for tribal cultures: "Even today the mere existence of a literate and industrial West appears quite naturally as dire aggression to nonliterate societies; just as the mere existence of the atom bomb appears as a state of universal aggression to industrial and mechanized societies" (*Understanding* 299). Such thinking would appear to underlie Almásy's fear, in the end, that what he and his fellow explorers have actually done in their work of explorations is to bring war to the desert. His whole life in the desert, he says, "has been governed by words. By rumours and legends. Charted things. Shards written down. The tact of words. In the desert to repeat something would be to fling more water into the earth. Here nuance took you a hundred miles" (231). What he has been pursuing through such nuance is the recovery of lost worlds, lost history: "All morning he and Bermann have worked in the archaeological museum

placing Arabic texts and European histories beside each other in an attempt to recognize echo, coincidence, name changes—back past Herodotus to the *Kitab al Kanuz*, where Zorzura is named after the bathing woman in a desert caravan” (*English* 153). As long as his version of *The Histories* is simply evocative of the poetry of such naming, his book is no threat to the desert; but, “When he discovered the truth to what had seemed a lie, he brought out his glue pot and pasted in a map or news clipping or used a blank space in the book to sketch men in skirts with faded unknown animals alongside them” (246). So, in the end, he has to wonder if this very quest for verification, for a cartography of history, has not brought Rommel and all the machinery of war into the desert after all: “This country—had I charted it and turned it into a place of war?” (260).

The disaster for McLuhan, as much as for Almásy, is that print has turned space into something uniform and continuous; the map does to space what the alphabet and the printed word have done to oral cultures: it “is an aggressive and imperial form that explodes outward” (*Understanding* 258). Print invariably works to explode all previous forms of social organization and modes of production, just as the phonetic alphabet first exploded the balance between the senses. But the kind of psychic dissociation of sensibility which results from the use of the phonetic alphabet has also been transformed in the age of print into a dissociation of individuals from clan and family. So Almásy, the conventional bookman in his earlier phase, compares himself to Katharine who has continued to inhabit an oral culture, reciting her “old memorized poems. She would have hated to die without a name. For her there was a line back to her ancestors that was tactile, whereas he had erased the path he had emerged from” (170). His commitment to print has evidently fostered what McLuhan calls psychic values of privacy, detachment, and objectivity. But there are still worse effects to technology than its merely psychological effects.

Print, in McLuhan’s view, has proven to be as apocalyptic as Innis had claimed; for the ultimate effect “of paper in organizing new power structures [is] not to decentralize but to centralize. A speed-up in communications always enables a central authority to extend its operations to more distant margins” (*Understanding* 96). While all “[c]entralism of organization is based on the continuous, visual, lineal structuring that arises from phonetic literacy” (*Understanding* 267), any “[s]peed-up creates what some economists refer to as a center-margin structure” (92). And so the new

centre in an age of print is defined by a concentration of paper and presses, while the political margins are structured by the homogeneity of print. "Nationalism was unknown to the Western world until the Renaissance, when *Gutenberg* made it possible to see the mother tongue in uniform dress" (192). Henceforth, great wars between nations are an inevitability, given the need to recover the balance of power lost to technological change (*Understanding* 101). But far more optimistically than Innis, McLuhan also holds out the hope that the new electronic media can challenge the visual hegemony of print, enabling the recovery of vocal, auditory, and mimetic values that have long been repressed by print, in effect rejecting the *Bias* of visual culture with its fixed point of view and promoting "the acceptance of multiple facets and planes in a single experience" (*Understanding* 247). And so McLuhan concludes that electric technology reverses the movement from centre to margin, since "Electric speech creates centers everywhere. Margins cease to exist on this planet" (92).

The difference on this point between Innis and McLuhan is the difference between a man writing in the age of radio and one writing in an age of television. Even though radio has had the power "to retribalize mankind" in an "almost instant reversal of individualism into collectivism" (263, 265), the "vernacular walls" (248) of electric speech are instantly breached through television whose video image is low in data, because the incomplete form of the image requires active response. In contrast to a film image, "The TV image requires each instant that we "close" the spaces in the mesh by a convulsive sensuous participation that is profoundly kinetic and tactile, because tactility is the interplay of the senses, rather than the isolated contact of skin and object" (272). "The mosaic form of the TV image" thus "demands participation and involvement in depth of the whole being, as does the sense of touch" (291). In sum, McLuhan finds in television a recovery of the sensory and social balance so prized by Innis: "What began as a 'Romantic reaction' towards organic wholeness may or may not have hastened the discovery of electro-magnetic waves. But certainly the electro-magnetic discoveries have recreated the simultaneous 'field' in all human affairs so that the human family now exists under conditions of a 'global village'" (*Gutenberg* 31).

On one level, we find a ruined version of this global village in the Villa San Girolamo of *The English Patient*. Here, a despairing collection of casualties from Europe, North America, and Asia are still unable to realize the hope of organic wholeness held out by the "electro-magnetic" age. Hana, the nurse

from Toronto, has decided at the end of the war to “remain with the one burned man they called ‘*The English Patient*,’ who, it was now clear to her, should never be moved because of the fragility of his limbs” (51). This “English patient,” more likely a Hungarian, is “someone who looked like a burned animal, taut and dark, a pool for her” (41). And yet, “There was something about him she wanted to learn, grow into, and hide in, where she could turn away from being an adult” (52). For a nurse, it seems, could also break, “the way a man dismantling a mine broke the second his geography exploded. The way Hana broke in Santa Chiara Hospital when an official walked down the space between a hundred beds and gave her a letter that told her of the death of her father” (41). David Caravaggio, her father’s friend, even accuses her of having “tied [her]self to a corpse for some reason” (47). A spy himself who has lost his thumbs to the Nazis, Caravaggio is “a large animal in their presence, in near ruins when he was brought in and given regular doses of morphine for the pain in his hands” (27). All three of these fragile beings are attended in their ruined villa by the Sikh sapper who, after the death of his mentor Lord Suffolk in a bomb blast in Britain, had joined a unit in the Italian campaign, and “hid there for the rest of the war” (196). None of these fragile characters is whole in either body or soul; each is a casualty of this desperate age, in this “strange time, the end of a war” (54).

And yet there is still hope in various figures of participatory media in the novel, most obviously through that “borderless” commonplace book which Almásy keeps in memory of his dead lover. Before his love affair with Katharine, the bookman had been especially preoccupied with the problem of space and the mapping of *Empire*. But after her fatal injury, he is drawn to media which are *Biased* more towards time. In the Cave of Swimmers, “He looked up to the one cave painting and stole the colours from it. The ochre went into her face, he daubed the blue around her eyes. He walked across the cave, his hands thick with red, and combed his fingers through her hair. Then all of her skin, so her knee that had poked out of the plane that first day was saffron. The pubis. Hoops of colour around her legs so she would be immune to the human. There were traditions he had discovered in Herodotus in which old warriors celebrated their loved ones by locating and holding them in whatever world made them eternal—a colourful fluid, a song, a rock drawing” (248). After her death, however, he values rock as a medium of eternity no more than he does paper as a medium

of *Empire*. By the time he reappears in the Villa San Girolamo, he has abandoned both forms of fixity and has embraced the flow of borderless text.

Essentially, what he does in converting the book from map to poem, from printed text to oral performance, is to atone for his earlier mistake in charting the desert, or erasing his past, or resisting Katherine's tribal link to her ancestors. So now he reads to an improbable gathering of "villagers" from around the globe: "Hana sits by his bed, and she travels like a squire beside him during these journeys" (135). Whether Hana's reading to him in return demands "participation and involvement in depth of the whole being," it certainly requires "public participation in creativity" (McLuhan, *Understanding* 291, 282). For many of her books are offered to him only in fragments, filled with as many gaps as the walls of the ruined villa, since Hana never refers to the chapters she has read between times in private: "So the books for the Englishman, as he listened intently or not, had gaps of plot like sections of a road washed out by storms, missing incidents as if locusts had consumed a section of tapestry, as if plaster loosened by the bombing had fallen away from a mural at night" (8). Now he must follow her as best he can, whether they are "travelling with the old wanderer in *Kim* or with Fabrizio in *The Charterhouse of Parma*" (93).

Just as significantly, many of these volumes invite a dialogic form of participation: "She pulls down the copy of *Kim* from the library shelf and, standing against the piano, begins to write into the flyleaf in its last pages.

He says the gun—the Zam-Zammah cannon—is still there outside the museum in Lahore. There were two guns, made up of metal cups and bowls taken from every Hindu household in the city—as jizya, or tax. These were melted down and made into the guns. They were used in many battles in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries against Sikhs. The other gun was lost during a battle crossing in the Chenab River—

She closes the book, climbs onto a chair and nestles the book into the high, invisible shelf" (118). Kip not only verifies for Hana the authenticity of her journey, via Kipling's pages, "through stilted doorways" where "Parma and Paris and India spread their carpets" (93); but he offers her an opportunity to write back, to update the novel since Independence, perhaps including himself in a "reversal of *Kim*," where "The young student was now Indian, the wise old teacher was English. . . . And in some way on those long nights of reading and listening, she supposed, they had prepared themselves for the young soldier, the boy grown up, who would join them.

But it was Hana who was the young boy in the story. And if Kip was anyone, he was the officer Creighton" (111).

Similarly, "She opens *The Last of the Mohicans* to the blank page at the back and begins to write in it. *There is a man named Caravaggio, a friend of my father's. I have always loved him. He is older than I am, about forty-five, I think. He is in a time of darkness, has no confidence. For some reason I am cared for by this friend of my father.* She closes the book and then walks down into the library and conceals it in one of the high shelves" (61). To her, Caravaggio seems more of a latter-day Leatherstocking, a New World hunter having to confront an ancient ruin in the trackless forest, and so to surrender his New World myths of original innocence. Now, not even Hana's singing of the "Marseillaise," which had once touched him so deeply in her childhood, can "bring all the hope of the song together." For "There was no certainty to the song anymore, the singer could only be one voice against all the mountains of power. That was the only sureness. The one voice was the single unspoiled thing" (269).

All these instances of creative participation in the novel point to more than an ethos of "organic wholeness," as McLuhan's typology would have it. For everyone in the ruined "global village" is granted access, in an era before the personal computer, to a version of hypertext in its non-linear pathways to related texts and in its projection of a third dimension behind the two-dimensional page. Now a book in *The English Patient* is no longer a book, that is to say, a bounded entity, an authored text, or even an autonomous voice; it is its own prefiguration of cybertext. Much like the book Roland Barthes envisions in "The Death of the Author," such anticipations of hypertext in Ondaatje's novel become sites where multiple meanings are collected by internal and external readers alike, all of us made collaborative authors in an expanding text. Authority is radically decentered in a "communal history" which bears the traditional name of Herodotus, and yet hides the name of its compiler (*English* 96). For who could possibly be the author of hypertext where another text always looms behind every text? Or where there is another story behind every story, as in the tales *The English Patient* tells Hana which "slip from level to level like a hawk" (4), stories of himself as Icarus fallen from the sky, or as Gyges driven by a queen to kill her husband Candaules (232)?

As *The English Patient* informs us concerning one of his quotations, "'This history of mine,' Herodotus says, 'has from the beginning sought

out the supplementary to the main argument.' What you find in him are cul-de-sacs within the sweep of history" (118-19). What in the novel seems to be "supplementary to the main argument" is the central *Bias* of electronic communications: a reinscription of some of the values of scribal culture where, as McLuhan argued, writing was still a form of rhetoric, just as all "reading was necessarily reading aloud" (*Gutenberg* 82). One could even say that McLuhan's "argument for electronic media reintroduced the rhetorician's conception of language, and of human self and society, after the three hundred years dominated by the philosophers' of Newtonian science" (Lanham 202).

For all his private pain, *The English Patient* is just as hopeful as McLuhan that a repudiation of the fixity of print and the return to more rhetorical structures of communication might create an organic society. There are nonetheless two questions which complicate such a reading of the benefits of this "total field" of electric technology. First, the reading practices of *The English Patient* remind us how different is the reception of print from the process of its production. The act of reading has always required the sort of "gestalt" formation which McLuhan took to be intrinsic to the TV image, especially when the reader has to bring to the page a whole range of sensory and imaginative codes, including the sound of words, the vast tribal encyclopedia of meanings and associations, and the transcultural panoply of literary conventions and expectations. Could a visual medium like print ever be deciphered without something like a third eye of imaginative configuration? Or could a cultural cliché of the TV viewer as a "couch potato" not prove more than a prejudice of literate culture, especially when the work of connecting electron dots seems to be the activity of a standardized culture, always more ready-made than McLuhan was prepared to see? Would the television viewer not already experience alienation, in the Marxist sense, from the flickering images produced by a cathode-ray tube?

Even a former Marxist like Jean Baudrillard would have to say yes: "With the television image—the television being the ultimate and perfect object for this new era—our own body and the whole surrounding universe become a control screen" (Baudrillard, "Ecstasy" 127). And so no distance, no detachment is possible any more. A "new form of schizophrenia" (132) results, as the television viewer feels "the absolute proximity, the total instantaneity of things, the feeling of no defense, no retreat" (133). Where

McLuhan blamed the alphabet for having created “a split man, a schizophrenic” (*Gutenberg* 22), Baudrillard blames television for the viewer’s schizophrenia: “He is now only a pure screen, a switching center for all the networks of influence” (“Ecstasy” 133). Of course, McLuhan had already anticipated the structure, if not the alienating effect, of such an interiorization of the medium: “[W]ith film you are the camera and the non-literate man cannot use his eyes like a camera. But with TV you are the screen. And TV is two-dimensional and sculptural in its tactile contours. TV is not a narrative medium, is not so much visual as audile-tactile” (*Gutenberg* 39).¹ But Baudrillard senses what McLuhan failed to see in this “organic” constellation: the loss of privacy, of distance, and even of space.

If there is anything like Innis’s threat of apocalypse in Baudrillard’s view of the media, it comes from their being “anti-mediatory and intransitive,” speaking “in such a way as *to exclude any response anywhere*” (Baudrillard, “Requiem” 169-70). In the resulting implosion of both subject and object, we reach “the end of metaphysics. The era of hyperreality now begins” (“Ecstasy” 128). Hyperreality, Baudrillard’s term for “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality” (“Simulacra” 166), is a function of cybernetic programmes where “The real is produced from miniaturized units, from matrices, memory banks and command models—and with these it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times. It no longer has to be rational, since it is no longer measured against some ideal or negative instance. It is nothing more than operational.” And since the image “bears no relation to any reality whatever,” “it is its own pure simulacrum” (“Simulacra” 167, 170). The simulacrum helps to explain the poststructural view of language, “where the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences” (Derrida 232). For there is nothing beyond language to guarantee its meaning either, just as there is nothing beyond the simulacrum save the writing of the cybernetic code.

The hyperreal image can even be seen to generate Almásy’s love affair with Katharine. As he says, “She had always wanted words, she loved them, grew up on them. Words gave her clarity, brought reason, shape. Whereas I thought words bent emotions like sticks in water” (238). Both definitions come true as the words which Katharine reads to her husband in front of Almásy begin to produce their own simulacrum: “This is a story,” Almásy admits, “of how I fell in love with a woman, who read me a specific story

from Herodotus. I heard the words she spoke across the fire, never looking up, even when she teased her husband. Perhaps she was just reading it to him. Perhaps there was no ulterior motive in the selection except for themselves. It was simply a story that had jarred her in its familiarity of situation. But a path suddenly revealed itself in real life" (233). As he confesses, "I would often open Herodotus for a clue to geography. But Katharine had done that as a window to her life" (233). And yet the story itself is hardly a map of correspondences between Clifton and Candaules, or even between Gyges and Almásy. Rather, it is the verbal model which produces this love affair out of an initial absence of attraction, the words of the story bending "emotions like sticks in water." A speaking voice works to create reality out of illusion, where *The Histories* suddenly appear to write the future.

"Illusion," Baudrillard has claimed, "is no longer possible, because the real is no longer possible" ("Simulacra" 177). In a similar vein, *The English Patient* tells his nurse that "I have seen editions of *The Histories* with a sculpted portrait on the cover. Some statue found in a French museum. But I never imagine Herodotus this way. I see him more as one of those spare men of the desert who travel from oasis to oasis, trading legends as if it is the exchange of seeds, consuming everything without suspicion, piecing together a mirage" (118-19). If the desert and history are both informed by mirage, the mirage is none the less real. So the burned airman can imagine that reality fines itself down to a flicker of firelight, to a drug-induced dream: "If the figure turns around there will be paint on his back, where he slammed in grief against the mural of trees. When the candle dies out he will be able to see this. His hand reaches out slowly and touches his book and returns to his dark chest. Nothing else moves in the room" (298). In the grip of his mourning, there is very little left in the world for *The English Patient* outside his text.

But in the stubborn continuance of the world outside the text, there is another kind of mourning as well for the loss of the real, involving a strange nostalgia of consumption. According to Baudrillard, "What society seeks through production, and overproduction, is the restoration of the real which escapes it. That is why contemporary 'material' production is itself hyperreal" ("Simulacra" 180). So television sells an image of Coca-Cola as "the real thing," and consumers strive, by consuming the hyperreal image, to make themselves "real." But in Baudrillard's worldview, the whole system of objects now belongs to the cybernetic code of the hyperreal. Only for

McLuhan is their production still firmly grounded in the material and historical processes of print culture. “[J]ust as print was the first mass-produced thing,” he writes, “so it was the first uniform and repeatable ‘commodity’” (*Gutenberg* 125). Thus our contemporary overproduction, at which Baudrillard despairs, would only be a sign for McLuhan of the loss of the organic, rather than the real.

McLuhan, in fact, contends that we have yet to grasp the message of the new medium of cybernetic production: “Today with the arrival of automation, the ultimate extension of the electro-magnetic form to the organization of production, we are trying to cope with such new organic production as if it were mechanical mass-production” (*Gutenberg* 130). His most valuable insight about our “electro-magnetic” machines might then be that they are much like organisms, and so are capable of integration into our neural circuitry. Effectively, “In McLuhan’s discourse, biology and technology merge: the impact of electronic technology is to introduce the era of *bionic beings*, part-technique/part flesh” (Kroker 112). And yet such an integration of “man” and machine also threatens the sort of “stability” which McLuhan hoped to see achieved in “the new electronic and organic age” (*Gutenberg* 275).

Conversely, the “cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism,” could work to destabilize the whole social order by revolutionizing human consciousness. At least this is the view of Donna Haraway in “A Cyborg Manifesto” (149). “It is not clear,” writes this biologist-turned-socialist-feminist, “who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machine. It is not clear what is mind and what body in machines that resolve into coding practices” (Haraway 177). And so the breakdown of boundaries between animal and human, organism and machine, and physical and non-physical states of being discredits “all claims for an organic or natural standpoint” (157). The cyborg thus offers potential liberation, since the Western alibi of power has always been identification with nature, that “plot of original unity out of which difference must be produced and enlisted in a drama of escalating domination of woman/nature” (151). “Perhaps, ironically,” Haraway concludes, “we can learn from our fusions with animals and machines how not to be Man, the embodiment of Western logos” (173).

Of course, no scientist could ignore the codes of power written into technology itself: “From one perspective, a cyborg world is about the final

imposition of a grid of control on the planet” (154). What Haraway calls “the informatics of domination” (161) in information technologies depends on “the reconceptions of machine and organism as coded texts” (152). Both the “communications sciences and modern biologies are constructed by a common move—the *translation of the world into a problem of coding*, a search for a common language in which all resistance to instrumental control disappears and all heterogeneity can be submitted to disassembly, reassembly, investment, and exchange” (164). Textualization into digital code both in cybernetics and biotechnology thus prepares the way for re-engineering, not merely of bodies and machines, but of the whole social order. “No objects, spaces, or bodies are sacred in themselves; any component can be interfaced with any other if the proper standard, the proper code, can be constructed for processing signals in a common language” (163).

By this point, it should be clear that McLuhan’s celebration of electronic media for their organic character was premature. What he identified as the homogenizing, spatializing power of print can be multiplied to infinity in the cybernetic writing of the digital code. Since the *Bias* of digital communications is toward perfect translation and control, digital logic threatens to reduce life itself to a single code. The real task, then, of Haraway’s “cyborg politics” is to recode “communication and intelligence to subvert command and control” (175): “Cyborg politics is the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism. That is why cyborg politics insist on noise and advocate pollution, rejoicing in the illegitimate fusions of animal and machine” (176). Only “[i]f we learn how to read these webs of power and social life, we might learn new couplings, new coalitions” (170).

Though Haraway and Baudrillard both take for granted McLuhan’s assumption that we interiorize our media, neither sees an end to the hegemony of writing in the new forms of communication. But where Baudrillard frets at the prospect of the human mind turning into an electronic screen, Haraway finds new “possibilities inherent in the breakdown of clean distinctions between organism and machine and similar distinctions structuring the Western self” (174). Where Baudrillard despairs at the loss of the real, of dialogue, and of public and private space, Haraway celebrates “the profusion of spaces and identities and the permeability of

boundaries in the personal body and in the body politic" (Haraway 170). Such pessimism or optimism is evidently inflected by gender as much as it is by personality or culture. For the woman who can read and write a cyborg semiology has little historical investment in saving a masculine idea of autonomous selfhood. The old metaphysics of "a unitary self" is happily swept away in a cybernetic apocalypse. To the socialist-feminist, "The issue is dispersion. The task is to survive in the diaspora" (170). And so the female cryptologist seeks in the cyborg "a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self. This is the self feminists must code" (163).

The apocalyptic function of hypertext in *The English Patient* is finally explicable in terms of such cyborg politics. For Kirpal Singh appears in the Villa San Girolamo as if he had "entered their lives . . . out of this fiction. As if the pages of Kipling had been rubbed in the night like a magic lamp" (94), producing Singh as his own simulacrum. By Kip's own logic, he is a cyborg figure, since Sikhs are "brilliant at technology. 'We have a mystical closeness . . . what is it?' 'Affinity.' 'Yes, affinity, with machines'" (272). His dramatic function as a cyborg is to decode "that knot of wires and fuzes someone has left him like a terrible letter" (76). He even turns himself into a hybrid of man and crystal radio set because "The distraction of music helped him towards clear thought, to the possible forms of structure in the mine, to the personality that had laid the city of threads and then poured wet concrete over it" (99). The cyborg semiologist further notes the link between his own body and the machine: "There is always yellow chalk scribbled on the side of bombs. Have you noticed that? Just as there was yellow chalk scribbled onto our bodies when we lined up in the Lahore courtyard" (199). He sees himself as a ticking time bomb, a man "who has grown up an outsider and so can switch allegiances, can replace loss" (271-72), but whose cyborg politics commit him to the dispersion of old identities. In his relationships with Hana, Caravaggio, and with Almásy, he eventually is prepared to disassemble and reassemble himself as a sort of postmodern collective self.

The cyborg semiologist who has reduced bombs to harmless texts nevertheless meets a technology too powerful for him to decode. He hears a "terrible event emerging out of the shortwave" in August, 1945. "A new war. The death of a civilisation" (286).² Just as Harold Innis had claimed, "Each civilization has its own methods of suicide" (*Bias* 140-41). And Kip's

response to the threat of such suicide is vintage Innis: he seeks to hallow an existence beyond change. Specifically, he retreats into his birth name of Kirpal Singh, back inside the geographical borders of the Punjab, where he can serve his own culture as a medical doctor. In such fashion, cyborg politics regresses toward a version of postcolonial politics, back inside the borders of nationalism, what Kwame Appiah calls the “nationalist project of the postcolonial national bourgeoisie” (353).

Nevertheless, Ondaatje’s novel does not renounce its own experiment with boundary breakdowns. For Almásy, whom Kip has loved much as Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* had loved his Eastern teacher as the avatar of wisdom, offers a revised version of cyborg politics and cyborg semiology. In his narrative of love and loss, Almásy admits that “He has been disassembled by her. And if she has brought him to this, what has he brought her to?” (155). No simple representative of the strain of love on identity, the true cyborg is a man who sees the need for a borderless state in love, in geography, and in politics: the desert “was a place of faith. We disappeared into landscape. Fire and sand . . . *Ain, Bir, Wadi, Foggara, Khottara, Shaduf*. I didn’t want my name against such beautiful names. Erase the family name! Erase nations! I was taught such things by the desert” (139). In the Sahara, space itself disappears: “The desert could not be claimed or owned—it was a piece of cloth carried by winds, never held down by stones, and given a hundred shifting names” (138).

The desert as a sign of flow thus shifts with every new wind of information, giving the lie to the author of *The Histories* who has tried to write his truth in stone, in words that he would like to see forever fixed: “I, *Herodotus of Halicarnassus*, set forth my history, that time may not draw the colour from what Man has brought into being, nor those great and wonderful deeds manifested by both Greeks and Barbarians . . . together with the reason they fought one another” (240). But after his loss of Katharine, the student of Herodotus gives up on his hope of permanence. The desert becomes for him a sign of flow rather than of fixity, such as may be found in electronic text, or in the shifting winds of his commonplace book:

The *harmattan* blows across the Sahara filled with red dust, dust as fire, as flour, entering and coagulating in the locks of rifles. Mariners called this red wind the “sea of darkness.” Red sand fogs out of the Sahara were deposited as far north as Cornwall and Devon, producing showers of mud so great this was also mistaken for blood. “Blood rains were widely reported in Portugal and Spain in 1901.”

There are always millions of tons of dust in the air, just as there are millions of cubes of air in the earth and more living flesh in the soil (worms, beetles, underground creatures) than there is grazing and existing on it. Herodotus records the death of various armies engulfed in the simoom who were never seen again. One nation was "so enraged by this evil wind that they declared war on it and marched out in full battle array, only to be rapidly and completely interred." (17)

Abandoning his quest to capture the history of the desert in his cartography, the bookman now becomes the equivalent of a netscape navigator: "I have always had information like a sea in me. I am a person who if left alone in someone's home walks to the bookcase, pulls down a volume and inhales it. So history enters us" (18).

Whereas the *Bias* of print is static, the *Bias* of computer text is volatile: print communicates a sense of stable interiority and privacy, hypertext a sense of dynamic oscillation between inside and outside, between private and public space. Characteristically, Hana has read "books as the only door out of her cell" (7), appearing "like Crusoe finding a drowned book that had washed up and dried itself on the shore" (12) to validate the book as the very type and origin of private space.³ Conversely, the burned aviator oscillates between a private and public self, seeking to disappear "into landscape," to do away with property and the nation-state, to develop a "cartography . . . marked by nature, not just to label ourselves on a map like the names of rich men and women on buildings" (261).

Even Almásy's mental processes are instances of networked, rather than of linear, thinking, as his mind moves through catalogues of information, slipping beneath the surface of embedded texts where further texts are stored. "Some old Arab poet's woman, whose white-dove shoulders made him describe an oasis with her name. The skin bucket spreads water over her, she wraps herself in the cloth, and the old scribe turns from her to describe Zorzura. So a man in the desert can slip into a name as if within a discovered well, and in its shadowed coolness be tempted never to leave such containment. My great desire was to remain there, among those acacias. I was walking not in a place where no one had walked before but in a place where there were sudden, brief populations over the centuries—a fourteenth-century army, a Tebu caravan, the Senussi raiders of 1915. And in between these times—nothing was there" (140-41). The reader's hyper-textual "path through such interreferentiality soon becomes totally nonlinear and, if not totally unpredictable, certainly 'chaotic'" (Lanham 94). Yet

the point of such nonlinear thinking is to oscillate between both sides of a “characteristically unstable Western self, by turns central and social, sincere and hypocritical, philosophical and rhetorical,” which “is just what electronic literacy has been busy revitalizing” (Lanham 25).

The political problem of Almásy the “international bastard” (176), however, is the fixed identity of his English lover, Katherine Clifton: “He was amazed she had loved him in spite of such qualities of anonymity in himself” (170). In the end, Katherine’s fidelity to the code of nation and society (particularly the code of monogamy) leaves her vulnerable to a suicidal husband; but she is destroyed as well by her lover’s refusal to use her proper name. After her husband has tried to kill all three of them in the desert, Almásy goes to bring the British to the rescue; but they lock him up because they cannot identify her in the ravings of the madman: “I was yelling Katherine’s name. Yelling the Gilf Kebir. Whereas the only name I should have yelled, dropped like a calling card into their hands, was Clifton’s” (251). The anonymous man can only atone for such a fatal linguistic error in the tryst he later keeps with his dead lover. He tries to fly her body out of the desert in a rotten canvas plane, buried for more than a decade in the Sahara. But plane and corpse and pilot alike are consumed by fire in mid-air. Only the fallen Icarus emerges out of the fire as another hybrid of man and machine: “I was perhaps the first one to stand up alive out of a burning machine. A man whose head was on fire. They didn’t know my name. I didn’t know their tribe” (5). In the end, he is only recognized by another cyborg man, Kip, who seduces Hana by snipping through the burned man’s hearing aid. “I’ll rewire him in the morning” (115), Kip says to the delight of the woman, but not without genuine sympathy for another cyborg.

The ultimate price the cyborg has to pay for hybridization is the border of his own skin; in Almásy’s pain, we feel the cost of achieving perfect “permeability of boundaries in the personal body and in the body politic” (Haraway 170). For, if Almásy bears witness to the identity of his dead lover, he also remains as vulnerable as a child, quite as bare as the plum his nurse “unskins. . . with her teeth, withdraw[ing] the stone and pass[ing] the flesh of the fruit into his mouth” (4). In the end, Almásy martyrs himself to a postmodern idea of a plural self, and to a post-national idea of collective identity: “We die containing a richness of lovers and tribes, tastes we have swallowed, bodies we have plunged into and swum up as if rivers of

wisdom, characters we have climbed into as if trees, fears we have hidden in as if caves. . . . We are communal histories, communal books. We are not owned or monogamous in our taste or experience. All I desired was to walk upon such an earth that had no maps" (261).

Cyborg semiology thus prepares us to decode his borderless "geomorphology. The place they had chosen to come to, to be their best selves, to be unconscious of ancestry. Here, apart from the sun compass and the odometer mileage and the book, he was alone, his own invention" (246). In such wise, the "borderless" text enables him to be his own simulacrum. In other words, a hypertext without borders authorizes the man without borders who finds it easy, in the desert, "to lose a sense of demarcation" (18). And so Almásy's cyborg politics of "communal books, communal histories" becomes his ultimate challenge to the fixity of print and to the metaphysics of Western identity.

Even Hana, who bears deep scars from the war in Europe, denies with her English patient the coherence of European identity. As she writes her stepmother back in Canada, "*I am sick of Europe, Clara. I want to come home. To your small cabin and pink rock in Georgian Bay*" (296). But Hana, who is finally deserted by her Indian lover, retreats as much as Kirpal Singh back into the traditions of her own place and culture. A woman who has "imagine[d] all of Asia through the gestures of this one man. The way he lazily moves, his quiet civilisation" (217), appears to give up on the possibility of cyborg politics. And so the new couplings and new coalitions, which had been the promise of her union with Kip, are not realized at the end of the novel. Only in the narrator's imagination do the lovers remain open to what Almásy calls "the desire of another life" (238). But, as the narrator says, "She is a woman I don't know well enough to hold in my wing, if writers have wings, to harbour for the rest of my life." And so, on opposite sides of the globe, "Hana moves, and her face turns and in a regret she lowers her hair. Her shoulder touches the edge of a cupboard and a glass dislodges. Kirpal's left hand swoops down and catches the dropped fork an inch from the floor and gently passes it into the fingers of his daughter, a wrinkle at the edge of his eyes behind his spectacles" (301-2). Though a door is left open at the end of the novel for a flow across borders and through time and space, no lasting "neural" networks have been created. The potential of "communal books, communal histories," or of "a kind of disassembled and reassembled, post-modern collective and personal self" (Haraway 163), is left to the future.

In the end, Kirpal Singh's cyborg semiology becomes postcolonial politics, rejecting the hegemony of Western thinking but failing to deal with its threat of apocalypse. For he gives up decoding the technology which could bring it about, and retreats toward an essential identity and identity politics: "American, French, I don't care. When you start bombing the brown races of the world, you're an Englishman" (286). He thus denies difference as much as any imperialist, only to reinscribe in reversed order the old binary oppositions. Hana, by contrast, tries to escape such stereotypes through an oppositional politics: as she writes to her stepmother, it is "*One day after we heard the bombs were dropped in Japan, so it feels like the end of the world. From now on I believe the personal will forever be at war with the public. If we can rationalize this we can rationalize anything*" (292). But Hana's polarization of the private and the public only stereotypes the public sphere as imperial, the private as subaltern, and so arrests the dynamic oscillation between the two. Ultimately, this gesture also reproduces the binaries of Western metaphysics without realizing the promise of "communal books, communal histories," the promise of partial and contradictory identities which died with *The English Patient*.

Though we should not forget Baudrillard's lesson about the collapse of private and public spaces in our technology, we need not be fatally determined by the *Bias* of communication, as Innis and Haraway would remind us in their differing ways. And yet it is *The English Patient* who best illuminates what McLuhan means when he writes that "The literate liberal is convinced that all real values are private, personal, individual. Such is the message of mere literacy. Yet the new electric technology pressures him towards the need for total human interdependence" (*Gutenberg* 157). Before we can negotiate the *Bias* of cyborg communications, we have to learn from the printed word both how to subvert the command and control of the engineers and how to escape the old politics of tribalism, in order to survive in a world of electronic flow. Our global future depends on it.

NOTES

- 1 The film version of *The English Patient* (Alliance, 1996) would seem to bear out McLuhan's contention that 'Film, both in its reel form and in its scenario or script form, is completely involved with book culture' (*Understanding Media* 250). For the

- film, both in its cinematography and in its dialogue, is a faithful translation of the book into a related visual medium. Here, the love affair of Almásy and Katharine Clifton is developed with an intimacy and a simultaneity that print cannot rival, where new dialogue even adds depth to the characterizations. But most unforgettable are the panoramic views in the movie of desert landscape, particularly of those scenes shot from the air, which help to illustrate the graphic connection between typography, film, and continuous, uniform space. For the ripple of sand dunes seen from the Gypsy Moth at the outset of the movie emerge in a dissolve from the opening shot of a sheet of dark, grainy paper which could be sand dunes, until a calligrapher's pen appears to trace jet-black figures across the 'sandy' landscape. At least once more in the movie, such a juxtaposition establishes the connection between text and desert, and helps to explain the coincidence in film and typography alike of a monopoly of knowledge over space. In fact, the poetry of space in this particular movie makes it startlingly clear how deep the *Bias* of the film medium, like paper before it, is towards space.
- 2 The one really crucial omission in the film is the absence of Hiroshima and its effects on Kip. But then Kip never figures in the movie as anything like a cyborg. The absence of his crystal radio set only anticipates how the movie could not end in the shadow of a mushroom cloud, since it does not share the novel's concern with the shaping effects of media upon civilization, either in war or in peace. Almásy, whose commonplace book in the movie doesn't even outgrow its original binding, never comes to repent of his fatal cartography; nor does Kip repent of his service to Western imperialism, leaving Hana and *The English Patient* only because he has been posted by the British army to continue the post-war mop up farther north of Florence.
 - 3 As McLuhan maintains, "Typographic man took readily to film just because, like books, it offers an inward world of fantasy and dreams. The film viewer sits in psychological solitude like the silent book reader" (*Understanding Media* 255). So the viewer of the film version of *The English Patient* is returned to Hana's condition of 'typographic man,' inasmuch as the movie reproduces the experience of the 'inward dream,' rather than the 'networked thinking' of hypertext. The burned aviator lying in his bed becomes the quintessence of this private man, where his recollections turn into a cinematic equivalent of interior monologue. But then 'The stream of consciousness,' as McLuhan had also noted, 'is really managed by the transfer of film technique to the printed page' (*Understanding Media* 258). In this case, it is a cinematic device which now seems to have been returned to its origins. But what the film seems to lack—and what may be impossible for the medium to reproduce—is what Almásy describes as 'information like a sea in me' (18). The only real gesture which the film makes in this direction is to dramatize *The English Patient's* extensive knowledge of popular music. The movie, in other words, seems unable to reproduce the effects of hypertext or even of Almásy's expanding commonplace book, and so recreates instead an established order of experience based on typography.

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The Laying on of Hands

He dreamed in colour
of a glacial lake pocketed between two high peaks.
Bending to sip from a feeder rivulet he was surprised
to find his dream also tasted sweet, then the scent
of wet lichen triggered his senses and sound too
of water was a kind of chime
like a brass cow-bell dragged along a path
leading up one of the mountains. His dream-hands
thrilled to cold rock and he began to climb;
she followed slowly, taking a long time.

These words are the mind's passion,
an offering, a remedy, a wish.
Some say love is not utterance but action.
The hands talk
a different intelligence;
they say
here and here and here.
It takes the language of hands
to interpret the words for a body,
it takes the sibilance of fingers,
to smooth skin, sink into sex,
the hands and the body together
conjuring bright new thoughts
amidst the being's applause.

As a child Sunday mornings he endured
the prayers of evangelists until cartoons
flickered on the screen of his brain.
In an oval frame in one corner
a woman signed litany for the deaf
with the ballet language of hands.
The word for God was beautiful.
She disappeared when the choir sang.

In a wooden hut built by climbers at the pass
they rested until the day did too,
then escaped their clothes and dipped themselves
into a single sleeping bag.
Despite desire her will forbade such
intimate dialogue and try as she may,
her mouth refused to open to his kisses
or to form words for what her body wanted to say,
as though there were some obstacle in her way.

And yet, as though the object were transparent,
she refused to give up and sought
routes around it. He lapsed into a silent mood
through which he could not reach out.
Then it was she who focused on him
and pried him open like some
box into which mysteries had been placed.
She remembered herself as kind of bird beyond this fear
as if, once, the mind was numb
and yet: as though, once, it was overcome.

Can she remember herself as a baby
holding her hands up before her gaze,
as if her
self is just
beginning to emerge
into the world of difference,
like reaching from underwater to break the surface
surprised at skin drying.
Her tiny fingers touch sunlight,
she grabs at printed daisies on a dress.
Each small fist
curls into her mouth like a good idea,
she would speak each finger
she would whisper thumbs.

Only when they closed their eyes did they begin to see,
exploring the landscape of their bodies,
learning to read the rises and clefts
of skin as a form of braille.
She saw he was afraid too, so she rose above him
and her fingertips read the ridges of his form like a cry
of pain, or rapture and she saw through him to a place
beyond his dreams: a world not a world where,
if she could leap free of her body and die,
she would be beyond all walking, and would fly.

Four lines are lifted from Rilke's poem "Going Blind" (trans. Stephen Mitchell).

“The Coded Dots of Life” Carol Shields’s Diaries and Stones

Speaking of her childhood reading, Carol Shields notes her attachment to *Anne of Green Gables*: “Anne transforms her community with her exuberant vision. She enters the story disentitled and emerges as a cherished daughter, with loving friends and a future ahead of her, and she has done it all without help: captured Gilbert Blythe, sealed her happiness, and reshuffled the values of society by a primary act of re-imagination” (“Thinking” 10). The tone and tenor of this passage celebrating a model woman’s “primary act of re-imagination” resonate with Shields’s Governor-General-Award and Pulitzer-Prize-winning *The Stone Diaries*. In this book, Daisy Goodwill Flett’s own “primary act of imagination” (76) redeems and transforms her experiences into an exuberant auto/biography, which imitates and ironizes biography and autobiography, even as it re-views the values of society and their impact upon her.

The Stone Diaries is, however, a novel of contemporary sensibility, and Daisy’s role is much more complicated than Anne’s. She does transform and shape her experiences, but she is also transformed and shaped by them. She finds voice(s) with which to speak, but is simultaneously spoken by others, leading to the conclusion that the site of language and body is both her own and forever mediated by others. This book explores the characters’ longing for self-definition and control of their lives and narratives, concluding that the subject is the site of contradictory impulses and multi-vocalic utterances, which are always-already never our own—but which, Shields maintains, the imagination can seize and reshape.

Although in an interview Shields argues that *The Stone Diaries* is Daisy Goodwill Flett's fantasy of "what other people imagined about her" (Shields, Web Interview), this character exists partly as a narrative centre, and partly as a nexus of events and language: mediated by others through "the socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures and the socially structured situation," i.e., "habitus" (Bourdieu *Outline* 6), she is hardly more than an absence herself. This absence is, however, part of an important conceptual and thematic relationship between instability and stability, indeterminacy and pattern, "fate and choice" (Poole 20), relationships that bear the strong imprint of chaos theory. The diaries and stones announced in the title of Shields's book serve as figures for the main character's self-construction and her construction by others and for their "chaotic" implications. In this essay I will use the diaries to explore Daisy as the nexus of a system of dispositions and her own agency, as well as others' and her own narratives, and the figure of the stones to investigate the continuing and problematic role of her parents in constructing and maintaining this habitus. The use of the diaries and stones, explored through chaos theory and the social constructivism of Pierre Bourdieu, leads to my conclusion that the book's central operating hypothesis is that our lives are self-formed *and* the product of habitus, indeterminate *and* determinate, and random *and* patterned in strange and wonderful combinations.

i. The diaries: the mediated body, nexus, and mosaic narration

Although Shields's main character Daisy faithfully fulfilled the traditional duties of daughter, wife, mother, and friend, her language and voice—her diary—and those of others redefine that adherence to convention. In a way, Daisy is the paradigm of the traditional author/subject, searching for coherency and meaning within and outside society, while other voices with their varying "range of tones" (Weil 174) problematize that perception, suggesting that meaning is constituted beyond the reaches of the individual subject. Shields's language and, especially, her multiple and even contradictory narrators and narrations, undermine the "wholeness" of societal, auto/biographical, and novelistic conventions, asserting that the subjectification of identity and text is complicated and implicated.

A "genial," "clever," and "obedient" woman (59), Daisy presents herself as the near-perfect, twentieth-century, *Good-Housekeeping* embodiment of the upwardly mobile daughter, wife, mother, and friend. She had a rela-

tively good life and to outward appearances was the model of stability, predictability, and “wholeness.” Born in 1905 to a stone cutter who later became a stone carver and quarry owner, married in 1935 to an Ottawa civil servant, she was offered a position as a part-time gardening columnist after the death of her husband in 1955, only to lose that position in 1964. Sometime between 1965 and 1977 she moved to Florida where she may have died in the 90’s. As a young girl, she tended to the needs of her father, as a wife to her much older husband Barker Flett (perhaps another version of a father), as a mother to her three children, as an aunt to her niece who raises an illegitimate daughter in Daisy’s household, and as a friend to her pals from childhood days. Even in her 80’s after a coronary by-pass, kidney operation, and smashed knees, her unfailing courtesy and “persevering strictures of social discourse” (314) remained intact. These were her familial and societal obligations, and Daisy fulfilled them completely—or so she would have us believe; she lived what Richard Ford in his own fiction has called a “perfect, crystallized life” (202). Indeed, her daughter Alice claimed that Daisy’s life was more crystallized than most, for “being a young wife to an older husband . . . kept her girlish, made her a kind of tenant in the tower of girlhood. There she remained, safe, looked after” (235-36), the equivalent of a fairy-tale princess locked in a tower. In an interview, Carol Shields expresses the opinion that this crystallized life characterized a whole generation of North American women whose lives have been nearly forgotten (Web Interview).

In terms of system and stability theory, Daisy’s well regulated life, her orderly system, involves a pattern of expectation for women, proceeding in the same linear direction:

birth → school → college → marriage → family → part-time job → retirement → death.

This systematic and predictable progression may be called a fixed-point attractor, characterized by stable motion, repeatable pattern, and identical recursions. In terms of human behavior such patterning suggests a preference for stability and routine and a disposition against adventure and imagination. It also suggests that, in a regular way, small causes will have minor effects and large causes will have major effects. Such a view is positioned on balance and order.

In terms of chaos theory, an area of curiosity and knowledge for Shields herself (Web Interview), this appearance of stability is deceiving, for

around and within it exist various manifestations of instability. Indeed *The Stone Diaries* itself suggests that beneath this crystallized life are ungovernable beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, and feelings—things that those around Daisy “can only register and weigh and speculate about” (230)—because her identity was not fixed and her self not “carved on entablature” (231). The book’s view resembles that of various scientists of chaotic activity who argue that order is an inherent part of a dynamic process which also contains disorder, and that the symmetrical, orderly “world of almost Platonic purity” (Briggs and Peat 14) defined by traditional science does not, in fact, exist apart from turbulence, irregularity, randomness, unpredictability, and asymmetry. Rather than patterns defined by orderly movement (attractors), there are curious and unpredictable patterns formed by random and asymmetrical processes caused by some kind of extreme turbulence (strange attractors). Such turbulence often takes the form of bifurcation (as when water rushes around a large rock), which is a fragmenting and dispersing of the previously unified flow into stable and unstable forces, in which the resulting dynamics are much greater than the initial cause. Many scientists and social philosophers now accept the validity of this assumption, but they value it differently: for instance, Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers argue that *order arises from chaos*; Benoit B. Mandelbrot asserts that *order is inherent in chaos*; and M. Mitchell Waldrop, contrary to both, believes that *chaos arises from order*. Although these views are mainly ascribed to the fields of science and mathematics, they have significance for the construction of identity and narrative, as James Gleick and N. Katherine Hayles have demonstrated. In both identity and narrative, the notion of a transparent, essentialized, centred self or text is surrendered to an indeterminate, non-linear one of opacity, dispersion, gaps, and boundaries.

In many respects, Daisy herself bears out the implication of the strange combination of order and disorder, symmetry and asymmetry, the rational and the mysterious. Shields highlights this lack of a consistent and unitary persona by omitting Daisy from the gallery in the middle of this fictive chronicle that presents purportedly authentic photographs of the central family residence as well as family members and acquaintances. Daisy, who dominated the book from beginning to end, from her birth to death—is nowhere to be found in any picture. Although Shields claims playful post-modernity (Parini 3) in inserting the pictures drawn from museums and

galleries (the older pictures) and her own family (the more recent pictures) to give the book a biographical cast (Thomas 59), the fact remains that Daisy is absent, “blinded, throttled, erased from the record of her own existence” (76). She is further almost hidden from view in the genealogical tree at the front of the book. If Daisy cannot be found in the pictures and only barely traced in the genealogical tables, neither at the end can she be found under the stone chiseled beside her husband’s. Nor in this book in which every significant event has a date, is the day and year of her death actually revealed. Finally, even the name Daisy may be arbitrary for it was not a name bestowed by her parents, but rather one her foster mother Clarentine had “taken to calling her” (49).

These are significant omissions and gaps, making the reader wonder who and what Daisy really was, apart from her social context and network of relations. “Her life,” as the introductory poem intimates, “could be called a monument,” but it is more accurately an “assemblage of dark voids and unbridgeable gaps” (76), an abundance of elusive words that circle her life and trace its boundaries. Daisy is like the evanescent, insubstantial “arc of a rainbow [which] cannot be touched; its dimensions are not measurable, and its colors fade even as they are apprehended” (57).

The lack of Daisy’s picture in the gallery of *The Stone Diaries* is the same absence that haunts this work filled to the brim with lyrical prose and personal ruminations, for, of all that we come to know about Daisy, we never understand precisely who she is and what she thinks about many issues. As in any other diary or autobiography, more of the subject is hidden than exposed and is likely “full of systemic error, of holes that connect like a tangle of underground streams” (196).¹ The holes in the narrative remind the reader that “human beings are defined as much by the things that don’t happen to them as by the things that do” (Summers 45) and that, in the Derridean sense, excess impoverishes. The excess of narrative—Daisy’s account of her own life and other voices and narratives (diaries) as well—tends to reduce the subject as a meaningful presence.

These unbounded narratives are like a chorus of socially dialogized voices that play against each other, but that also show links and interrelationships (Bakhtin *Dialogic* 263). Daisy’s is the organizing and foremost voice, but it is not consistent, nor is it the dominant one—in fact, this chorus arguably has no dominant voice. These multivocalic, polyphonic, and heteroglossic voices include Daisy herself from a young girl to an old

woman, her mother and foster mother, her children and grandchildren, her extended family, and her close friends. The diaries also include occasional speeches, letters, invitations, announcements, lists, recipes, and poems that cast some light on Daisy and her changing attitudes and circumstances. These are the multiple mediators that contribute to the understanding—or the illusion of understanding because Daisy invents or edits them, too—of Daisy and establish her place, and theirs, within the social and cultural matrix of the institutional and community framework. In fact, these are the threads of the narrative that Daisy constructs to give herself identity; indeed, narrative is all we have of her identity—and by extension anyone else—for in certain respects we are all constructed by narrative. Daisy's autobiographical account was, for her, constructed to give perspective and pattern to her life, but for her family and acquaintances she is an "indeterminate site" (Bourdieu *Field* 43) or text which they will continue to gloss in the hope of arriving at a knowledge of her and themselves. For the reader she is the nexus of all the narratives and events. This method accomplishes something very important: it undoes traditional, logical, linear narrative form, presenting a plethora of voices that simultaneously subvert personal and narrative consistency and any notion of a unitary person, text, or history of narrative autobiographic form. In more conventional autobiographical narratives, the first-person or sometimes third-person narrator provides a sense of coherent design and structure, whereas here the eruptive narrative of many voices undermines coherent identity. In terms of chaos theory, linearity and overt coherence give way to non-linearity and lack of obvious coherence.

Multivocality and multiplicity are important means of breaking down the solipsistic centredness of an individual, familial, or communal vision. When interrogating one kind of centre—Daisy's socially gendered position—the multivocal narrative disrupts all similar centres, even as it breaks down the conventional narrative structures used to speak of and support those societal positions. Shields accomplishes this task not only by moving from one first-person, one-directional voice to another, but from first-person to third-person narration as well; the book also sometimes moves from past to present, following the arrow of time, but at other times, especially when multi-personed and non-linear, it will move backwards in time. The book opens with Daisy as the narrator—in a modified traditional diary form—giving an imaginative account of her own birth and her mother's

simultaneous death, and the book ends with Daisy's real or imagined death and the family's discovery of some of her buried past. In between, the treatment is not all of a piece by Daisy, and it is not directly chronological because the narrative weaves around the lives of the various characters, conveying a sense of simultaneous discontinuity and continuity and of "segments of time . . . untied to any other time" (11). As chaos theory reminds us, the linearity of life and narrative is often thought of as consistent and in a straight line ("the name 'linear' refers to the fact that if you plot such an equation on graph paper, the plot is a straight line" [Waldrop 64]), but both may be regarded in completely different ways. As M. Mitchell Waldrop points out, the brain is not linear, and, as writers know, most classical works follow some method of plot triangulation (cf. Freitag's triangle), and many modern works are much more curvy, cyclical, and open-ended. Indeed, "virtually everything and everybody in the world is caught up in a vast, nonlinear web of incentives and constraints and connections. The slightest change in one place causes tremors everywhere else" (Waldrop 65).

Daisy's own voice is extremely important to this non-linear narrative and herself because she does not want her views lost or her voice deafened by interpretation that "marches ahead of her. Announces her. Declares and cancels her true self" (122). At the tender age of eleven she decided that her life would have to be held together by a "primary act of imagination" (76), which would consist of the real, outrageous, false, and exaggerated. As with the remainder of the voices, hers is, then, neither constant nor consistent, and an omniscient narrator, perhaps Daisy herself in another guise, reinforces this position, noting her "blend of distortion and omission, its willfulness, in fact" (283). These reservations about personal observation, commentary, and story make us aware of the ways everyone distorts experience and, hence, the need to hear the views of others who can fill in the gaps and add different perspectives, but it also paradoxically makes us trust Daisy's comments more because of her candor, self-effacement and "talent for self-obliteration" (124).

Even when the narrative voice is predominantly Daisy's, it is heteroglossic, changing from occasion to occasion and inflected by knowledge that she cannot realistically have. For example, her narrative is sometimes assisted by obscure narrator agents who peek into the fiction, revealing details closed to her. In Daisy's opening account of her birth and her

mother's unfortunate death, the narrative reveals much about her mother's and father's intimate thoughts, observations, and even sexual relations, often in a voice that sounds vaguely archaic, an inflected voice that could not be very different from Daisy's mother's. This may be Daisy's imaginative re-creation of her mother, but the language is undoubtedly not what she herself would use, even if her father revealed to her everything he knew and she repeated it in his voice. Nor does the account only give voice to "legend along with facts," as Shields would have us believe (Web Interview). It is almost surely, in part, the voice of Mercy Stone Goodwill, Daisy's mother. This especially knowledgeable first-person voice is layered on top of, and mingles with, Daisy's more restricted and limited first-person voice, giving a sense of interior knowledge and complexity that goes beyond ordinary physical, historical, and linear boundaries, beyond the usual "pure" first-person narrative forms. The narrative repeats this technique in the pages immediately following the conflating of Mercy's and Daisy's voices when that of Clarentine Flett blends with Daisy's, providing a certain view of Mercy, and still later when Abram Gozhdë Skutari, the Jewish peddler who discovered Mercy collapsing and giving birth to Daisy, reflects on that moment of life and death. The final voice—a narrative aside—that blends with Daisy's might be that of an unidentified grandchild (329).

These penetrative first-person omnisciences suggest that bodies dissolve into language and that the voices and experiences of the past are embedded within the present, creating an historical mosaic. This is not Bakhtin's chronotope, which removes devices, functions, and motifs from temporality and contextuality (Holquist *Dialogism* 109-113), but an intertemporality that shows the non-linear penetration of one period or event by another. Indeed, I would like to call this technique "mosaic narrative," in which first- and third-person voices from the past and present blend to create a sense of continuity and presence coupled with discontinuity and absence.

In intertemporal mosaic narration, the past and present bear remarkable affinity, and, as one of her children said after Daisy's supposed death, "the past is never past" (352).² Of relevance in understanding this phenomenon are Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas of language acquisition and Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of "dispositions" and "habitus." According to Bakhtin (Volosinov), children acquire from their parents and community not only language but a method of organization and a way to think (*Marxism* 11-13).

In Bourdieu's formulation, each of us picks up in an unconscious fashion certain attitudes, conceptual models, and sensitivities to cultural structures and ways of negotiating them. This habitus is

a 'feel for the game', a 'practical sense' (*sens pratique*) that inclines agents to act and react in specific situations in a manner that is not always calculated and that is not simply a question of conscious obedience to rules. Rather, it is a set of dispositions which generates practices and perceptions. The habitus is the result of a long process of inculcation, beginning in early childhood, which becomes a 'second sense' or a second nature. (Bourdieu *Field 5*)

There is, of course, room for individual agency, but habitus suggests a multi-generational structure in which structures and ideas are continually reproduced. Daisy's archaic narrative voice at once conveys the flavor of the speech of Mercy Stone Goodwill and Clarentine Flett and suggests the very imprint of their being, their "system of dispositions" and habitus, on her. (I will turn to this aspect more fully in the second section.) Despite their belief that, as orphans, Daisy and her mother had no "coherent history," their "dispositions" would have been part of the general society, but the lack of at least one parent gave them a sense of difference and existential dis-ease; it allowed them to experience a "disenchantment" with the prevailing doxa (Bourdieu *Outline*), a disenchantment fostered and underscored by non-linearity and multivocality.

The multiplicitous secondary observers add an elaborated view of these social dispositions. In some cases Daisy reveals herself to these commentators, and they react to those observations. In other cases, she is a symptom, and others try to diagnose her origin, meaning, and cure. These polyphonic voices suggest that Daisy's personal life was part of a generally recognized social phenomenon in a certain class at a certain time, and that her personal life was constrained by these systems of dispositions. They also reveal that she sometimes eluded those constraints. These voices try to decode her acts and language, but part of Daisy remains aloof, mysterious, and ultimately separate because systems of dispositions are always-already heteroglossic.

This attempt to locate Daisy, decode her voice, and define her resistances is nowhere more evident than in the recounting of her black, lengthy melancholic despair following her sacking. Up to that time she had a sense of purpose, community, and responsibility, whether of family or profession. Those around her expressed their concern and analysis in this narrative partly as a response to each other—not that they were present in each

other's company, but that one presented a viewpoint and another dismantled or augmented it. This dialogic, effective only if the reader disregards fidelity to time and place, suggests how family and friends project onto Daisy their own justifications, choices, shortcomings, solutions, and self-definitions, revealing more about themselves than about Daisy—adding still another dimension to the richness of this narrative. Perhaps none of these is right—not even Daisy in the guise of the omniscient narrator who interposes at the last moment—or perhaps all of them are right in a limited fashion. From these differing accounts, it is obvious that the narratives cross over and intersect with one another in a non-linear manner, and that they fail to locate the “real” Daisy. She remains elusive and “virtual,” the nexus of non-essentialized narratives.

Two other voices from her distant past are included with the others because they prophesied her emotional crisis, add to the non-linearity and multivocality, and reinforce the mosaic narration. Cora-Mae Milltown, the Goodwill nanny from Bloomington, saw when Daisy was little that she would have a “dark place” in her future because she had no mother to raise her, and the peddler Abram Skutari sensed the newly-born child’s “loneliness of an extreme and incurable variety” (260). The omniscient narrator has the final say in this chorus, announcing that the sorrow Daisy hears and feels “may just be the sound of her own soul thrashing. It sings along the seams of other hurts, especially the old unmediated terror of abandonment” (262). These latter three voices in the mosaic narrative reinforce Daisy as a nexus lacking “presence.”

It is this sense of existing in a void and belonging to no one which Carol Shields uncovers in the life of Daisy and which she places side by side with the more orderly, though heteroglossic, systems of dispositions and the sense that Daisy and others like her belong to everyone: given adequate means of support and surrounded by accepting family, Daisy nevertheless discovered that she had no centre, that she was indeed all absence and boundaries. Despite her crystallized past, despite her orderly system of dispositions, habitat, and cultural structures, she remained a spiritual orphan in an existential void, a suffering wanderer and an unanchored vessel, a random particle. At eleven years of age she sensed this vacuum and developed a deep anxiety because she lacked “the kernel of authenticity” (75). Later, the presence of family members disguised some of that emptiness, but the truth of it persisted, and she longed “to bring symmetry” to the too-

evident “discordant elements” of her life. At sixty her sense of helplessness and loneliness took over, offering little more than despair: “In the void she finds connection, and in the connection another void—a pattern of infinite regress which is heartbreaking to think of—and yet it pushes her forward, it keeps her alive” (281). In a sense, it is not logical that at eleven and sixty she should suffer such distress. In the way of chaotic phenomena, however, a small cause can create large-scale, catastrophic effects. Daisy’s deep despair is one such effect and related to that is her decision in each case to follow another course. Her sickness as an adolescent and her job loss as an adult become points of bifurcation altering the symmetry of her life and creating the need for new decisions and insights, arguably resulting in the development of heightened imagination and the narrative account of her life.

The connections and voids must, then, be balanced against her imaginative *tour de force* of confronting and embracing loneliness, of choosing “to lie alone in death” (347), far from her husband and his headstone. These expressions of absence, loneliness, and lack must be placed alongside her ability to keep moving and her imaginative re-creation of events, perceptions, and emotions, which, taken together, create loosely symmetrical patterns, and sense of order coming out of chaos. It was during the depression of her early confinement for measles and pneumonia and much later sacking that she most fully recognized and articulated the need for the primary act of imagination. Indeed, Shields suggests that only through isolation and existential despair can imagination and transcendence take shape (Smyth 140-41).

In a sense her decision to lie alone in death is a major cusp in the narrative and her life because as death loomed she accepted the inevitability of loneliness and absence—what she had ignored, struggled against, or held at bay. If she does not exactly celebrate loneliness, she at least accepts it as her lot, and perhaps that of many other women in her generation, for this is a text about the impossibility of securing full identity and place. Daisy’s void *and* the imaginative act of affirmation, her sense of isolation *and* the multitude of inquisitive and even comforting voices which surround her in these diaries—these give a sense of life being simultaneously lonely *and* companionable, empty *and* full, disconnected *and* connected, symmetrical *and* asymmetrical.

It is an understanding that others across the generations have shared, for Daisy, although not an average woman of average sensibilities, philosophically portrays the state of human kind. In the moments before Daisy’s

birth, her foster mother Clarentine Flett anticipated this, as well. She attributed her own malaise to “loneliness, not the unhappiness of life itself” and believed that she and Mercy were “alone in the world, two solitary souls, side by side in their separate houses, locked up with the same circle of anxious hunger” and encircled by a “ring of disability” (18-19). Mercy, Clarentine, and Daisy are unified in their loneliness and bound by their separateness.

The totality of the narratives or diaries evaluates life and finds that it is indeed lonely and random, even in the midst of companionship and family support, and yet strangely full and whole, in the midst of aloneness. The events of everyday life and those special moments of happiness and sadness are important, but there are intimacies and feelings that cannot be wholly shared, except ironically in this case by the reader. Despite the habitus or system of dispositions that she is born into, and despite the heteroglossic voices that constitute this system, Daisy comes into and exits from the world an orphan. Her *raison d'être* is never definitively located, but, as the key figure in Carol Shields's novel, she represents our longing for wholeness, coherency, and meaning and our worst fears of loneliness, fragmentation, provisionality. Shields's very techniques of story-telling create and sustain this dilemma: heteroglossic and intertemporal mosaic narrative emphasizes both Daisy's place within systems of dispositions (her objectivity) and her intensely personal loneliness and agency (her subjectivity), both the continuity and importance of her social function and her very real psychological and spiritual isolation and resistance, both the orderly and disorderly in life. This mosaic narrative mediates Daisy's body, decentralizing her, others like her, and this text in radically innovative ways, even while it suggests that this, too, is part of a temporal continuum, which is rescued and mediated by acts of primary imagination.

ii. A woman of tapestry stone

If the diaries do not suggest that Daisy Goodwill Flett is a subjectivized “presence” and object of order, neither do the stones. The complex, multi-vocal, heteroglossic narratives of *The Stone Diaries* are not enduring monuments “written in stone,” and the various stones, these other “coded dots of life” (301), likewise reveal inconsistency, unpredictability, and indeterminacy amidst suggestions of pattern. Daisy is strongly identified with stone throughout her life, especially in her early years, though her later

years are equally identified with stone.³ Leona Gom argues that stone is “the dominant image/symbol/themes running through the novel” (22). Indeed, there are so many allusions to stones within the book that they are like the heteroglossic voices of the diaries; multi-lapiscanery, they also fail to “locate” Daisy or create a single monument to her. On the surface, stones have a solidity that does not characterize diaries which are never “cast in stone,” either figuratively or realistically, and which are always personal and provisional, often not meant for public dissemination and not necessarily standing for, or representing, public positions. But, the use of stone and diary together is deliberately ambiguous, standing in certain respects for the appearance of solidity and general continuity but only in relation to contingency and randomness. Neither the diaries nor the stones affirm traditional notions of identity, order, and textuality, but neither do they wholly confirm their opposites.

Although Daisy ultimately chose a headstone inscription that reflected her own agency and not that of others, the stones most intimately connected with her identity are associated with her father and mother and together reinforce the relationship of pattern to indeterminacy and habitus to self-formation observed in the mosaic narratives. Stone represents the origins of her existence, the force of her birthplace, the premature death of her mother and foster mother, her father’s economic, social, and cultural impact upon her life, her ability to mediate and structure her own experience through language, and even the persistence of customs, habits, and attitudes from her adolescent years in Winnipeg and Bloomington.

In her teenage years and much of her adult public life, Daisy shared her father’s view of stone as supportive of a good life and representative of stability, endurance, and even transcendental beauty. His is an almost Emersonian view of stone as useful commodity, vehicle for art, symbol of a quest for self-discovery, and sign of a more universal pattern. By contrast, in her very early years and those preceding her death, Daisy identified with the stones related to her mother and foster mother. These are neither hard, stable, nor transcendently inscribed, but associated with the arbitrariness, lack, absence, instability, and impermanence which exert an influence on Daisy’s subconscious and unconscious life. The exterior of her life is very like that of her father’s stones—stable and patterned, but her interior life takes its problematic and meaning from her mother’s.⁴

Of these possibilities, the stones of Daisy’s father are more-or-less related

to continuity and stability. For his brief time with Daisy's mother, they put food on their table and quite literally held Mercy's food preparations in place. The stones Cuyler removed from the Tyndall and Bloomington quarries gave him a good livelihood and served as the polished and carved building material for many fine churches, banks, insurance company offices, law courts, and college buildings. In this respect, stone is strongly identified with the idea of progress and the underlying ideals of the American dream, denoting the ability to come from poor origins and become wealthy. Furthermore, the stone suggests national progress, for the limestone used in Winnipeg went into fine business and civic buildings, and in Bloomington for similar public and private edifices. Stone, then, served as a means to establish Cuyler personally and stands as a symbol of rising North American prosperity. In this sense, Daisy's description of stone implies economic solidity and immutability, an indication of certainty in her father's career and her adolescent development and a representation of a certain kind of endurance and continuity.

Cuyler also believed that the uniquely centred Tyndall tapestry stone or the variable but uniform Indiana stone could be grasped by the imagination and turned into beautiful, transcendent art. Stone, then, was not only utilitarian in providing a good, systematic, orderly living for Cuyler and Daisy, but also in serving as the material for artistic production. It stimulated Cuyler's imagination, which Daisy reproduced on some psychological and personal level, certainly in her garden where she turned stones and dirt into glowing beds of colour—beautifully patterned and artistic but ultimately impermanent⁵—and also in her imaginative, autobiographical reconstruction of her life. Daisy initially seemed to accept her father's belief in the stability and basic orderliness of life and the force of economic and cultural symbolic practices, but these precepts were tempered, and perhaps even superseded, by the impermanence, disorderliness, and unpredictability represented by the stones associated with her real and foster mothers.

There is certainly a self-perpetuated illusion about Daisy's conception of an orderly childhood marked by the presence of stones, for her construction of events is based on selective memory, and the narrative interrogates her and Cuyler's representation of stability and authenticity. Their optimistic accounts must also be weighed against the deaths of Daisy's real and surrogate mothers and her first husband as well as the various dislocations she endured in moving from place to place in Canada and the United

States. Daisy's impression of that endurance, permanence, and pattern is further problematized by the very composition of limestone itself. The stone that Cuyler quarried in Stonewall, Manitoba was known for its surprising images: "Some folks call it tapestry stone, and they prize, especially, its random fossils: gastropods, brachiopods, trilobites, corals and snails. . ." (25). These images in the stone suggest a rare kind of beauty, though their "tapestry" means that they are inherently ambiguous and, as we shall discuss more fully later, in the words of complexity theory, chaotic.

The artistic function of tapestry stones and Cuyler's attempt at permanence are also highlighted and problematized in his monumental tower in honour of Daisy's mother. He decided to build the tower when carrying a single stone to mark her grave: he saw a magnificent rainbow that seemed "made of glass or a kind of translucent marble, material that is hard, purposeful, pressing, and directed. Directed at him, for him . . . Solid and perfect, and through its clean gateway shines a radiant slice of paradise" (57). The conjunction of rainbow and stone is most ironic, for, while a rainbow is evanescent, Cuyler viewed it as "solid," even as he saw the stone itself as "hard, purposeful, pressing, and directed." Cuyler's hopes, then, to build an enduring tower with carved images on the stones, "elaborate ciphers" that would "reflect the capriciousness of the revealed world" (64), is more ambiguous and self-contradictory than he realized. In his mind, the "capriciousness" was not the on-going fickleness and indeterminacy of the revealed world so much as the variety of possibilities for carving, and he formulated a theory of craftsmanship and art based upon the understanding that "every piece of stone in the world has its own center with something imprisoned in it" (90). For Cuyler, this was not vaguely spiritual but explicit in unifying materiality and spirit: he believed "that the earth's rough minerals [were] the signature of the spiritual, and as such could be assembled and shaped into praise and affirmation" (63). Daisy, however, reveals that even as Cuyler was leaving this part of Manitoba for Indiana, the youth of the community were clambering over the stones, defacing some and carrying others away. Between vandalism and weathering, the tower did not even survive his life, and points to the impermanence of stone.

The most important key to the figure of the stones, their instability, and relationship to identity and the network of narratives is, I would argue, Daisy's relationship to her mother and the significance of her mother's name: Mercy Stone. It is Mercy's last few hours in life which opens the

book: her preparation for a meal with her husband, the ingredients of the recipe for Malvern pudding that she was using, her relationship with her husband and neighbor, and the “accidental” birth of Daisy. It is Daisy’s last days which close the book: her loss of life—if not selfhood; the ingredients to a recipe for lemon pudding that lingers on after her death; her relationship with her children and the staff of the hospital; and her belief that, in turning into stone, she becomes one with her mother. (Perhaps, ironically, she also came closer to resembling the shape of her mother in later years.) While different in certain important ways, the beginning and the conclusion of the book are highly reflective of one another and reinforce the mother’s lasting influence upon the daughter—whether or not Daisy was aware of this power. In her dying moments—or her imagined projection of them—she consciously recognized this affinity, equating herself with her mother and the stone effigies. The tragedy of isolation, orphanhood, and worthlessness that Daisy sometimes felt was somewhat dispelled and dissipated when she saw herself as a stone resembling her mother:

Stone is how she finally sees herself, her living cells replaced by the insentience of mineral deposition. It’s easy enough to let it claim her. She lies, in her last dreams, flat on her back on a thick slab, as hugely imposing as the bishops and saints she had seen years earlier in the great pink cathedral of Kirkwall, . . . and feels herself merge with, and become, finally, the still body of her dead mother. (358-59)

This expression of unity with her mother is singularly powerful, for Daisy uttered it in her final days when she had a highly developed sense of agency and narrative.

Given Daisy’s recognition of her unity with her mother, it is perhaps ironic that Daisy became interested in her father-in-law’s past, but never really investigated her mother’s. There are undoubtedly many compelling reasons for this omission, one being the fact that Mercy was an orphan and arbitrarily given the name of Stone, as were all the orphaned children of unwed mothers in Stonewall. Another possibility is that the search for her father-in-law is really, as Victoria believed, a displacement of the need for her mother. The most important reason she did not attempt to explore her mother’s background may be that Mercy Stone dwelt inside her in a way which she only inchoately recognized, but nevertheless experienced.

This latter possibility implies that one generation enters another, especially that a mother continues to exert a powerful and compelling influence

upon the life of her children—whether or not they are consciously aware of it or want it. Despite being orphaned and lacking her mother’s “presence” and despite her ache of loneliness and lack of authenticity, Daisy experienced her “felt absence,” which could not be discounted, diminished, or dismissed. Daisy, too, would likely continue to exert this same influence and pressure upon her children and account for attitudes and responses within their lives, becoming a felt or present absence around which they would trace the boundaries of their lives. Mercy and Daisy together demonstrate how mothers become located in their children as a kind of nexus of narratives, remembrances, and possibilities,⁶ how they become symbols of order and continuity in the midst of chaos and disorder. Paradoxically, it is through the symbol of the absent mother that Shields most fully expresses a persistent order, and through the symbol of the present father that she dismisses an inadequate construction of order.

iii. Conclusion: the complex relationship of chaos and order

The paradoxical relationship between the legacy of father and mother, need for pattern amid random thoughts and events, interplay of habitus and agency, and master narrative and multivocality underscores the indeterminacy and unpredictability which mark the words of Daisy as opposed to her socially conforming actions. Despite her family’s belief that Daisy lived a simple, patterned existence with little consciousness, her life was more thoughtful, surprising, and unpredictable than they imagined, but also more informed by the imprint of her father, mother, and social environment. They assumed that Daisy was “pure granite” (356), solid and heavy, but her life was clearly as random, unpredictable, and yet beautifully patterned as tapestry stone.⁷ These tapestry stones that Cuyler admired so much in Manitoba have fossils unpredictably embedded in them and suggest artistic patterns to random events. They are the very stones that lay “gleaming whitely just inches beneath the floorboards” of Daisy’s birth spot (40), and which added real and symbolic value to her life. The unpredictability and haunting beauty of such stones and fossils also characterized the stony promontories and plains of the Orkney Islands where Daisy felt especially happy and where Daisy’s father-in-law had settled. There she sensed the fragility of the pastoral beauty of the landscape, which disguised “a thin covering over beds of layered rock. Rock is what these islands are made of, light shelly limestone, readily split into flakes and flags . . .” (298).

These fossils and their green mantle of grass revealed the quirks and beauty of the biological process, though they would “always frustrate the attempt of specialists to systematize and regulate; the variables are too many” (293). Even the sense of history articulated by the building stones on Orkney reiterate this strange union of chaos and order. All the monuments and abodes—villages, forts, cairns, burial chambers, and landing stones from the prehistoric era; Iron Age monuments; Norse monuments from the ninth century; medieval, feudal, and monastic buildings; and various early modern and modern buildings—give the impression of continuous human habitation, but the cultures are impermanent, each falling victim to the next invasion, period of transition, or cultural wave.

The tapestry stones of Manitoba and the fossils and successive settlements of Orkney exemplify the curious relationship between randomness and pattern in chaos or complexity theory. This relationship is, for example, what Stephen Jay Gould describes in *Wonderful Life*, in which a pocket of the environment was unaccountably preserved and immortalized in stone by certain random environmental actions, leaving other large and important areas untouched in such a way that the remaining species would continue to change and adapt. The fossils bear testimony to a life that was full and might have developed had not some cataclysm intervened. The “chance,” “luck,” “time,” and “miracles” that Daisy’s father saw in the formation of the Indiana limestone—how the climate had been favourable for the existence of the sea creatures, the ocean clear, and the depth of water ideal for the sedimentation which created such beautiful stone—involved the operation of randomness and indeterminacy, the so-called “bent corners of evolution” (143) in the creation of pattern and beauty. But the conditions that allowed for the continuance of other life forms, of which the human is one, also involved randomness and beauty.

The indeterminate and unpredictable fossil development and the alternative development of other life forms tell us something about Daisy’s life and our own. It is perhaps this feeling of awe and even confusion that overwhelmed Daisy when dwarfed by the enormity, immensity, and inconsistency of the remnants of past life for they overshadowed the present and refused it special status. The sky, the sea, and the moor were awe-inspiring, but in the Orkney Islands she could glimpse “the surface of the hidden world, . . . find a microscopic tracing of buried life. Life turned to stone. To bitter minerals.” She and her niece hoped to find “a trace, even, of bacteria,

fine as knitting, the coded dots of life" (301). She wanted what her father believed he had found, "some ancient subtle strand of memory, a luminous image of proof and possibility" (34). This code would not, however, necessarily lead to such a certain identifiable message or pattern as Cuyler believed, for the life extending beyond the fossils must also be considered. Such patterning would have to admit the complicated, multiplicitous, enigmatic, and indeterminate, and Daisy would have to think of herself as simultaneously inside and outside the great flow of life, united with and separate from others. Though others might see her as the nexus of a social and familial network, she would view herself as psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually outside, a woman without centre, a woman of margins and boundaries, a woman of tapestry stone and immense imagination. And the truth would lie in the tension between the socially constructed and independently imaginative, habitus and agency, centre and boundary, pattern and randomness. In an interview Shields expresses the universality of this complicated relationship: "It doesn't matter how well insulated you are, you're going to get these glimpses of chaos. . . . [and] those other, equally rare, transcendental moments when you suddenly feel everything makes sense and you perceive the pattern of the universe" (Wachtel 39).

The diaries and the stones of *The Stone Diaries* both interrogate and affirm the relationship between stability and instability, determinacy and indeterminacy, the fossil and the living. The narratives or diaries are unbounded, diffused, and indeterminate, refusing to follow the chronology of Daisy's life and weaving a tapestry around the lives of the various characters, conveying a sense of simultaneous discontinuity and continuity.⁸ Time and timelessness, the conscious and the unconscious, coherent linear language and its opposite—these are the dualities that underlie Daisy's life and finally become the fundamental supporting structure of the text with regard to all the narrators. Like the stones themselves, these diaries are the coded dots of Daisy's buried life, but coded dots that do not create a certain or single pattern, and that offer more questions than answers about the mysteries inherent in Daisy's life.

Daisy Goodwill Flett knew that her life consisted of discordant elements to which she longed to bring symmetry, she recognized the reality of her essential helplessness, waste, and opacity, and she saw herself as an absence and centreless boundary, but the autobiography itself also confirms its opposite: the structures and forms of family continuity and everyday life

were maintained, and her imagination continued to wrest meaning out of chaos and, perhaps, chaos out of meaning. Her life was simultaneously empty and full, disconnected and connected, unstructured and structured. As Carol Shields's key figure, Daisy represents our longing—and the provisional quality of that longing—for wholeness, coherency, and meaning and our worst fears—and possibly joy—that we are fragmentary, provisional, and void of certain meaning. The narratives, the diaries, describe her as surprising, unstable, indeterminate, and random. Like stone, her life may appear to have symmetry and beauty, even endurance and continuity, but her life can not be decoded into a neat pattern or construct or channeled into one determinate meaning. Like the beautiful tapestry stones, the coded dots of her life and narrative are random *and* patterned, indeterminate *and* determinate, surprising *and* conventional.

NOTES

- 1 There is no diary in the strictest sense for Daisy gives up her "private journal" when she marries Barker Flett, and her travel journal gets lost. Similarly, her daughter Alice, who also has a significant voice in this narrative, burns her own old diaries. Instead of diaries in any traditional sense, *The Stone Diaries* is a collection of variously authored or narrated entries primarily about Daisy, but, of course, also revelatory of other characters.
- 2 At the very end of *The Stone Diaries* the voices of Daisy's children are undifferentiated, perhaps to emphasize that they all bear a fundamental relation to Daisy's voice and to reinforce the intertemporality of the narrative.
- 3 Her mother and father met when her father, Cuyler Goodwill, was sent to the Orphan's Home where Daisy's mother worked, to reset the stone of the front entrance. For a wedding gift they were given an adamantine clock by Cuyler's parents. At the time of her birth, her father was a stone cutter at the Tyndall quarry in Manitoba, though in his adolescence and early adulthood he worked at the Stonewall Quarries. When Daisy was twelve, the two of them moved to Bloomington, Indiana, where he first worked as a carver for the Indiana Limestone Company and later acquired a stake in a highly successful stone-carving company and eventually built a magnificent stone house. Her mother, who died giving birth to Daisy, was Mercy Stone who grew up in the Stonewall Orphan's Home in Stonewall County, Manitoba. After Mercy's death, Daisy's father built a stone tower to memorialize his wife and, many years later, after seeing the limestone pyramids in Egypt, attempted to build a miniature pyramid out of stones from locations throughout the world. Daisy's foster mother Clarentine Flett was killed when she was hit by a bicyclist in Winnipeg and hit her head on the cornerstone of the Royal Bank Building—quite possibly and ironically stone quarried by her estranged husband Magnus.

Daisy's first husband Harold Hoad was killed when he fell (or jumped) from their bedroom window in France to the stone pavement. Nearly a decade later, after she and

Barker Flett married, they lived in a large, lovely stone and brick home in Ottawa. Daisy pursued the memory of her ostracized and unknown father-in-law (who was known for "Unyieldingness . . . Narrowness. Stone" [299]) to the Orkney Islands and stayed in the Grey Stones Hotel, while her niece and boyfriend looked for rare fossils. Daisy eventually hoped to become a stone effigy resembling those she had seen in an English cathedral. Finally, she refused to be buried with her husband under his headstone, instead choosing, we are led to believe, one with her own individualistic, rebellious inscription.

It is, of course, possible that Daisy invents all of this background for in depicting herself at eleven, she raises the possibility of her inventing, exaggerating, lying, and "even dreaming a limestone tower into existence" (76). The possibility that she invents everything does not change the implication that this is a book about randomness and pattern.

- 4 The stones of Daisy's childhood bear out this complexity. Daisy was born in Stonewall Township, Manitoba, where her father was a master stonemason, and spent her childhood with Clarentine Flett in Winnipeg (a city of limestone buildings) and adolescence with her father in Bloomington, Indiana, where he became a wealthy owner of a stone-carving operation. These were places and years of some certitude, though complicated by the death of Daisy's mother and foster mother. She followed in the footsteps of her father who had a "curious bond with rock and earth" (81), whose life was, in a certain way, a "fossil field" (91), and who, following intercourse with his wife, had a "stone" removed from his throat, giving him voice and an affinity with words, which Daisy inherited.
- 5 By this Shields suggests that all of us are capable of acts of imagination, which turn chaotic materials into pattern and beauty. These may take the form of cooking and gardening that Daisy inherits from her real and foster mothers, and are perhaps even more critical to her development than her father's imaginative sculpturing of stone. There is, of course, a connection between the artistic production of stonework and Cuyler's ability to speak. He felt a stone dislodged in his throat, and he began to speak in wonderful ways. Perhaps speech and stones are linked to suggest that all things in life, however patterned, beautiful, and momentarily meaningful, are ultimately evanescent.
- 6 Daisy's mother's sense of lack, beginning with her orphanhood was reinforced by Clarentine Flett, who, just before Mercy gave birth to Daisy and died, commented of Mercy, "Poor thing, poor lost thing. Never a mother to call her own" (9). Daisy's own sense of lack develops, almost like puberty, when at eleven years she caught measles and bronchial pneumonia and began to doubt that she had a "kernel of authenticity" (75).
- 7 Indeed, Daisy's life itself suggests unpredictability, for example, in her father's unpredictably falling in love with her mother, Daisy's own unanticipated birth, and her own ill-fated marriage to Harold Hoad. Her husband Barker, too, despite his own patterned existence, experienced such randomness. Indeed, he imagined "fixed voids" in "the separate layers of his brain" (142), and generally experienced these in his life and death.
- 8 This non-linearity is signaled concretely at the onset of the book when Clarentine Flett reflected on the time her work took:

God sees her, of course. He must. God observes her at the window where she stares and stares at the shadows of the caragana blowing across the path, or sitting on one of the kitchen chairs, locked into paralysis over her mending basket, watching a fly creep across the table. The minutes tick by, become an hour, sometimes two. These segments of time are untied to any other time she recognizes. It happens more and more frequently, these collapsed hours. . . . (11)

What Clarentine (and, through her, Daisy) observed is that linearity is a concept fraught with problems, that mental time is very different from chronological time, and that life consists of the two often operating at variance. Clarentine tied this particular observation to another: that lapsed moments share something in common with the life of the imagination and the use of language: "this is something new, her lost hours, her vivid dreams and shreds of language, as though she'd been given two lives instead of one, the alternate life cloaked in secret" (12).

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a mother's dying

oral history:

my mother whispered to hers, "it's like childbirth,
you have to let go,"
as she slipped away from herself
leaving the body chill, dying is surely
one way of being born.

new reading:

it is akin to her own birth
for the child to behold a mother's dying

exegesis:

our history is sprinkled with the salt of loss
forfeiture defines the pair of us
and all our words have been an elegy
to that primordial unity
before weaning, school and weddings pulled me
from the anchor of your flesh.

a mother's dying is the final echo of being born.
birth was the first time I lost her
her death will be the last.

Unbecoming a “dirty savage” Jane Willis’s *Geniesh: An Indian Girlhood*

Jane Willis’s autobiography, *Geniesh: An Indian Girlhood*, deals with the author’s experiences growing up in the 1950s as a student resident at the St. Philip’s Indian and Eskimo Anglican Residential School in Fort George, Quebec and the Shingwauk Indian Residential School at Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario.¹ It locates a particular life story within a larger—though, until very recently, occluded—narrative of Canadian history. Indeed, this autobiography is itself somewhat occluded, having received only passing notice from readers and critics of Canadian literature. Published in 1973, it has long been out of print. Only two short reviews of the book were published: one in *Canadian Forum*; the other in *Chatelaine* magazine. And although it is sometimes mentioned in surveys of Native literature, such as Penny Petrone’s *Native Literature in Canada: From the Oral Tradition to the Present* (116-17), or histories of Canadian autobiography, such as Shirley Neuman’s essay on “Life Writing” in the second edition of *The Literary History of Canada* (351), to date no literary critic has undertaken a detailed critical analysis of this text.

Willis’s autobiography was published in the same year as Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed*, but while Campbell has gone on to attain a substantial reputation, and her book is regularly read and studied in universities and elsewhere, Willis has fallen into relative obscurity, even within the Native writing community itself. Janice Acoose notes that several contemporary Native writers, including Jeannette Armstrong, Beth Cuthand, and Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, regard *Halfbreed* as a classic, and some even credit

Maria Campbell with being an inspiration to them (Acoose 106). Jane Willis, however, doesn't seem to have made much of an impression on anyone.

Among reasons for the lack of critical attention paid to Willis's autobiography are that *Halfbreed* was published by McClelland and Stewart, an influential mainstream Canadian publishing house, intent on marketing the book to a general readership. *Geniesh: An Indian Girlhood*, on the other hand, was published by New Press, a smaller and more specialized publishing house with a more limited distribution network. Furthermore, no paperback edition was ever published, so the text was not popularized in the same way that *Halfbreed* was. As is the case with many autobiographical texts by Native writers, Willis's book has been valued more for its ethnographic and historical content than for its literary interest. It remains tucked away in the Native history and anthropology section of libraries. Furthermore, literary critics have tended to be somewhat uninterested in Native writers who write only autobiographies. As Emma LaRocque pointed out in a paper she delivered at the 1995 Learned Societies conference, readers and critics of Native literature consistently focus their attention on a limited number of writers and implicitly privilege those who write fiction. With her single autobiographical book, Jane Willis was not deemed a significant writer by a literary and academic establishment which quickly moved to establish a new canon of Native literature consisting of a few rising stars whose works conformed, to some extent at least, to predetermined generic categories and standards of evaluation.

Penny Petrone's comments on *Geniesh: An Indian Girlhood* reveal a common critical bias against Native autobiography. Petrone notes that "Willis's account of her early life and education does not rise above autobiographical protest because she has not moved beyond bitterness and the desire to condemn" (117). As Hartmut Lutz points out, to name Native writing "protest literature" is another way of dismissing it, for such writing is "not really considered part of Canadian 'literature' as defined by English departments and literary scholars in the mainstream" (2). Petrone compliments the author on her "gift for remembering and recording and her sharp eye for detail" (117), but she seems to believe that autobiography is a rather immature form of writing and that Native writers have to "rise above" their personal experiences, as well as move beyond their anger, in order to be considered serious writers of *literature*.

Certainly, Willis's narrative represents a harsh indictment of a paternalistic government, which sought to manipulate and control Native children through agencies such as residential schools, but it is also a subtle and often humorous text, which explores the complex processes through which the Native child was turned into a subject of the Canadian state. A deeper reading of *Geniesh: An Indian Girlhood*, a reading informed by the insights of colonial discourse analysis, reveals a complex Native subject constructed in language. In writing her autobiography, Willis uses the language of colonialism, understood to be patriarchal and European and disseminated by various colonial agents (church ministers, school teachers, employees of the Hudson's Bay Company, the Indian Agent) in order to reveal how she was positioned as an inferior subject under settler colonial rule. However, Willis uses this language self-consciously and often ironically, as a way of undermining its power to capture and contain her subjectivity. Much of the language of the text is focused on the Native body, which is stereotypically represented as an alien, dirty, and corrupt body. Willis's representation of her body—how it was treated and how she herself related to it—signifies the violent rupture that the imposition of colonial ideology causes in the Native subject. Although Native life writing can be understood as an act of political agency, in that the Native writer represents her experiences and her subjectivity from her own perspective, the extent to which the Native autobiographer writing in English can distance herself from the discursive structures that have represented her as a “dirty savage” is necessarily limited.

Jane Willis was born in 1940 in a small island community called ‘jisah-seebee,’ or Great River, near Fort George on the eastern shores of James Bay in northern Quebec. She is mixed blood, the child of a Cree mother and a Scots father, but she identifies herself as “Indian.” At the time of her birth—and, indeed, until the relevant clauses were revoked in 1985 by Bill C-31—the Indian Act dictated that if a Native woman married a white man she and any children produced by the union lost their Indian status and their accompanying right to live on reserve land. Because her parents never married, Willis's Indian status was never in question, but this naming of her as an Indian is a legal designation with wide-ranging consequences.

The Indian Act of 1867 gave the federal government exclusive jurisdiction over “Indians and Indian lands.” By granting Native people special status as “Indians” defined by the Act, the government sought to protect them from

European exploitation. However, as John L. Tobias argues, special status was supposed to be a short-term measure. The long-term projection and goal of the government was that Native people would assimilate into mainstream (i.e. white) culture through training in European values (Tobias 39). The education system was a prime agent of this assimilationist policy: it was assumed that Indianness could be—and should be—eradicated in Native children so that a new generation would grow up thinking of themselves as “Canadians” not as “Indians.” It was also hoped, as Vicky English-Currie notes, that these children would function as mediators between older generations and the state, thus serving as a catalyst to a more comprehensive assimilation (51).

The responsibility for Native education has historically been placed in the hands of the federal government. The government’s commitment to establish schools on reserve lands was part of the package of promises made in many of the treaties negotiated between First Nations and the Canadian state in the nineteenth century. Precisely how that responsibility was to be met, however, has long been a source of contention and debate. In the 1890s, the government set up day schools on reserves, yet some officials questioned the effectiveness of such schools on the grounds that parents and elders continued to have a significant (and, presumably, negative) influence on their children. Full assimilation was not readily accomplished. As a solution to the ongoing “Indian problem,” officials such as Edgar Dewdney, who was then minister of the interior and a former Indian commissioner, proposed that the government establish boarding or residential schools so that training in European knowledge and values could be more effectively achieved. This shift in policy is registered in remarks made by Dewdney to the House of Commons in 1891:

The Indians say they have a sufficient number of children on the reserve to attend a day school, and we have had to establish one: but where those children go to school for a few hours and then return to their wigwams or houses, there is not much chance to improve them. . . . The sooner we can close the day schools and send the children to the boarding schools, the sooner we will be able to do something with them. (qtd. in *Youngblood Henderson* 252-53)

Between the 1890s and the 1950s thousands of Native children were legally removed from their homes as early as age six and placed in Indian residential schools (usually kilometers away) where they would remain until they were sixteen. These schools were funded by the federal government, but

they were run by the various Christian churches. The schools operated according to three main objectives: to Christianize Native children; to teach them to speak English; and to give them a minimum education in both scholastic and practical matters.²

When Jane Willis attended The St. Philip's Indian and Eskimo Anglican Residential School, she inherited a history of Native education that was fraught with conflict. Native people generally recognized that education in the ways of the settler society would benefit the younger generation, and, as Barman, Hébert and McCaskill argue, "For a time, colonial and Indian interests coincided" (4). But no one could have predicted how insidious the effects of a thoroughly Eurocentric education would be not only on those who attended residential schools but also on later generations. Individual accounts of the residential school experience vary, as, of course, did the particular beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of those white people who worked in them, but for most former Native students the experience was traumatic and the result was that they learned to be ashamed of their people and of themselves.

The hardships and injustices Native students suffered were numerous. Once the children were at the residential school they became subject to a myriad of rules and prohibitions, most of which, because they were in direct conflict with indigenous social conventions, seemed illogical and arbitrary. As in any institution, rules meant the loss of certain individual freedoms, but in the particular context of Indian residential schools, many of those losses had profound and long-lasting consequences. One obvious loss was the ability to speak their own tribal languages. Students were generally forced to speak English, and although Willis and others report that this was a rule that the children consistently broke, they were generally severely punished if caught speaking "Indian." In the Foreword to Celia Haig-Brown's study of the Kamloops Indian Residential School, for instance, Randy Fred reports that his father was "physically tortured by his teachers" at the Alberni Residential School by having needles pushed through his tongue (15). Native children were frequently victims of overt verbal, physical, and sometimes sexual abuse. Children were routinely intimidated, humiliated, beaten, and incarcerated. To this day, many former students wonder why their teachers felt that they had to treat children so brutally.

Although some former students bear the physical scars of beatings on their bodies, much of the damage is not visible to the eye. Because they

were denied access to elders, who are the traditional educators in Native communities, Native children who attended residential schools lost the opportunity to learn and live their own cultural knowledges. Attaining those knowledges later in life is, for some, an important part of the process of healing. Moreover, because they were separated from their families for ten months of the year, many former students bear the emotional scars that accompany neglect. Even within the same school, siblings were separated, and brothers and sisters became strangers to one another. Some people grew into adulthood unable to form healthy intimate relationships with others, often experiencing difficulty relating to their own children or becoming abusive in their turn, because they had not had the opportunity to learn positive parenting skills through observing their own families. In an interview in which he discusses his experiences at the Fort Alexander Indian Residential School, Chief Phil Fontaine comments on the long-term effects of this alienation:

At home I learned certain things about love and how it was expressed, but that was cast aside when I went to residential school. There, I was completely cut off from my parents and I lost a lot. I lost my sense of family. I didn't develop the kind of love one should experience in a family, never being hugged or held other than when I experienced touching for purposes other than loving someone. At residential school I was part of an institution. (53)

For all that was taken away from them, Native students got little in return. During this period, residential school education placed greater emphasis on the teaching of religion, and the acquisition of domestic, agricultural, and technical skills than on the teaching of a solid academic curriculum; thus, students who attended Indian schools were academically—and, ultimately, economically—disadvantaged. Some commentators suggest that academic standards for Native education were deliberately kept low because whites assumed that Native people only needed to learn “a bit of reading, writing, figures and some notion of hygiene” because they were destined to live apart from and not participate in mainstream Canadian society (Cardinal 53). White people may have feared that if Native people were to be equally educated, they would become unwelcome competitors in the work force (Barman 120). Important studies of Native education have been written;³ however, many believe that those best equipped to recount the history of Indian residential schools in Canada and to analyze their long-term effects are Native

people themselves. First-hand personal accounts, such as Jane Willis's *Geniesh: An Indian Girlhood*, are integral to the investigation.⁴

In his account of the years he spent at the St. Peter Claver's Indian Residential School in Spanish, Ontario, Basil H. Johnston claims that the very word "Spanish" came to signify for him "penitentiary, reformatory, exile, dungeon, whippings, kicks, slaps, all rolled into one" (6). Johnston's evocation of penitentiaries and dungeons is significant, for, indeed, these educational institutions were essentially structures of discipline and punishment. They were analogous to what Michel Foucault would call "carceral spaces" or "spaces of exclusion" (199), but where those incarcerated were innocent children whose only "crime" was being racially and culturally different. These institutions were shaped by a complex colonial discourse that authorized white settler management of Native children. Teachers and administrators, hired by the Christian churches, occupied the classic paternalistic role of the colonizer: they understood themselves to be benevolent parents of "their Indians" who had a responsibility to protect Native people and to settle the enlightenment of European civilization upon them. As the twentieth century advanced, however, and as resistance to white society's exclusive control of Native education grew, it became more and more difficult for teachers, ministers, and government officials to justify some of their assumptions and practices. As it became increasingly evident that students in these schools were receiving a substandard academic education, as disturbing accounts of injustices and abuses became public knowledge, and as the students themselves tenaciously resisted having white values forced upon them, the task of managing "their Indians" became increasingly difficult.

Although official policy of this period was dominated by the belief that Native people had to become more like white people, the discourse that naturalized and stabilized the relationship between white school teachers and Native child subjects insisted on their racial difference. The Indian residential school system was underwritten by a colonial discourse that represented "the Indian" not just as the "other" but as the "absolute other," radically different from the normative white "self." In his essay "The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism," Homi K. Bhabha explains that colonial discourse is "an apparatus that turns on the recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences" (70). It "produces the colonized as a social reality which is at once

an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible" (70). The primary strategy of this discourse, explains Bhabha (drawing on the work of Freud and Lacan), is the production of the stereotype, which functions as both phobia and fetish to the white colonizer. The stereotype is the repository of the colonizer's fear and desire, and it enacts a complex psychodrama within which both the colonizer and the colonized are interpellated. The stability of the colonial relation, as Bhabha explores in much of his work, is always an illusion, for the colonizer is caught in a conflicted position as an agent of both a civilizing mission and a violent subjugating force. This position is even more conflicted in the Canadian situation where the white settler himself might feel colonized in relation to a distant European authority. Furthermore, both parties are implicated in a subtle and always shifting play of psychic identification and disidentification. Power is never total; nor is subjugation. Hence the urgent and consistent need for *repetition*. The stereotypical figure of the native (and here I use the term "native," as Bhabha does, in a more general sense) as a knowable and ultimately manageable type must be constantly reiterated by the colonizer in an ongoing effort to secure and normalize unequal relations of power.

It is a truism that colonial discourse is fundamentally racist, but what exactly does that mean? Kwame Anthony Appiah makes a useful distinction between *racialism*, the belief that different races have variable genetic and physiological characteristics, and *racism*, the belief that people of different races also vary morally and intellectually from one another. Appiah further distinguishes between extrinsic and intrinsic racism. Extrinsic racists can be persuaded to change their minds, given the appropriate evidence, about the supposed inferiority of the racial "other." Intrinsic racists, on the other hand, cannot be persuaded by any amount of evidence, but hold fast to the belief that racial difference is itself sufficient reason to think of and treat people of "other" races unequally. Whether extrinsic or intrinsic, racism is an ideology that confuses and conflates physical characteristics with intellectual and moral ones, thereby motivating some people to treat racially "other" human beings as inherently inferior (Appiah 4-12). Within the terms of a racist discourse, the identity of the racial "other" is reduced to his or her morphological features, reduced to what Frantz Fanon calls "the fact of blackness," but that "fact" is always in *excess* of what can be empirically substantiated.

In his psychoanalytic study *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon dramatizes how colonial discourse, which produces the stereotype as its primary strategy of enunciation, determines his own subjectivity. He recalls a scene where a young white child sees him on a train platform and is afraid of him because he is black.⁵ Fanon suggests that this moment functions as a metonym linked to a range of complex psychic effects produced in the black man by a white person's fear and rejection of him. The black man experiences a feeling of being divorced from his own consciousness, an experience Fanon describes as an "amputation" (112). He becomes an object, even to himself. His individuality—his very personhood—is erased as he is turned into a signifier of a whole history of racial myth:

I was responsible at the same time for my body, for my race, for my ancestors. I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism [sic], racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: "Sho' good eatin'," (112)

"I am overdetermined from without," continues Fanon, "I am the slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me but of my own appearance" (116). His skin, then, is the signature of his identity, which is really a non-identity. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. contends that "[r]ace, as a meaningful criterion within the biological sciences, has long been recognized to be a fiction. When we speak of 'the white race' or 'the black race,' the Jewish race' or 'the Aryan race,' we speak in biological misnomers and, more generally, in metaphors" (4). But these metaphors, as Fanon demonstrates, are extremely powerful. Indeed, they are internalized and lived as if they were real.

Jane Willis explores how the production of a particular stereotype determines and contains her subjectivity. That stereotype is of the brown Indian body as a dirty body: savage, degenerate, both prone to and responsible for disease, naturally given to sexual licentiousness and corruption. Not surprisingly, colonial discourse frequently translates itself into a surveillance and administration of the body. The colonial agent seizes on the body of the Native "other" as both the visible sign of difference and the signature of an alien and inferior identity. Overdetermined as it is, the Native body becomes a primary point of subject-formation for both the colonizer and the colonized: the colonizer because of the disavowal of the "other" in the "self"; the colonized because of the internalization of the ideological statements of a racist colonial discourse which attributes positive qualities only

to whiteness.

The gendering of the stereotype also makes a difference. Native girls and women are fixed within specific categories of identification, which Janice Acoose names the "Indian princess" and the "easy squaw." While the former is a romanticized version of Rousseau's "noble savage," the latter is "a contemporary distortion of the squaw drudge" (39). Both images are damaging to Native women, for, in Acoose's view, they "foster dangerous cultural attitudes that affect human relations and inform institutional ideologies" (49). Furthermore, they obscure and deny the fundamental humanity of Native women by reducing complex human beings to iconic types. In part, Native women writers write against these seemingly polarized but interrelated stereotypical representations; however, a simple reversal or refusal of them does not necessarily weaken their power, for stereotypical representations of Native women continue to be reiterated within contemporary culture, and they continue to confirm white expectations and fulfill white fantasies.⁶ As Barbara Godard suggests, Native women writers confront the *effect* that the production and repetition of these stereotypical representations has had on their subject positions. These writers not only expose but also historicize and critically analyze the origins, manifestations, and cultural meanings of stereotypes. Such critical analyses are located within a politics of decolonization. As Godard contends,

... through struggle, acquiring some of the strategies and structures of the dominant, the subaltern [Native subject] rises 'into hegemony', this process constituting a *dis/placement* of the dominant discourse and strategies of hybridization that undermine its monolithic position of power. Both speaking marginality and speaking against it, exploiting the ambiguity of their within/without position with respect to power, these emerging subjects destabilize institutional practices. (193, emphasis in the original)

The language of Jane Willis's autobiography can be characterized as just this kind of double-speaking from a position that is both inside and outside structures of power. While Willis does represent herself as a child who, upon entering residential school and confronting a figure of white authority, knows immediately that she is "completely at her mercy, to do with as she pleased" (39), she also employs specific linguistic strategies that suggest that she is neither completely dominated by individual white people nor by the discourses that authorize their power over her. One such strategy is to

mix languages. In telling her life story, Willis uses both standard English and Cree. Fragments of dialogue between the narrator and her relatives are often represented in Cree, and these fragments are not translated into English either within the main text or through the addition of a glossary. Admittedly, the non-Cree-speaking reader can get the gist of what is being said from the context of the utterance; nevertheless, the primary effect of incorporating the Cree language into the narrative is that the white reader—like the white characters in the autobiography—is never completely privy to all of the exchanges between family members. The importance of Willis writing in Cree should not be understated. For a woman who has been punished for speaking her mother tongue, the act of reclaiming that tongue is already an act of agency. Furthermore, by positioning the non-Cree-speaking reader as outsider, the author prevents that reader from ever fully knowing and, thus, *managing* the Native subject.

In residential school, Native children learn that their own speaking is unauthorized, yet the prohibition against speaking does not mean that they are uninterested in language. On the contrary, struggles over language, over the right to *name*, become part of their daily lives. Within Native cultures, generally, the power inherent in language is recognized and respected. In a collaborative dialogue between Douglas Cardinal and Jeannette Armstrong about the Native creative process, Armstrong states that

One of the central instructions to my people is to practise quietness, to listen and speak only if you know the full meaning of what you say. It is said that you cannot call your words back once they are uttered and so you are responsible for all which results from your words. It is said that, for those reasons, it is best to prepare very seriously and carefully to make public contributions. (90)

Jane Willis articulates her life experiences in language, and thus makes a significant public statement. Yet she does more than just use words: she thematizes the ways in which an alien language, the colonizer's language, shapes her subjectivity. Willis explores how particular words can be abusive and coercive. She also throws words back at the colonizers by mimicking their racist language, and, in doing so, holds them responsible for it.

Willis's narrative begins not with her own words but with a direct quotation: "No white person employed by the Hudson Bay Company shall fraternize with the natives [Indians]" (1). Here Willis immediately signals that the colonizer's words are of a particular kind: declarative statements of law. Yet while Willis frequently repeats this language of law, she also under-

mines its authority by ironically commenting on how she and other Native people heard and responded to it. This first law of The Hudson's Bay Company, we quickly discover, was "more often ignored than obeyed" (1); indeed, Willis cites this law primarily to show that her own existence is the consequence of her parents' disobedience. Rules and laws also characterize the environment of the residential school. The narrator recalls listening to the principal recite a formal list of the ground rules on the first day of school. Each rule has a number and is stated in short, declarative sentences. For example, Rule number one is "There will be no Cree spoken in this school. Anyone caught speaking it will be severely punished" (46). Immediately following the inscription of this statement in the text, however, Willis adds a parenthetical comment: "(This was a rule we absolutely refused to follow. By refusing to speak either Cree or English when any of the staff were around, we were able to escape punishment)" (46). Similar parenthetical comments follow several of the rules inscribed at this point in the text. The effect of this running commentary is that the reader acquires a more complete understanding of how students both reacted to and dealt with the constraints placed upon them. Resistance to the colonizer's law, then, is not simply enacted in the behaviour of the child; it is also enacted in the writing of the adult autobiographer. By critiquing the rules, the autobiographer refuses to repeat them "straight" or to state them as a matter of fact.

Nevertheless, the life story told here is one of domination and neglect. Much of the language of the text is devoted to descriptions of how school authorities controlled Native children through controlling their bodies. In some ways, *Geniesh: An Indian Girlhood* can be read as a biography of the narrator's body. As Gerald R. McMaster (following Chris Doran) suggests, the Native body is a "coded body." "In coding 'Indians' as 'bodies,'" writes McMaster, "the state exercises a form of state power whereby people are treated not as physical bodies but are forced upon a grid or master code, which can be rendered silent, docile, and infinitely manipulable instead of being seen as a resistant and challenging body" (76). Within the residential school, the Native child body is under constant surveillance. It is the first object of colonial administrative control, because it is her body—her skin—that is the visible sign of her difference. Furthermore, through acting on her body colonial authority ultimately hopes to convert her into its subject. The body, as Foucault argues in *Discipline and Punish*, might be the

focus of institutional regulation, but it is only an intermediary (11). What the authorities are actually after is control of the mind and conversion of the soul.

Unaware of the real conditions at the residential school, at first the narrator longs to live there. But on the day when she is handed over by her reluctant grandparents and mother to Miss Moore, “the female-wrestler supervisor” (37), she quickly learns that school is something more than a new adventure. In her excitement and eagerness to be accepted and approved of, she has taken great care over her appearance. She presents herself before her teachers in a new dress, her hair is clean, combed and braided, her body is freshly bathed. However, the first thing she is required to do is submit to being scrubbed in scalding water and having her hair and scalp doused with kerosene. Because “common knowledge” states that all Indians are filthy and louse-ridden, the teacher denies what she sees—a young girl whose personal hygiene has been scrupulously overseen by her grandmother—and acts, instead, according to what she believes, which is that all Indians are “dirty savages.” The colonized Native body, as Sander L. Gilman among others has documented, has been subjected to all sorts of biological investigation (see especially his chapter three), but colonial authority is not really concerned with the empirical body; rather, it produces the colonized Native body as its own object of scrutiny and regulation through stereotyping. The colonized Native body is always already inferior, degenerate, abnormal, dirty. It cannot be otherwise. And, as Appiah reminds us, intrinsic racism, of the kind that Miss Moore exhibits here, cannot be defeated by any amount of evidence. It is so ingrained, so normalized, that actions resulting from it are automatic.

The school authorities are obsessed with cleanliness. Not only is the external bathing and delousing a ritual event (and a scene that is repeated in many Native life narratives), but the children at St. Philips are subject to various other kinds of bodily regulation. The girls are all required to cut their hair short in the same page-boy style; they are made to sleep in unheated dormitories with the windows wide open, even in winter; they are made to wash six times a day and even brush their teeth with Lifebuoy soap; they are told when to sleep and when to wake; they are told when they can go to the toilet and when they cannot; they are fed the same food (some of it rotten and never enough of it) at the same time every day with variations only at Christmas and Easter; and they are regularly dosed with

laxatives. In an ironic comment about the hateful laxatives, the narrator notes "Our insides too had to be sterilized, just like our bodies" (44). While this statement signals that the school authorities hope to bring about good health and organic purity in their charges, it also signals that they want to bleach the Indian out of them, to cure them of the "disease" of racial and cultural difference.

Real disease and illness, however, often go untreated. Indeed, the authorities, not the children themselves, determine when they are sick. Children quickly learn that complaints about feeling sick are likely to prompt further scorn and possible punishment. For example, one of the girls, Annie, has a tape worm which she is afraid to tell anyone about for fear that it will prove what white people already believe. Earlier, when she had developed an allergic skin reaction to the Lifebuoy soap, Annie gets this response from Miss Moore: "You dirty little Indian! If you weren't so dirty, you wouldn't have this problem" (86). Note the irrationality here: Annie has a skin problem precisely because she washes so much. Another girl, Ellen, falls seriously ill, but her condition goes untreated because the teachers, believing that Indians are naturally lazy, think that she is faking sickness in order to avoid work. Ellen dies.

Willis's own child body, represented as a sick or potentially sick body, plays a complex role in the text. First, it provides her with an opportunity to compare and contrast her grandmother's traditional home-made remedies with "white man's medicine." When she is ill with tonsillitis as a young child at home, she tries to run away from both kinds of treatment, her grandmother's goose fat concoctions and the white nurse's hypodermic needle. Each remedy seems equally repugnant to her, and neither is judged more effective than the other. Her grandmother too seems to have no objection to the nurse's antibiotics, perhaps believing in the power of the double whammy. By contrast, when Willis enters the residential school, and her body falls under the exclusive regulation of the school authorities, only white treatments and medicines are valued and employed. In fact, colonial discourse dictates that Indians themselves are the source of disease. This belief is one of the mysteries the girls attempt to unravel:

"Did you know that white people don't have germs like us?"

"How do you know that?"

"Because they're always yelling at us about *our* germs. They're afraid of catching them. When we sneeze or cough they always scream at us to cover our

mouths so we won't spread our filthy germs around. If they had germs, they wouldn't be afraid of ours, would they?"

We all had to agree it made sense. They were always yelling at us about our dirty germs. This was one theory we could never disprove. If a white person got sick, we always felt that we were to blame. (48-49, emphasis in the original)

In fact, when a flu epidemic hits the village, the school principal refuses to allow the narrator to visit her dying grandfather for fear that she will bring the virus into the school and infect others. Because many of the school's residents (both students and teachers) are already infected, his logic is insupportable.

Curiously, the narrator maintains a fantasy about illness. She dreams of contracting tuberculosis and of being sent to the hospital. She regards TB as her "big ambition" (93), but this is an ambition motivated primarily by her curiosity about the world beyond the island. The narrator wants the illness but without the symptoms: "I don't want to get sick. I just want to get TB, I would explain patiently. The children who returned from the sanatorium were always telling us about all the good movies they saw, all the juice they drank, and all the good food and fruit they ate. All they did was lie around all day eating good food" (94). To a young girl who is chronically underfed and overworked, such images of luxury foods and leisure are understandably attractive. Yet to desire a tubercular body in order to attain these luxuries is, ironically, to desire what had actually meant thousands of Native deaths. This fantasy, then, functions not only to characterize the narrator as a naïve child, but also to evoke another deadly legacy of European settlement.

The stereotype of the "dirty savage" is constantly repeated, yet it has various manifestations. The Native body is consistently linked with a range of degeneracies, including slothfulness and sexual promiscuity. The girls are repeatedly told that if they do not work hard and uncomplainingly, they will be condemned to a life of perpetual pregnancy, prey to the lusts of drunken and abusive men.⁷ They are warned—even at age seven—not to speak to boys, because "boys are after one thing only" (47). And by the time the narrator is a teenager, she is regularly being accused of behaving promiscuously. A teacher even tries to change the way she walks, accusing her of provocatively wiggling her hips in an effort to attract male attention (116). But the truth is that the narrator and the other students are sexual innocents. At age seven, she has no idea what the "thing" boys want is, and

even when she is older she remains largely in a state of ignorance. Despite their obsession with sex, the teachers do not explain puberty and its accompanying physical and emotional changes. In fact, puberty is a phenomenon that is repressed to the point of denial. The narrator develops a painful abscess on her chest caused by the coarse material of her school uniform rubbing against her growing breasts. Because girls under the age of fifteen are apparently not permitted to have breasts, she is not issued a brassiere.

When Willis leaves St. Philips and travels to Sault Ste. Marie, where she boards at the Shingwauk Indian Residential School while attending classes at a white high school, she takes the lessons of a racist Eurocentric education with her. Although she is excited to be finally seeing the outside world, she is also disappointed because the world does not conform to the images she has come to expect. Even other Indians disappoint, for "They looked and dressed the same as the Indians on my island. The only difference, a very slight one, was the dialect. I had expected Indians in buckskins and feathers like the ones I had seen in the movies" (128). Such a response reveals just how effective her indoctrination has been.

Of course, these stereotypical movie images are also images of herself, and the narrator cannot easily distance herself from them. Just how powerful they are becomes apparent when she visits her step-father's sisters during a stopover in Moose Factory. With their encouragement, the narrator thinks about changing her appearance so as to look more like other city girls. But when Lillian suggests that she get rid of her thick school-issue stockings, the narrator thinks: "Me? Go bare-legged? Why, it was unthinkable! It was sinful and indecent! She might well have told me to walk around naked" (131). So used to being accused of being dirty in both body and mind, when attention is drawn to her body the narrator instantly feels ashamed. Indeed, she has learned to alienate herself from her own body, to repress and fear her corporeality (not to mention her sexuality). Her body, she believes, is a thing that can act on its own and betray her, a thing that has to be kept under tight control. Her body is her identity, in that colonial discourse reduces her to the sign of her skin. But what she has actually learned and internalized is western culture's need to gain mastery over the body and the dichotomy of "soul" and "body" that would locate the "self" outside of the corporeal. She is caught in an impossible situation: both defined by her body and required to deny it.

And yet Jane Willis does find ways of resisting the totalizing power of

colonial discourse. An important but undervalued feature of Willis's narrative technique, as I have been suggesting, is her use of irony. Willis repeats various derogatory stereotypical statements about Native people in her life story as a way of exposing their falsity. Moreover, she uses such statements with reference to herself, thereby revealing how a particular language influences and shapes her subjectivity. The text is punctuated with phrases that Willis appropriates from colonial discourse and turns against herself.

When she recounts a time when she was once again ill with tonsillitis, for example, the narrator comments "I awaited my death like a good little Indian" (93). The notion that the only good Indian is a dead Indian, is a notion that not only informed the plots of countless Westerns but also contributed to the actual murder of Native North Americans. As I have already suggested, the language of Westerns provides Willis with a rich vocabulary. On another occasion, when she is again ill but this time with a stomach ailment, the narrator expresses her anger at the lack of care and sympathy she receives by commenting that rather than complain, "I merely plotted all kinds of revenge—scalping, a quick shove down the fire-escape or stairs, getting out my bow and arrow or slingshot and 'accidentally' piercing the heart of any white person I happened to despise at the moment" (117). Here the narrator raises the specter of the warring Indian who is by nature given to acts of random, unpremeditated violence of a particularly brutal kind. The occasion for this comment is the automatic assumption on the part of the teacher that the narrator is faking illness in order to shirk her share of the work load. Willis's strategy is to counter one stereotype with another one, thereby exposing both as false, even ridiculous. But she also mimics the language of colonialism in order to point out its insidious effects. What becomes increasingly clear is that this is a language that is *available* to her. Indeed, she is supposed to internalize it, believe it, and use it when thinking or speaking about herself in the process of becoming a good colonial subject. The effect is jarring, for the reader can easily recognize the racism behind such statements, as well as Willis's sarcastic tone in repeating them. But the white reader is simultaneously and uncomfortably aware that such stereotypes have authorized a long history of settler colonialism in Canada which continues to this day and in which he or she is implicated.

In their comments on *Geniesh: An Indian Girlhood*, Penny Petrone and Shirley Neuman both note Willis's anger; however, anger, I would argue, is only overt on the final page of the text. At the end of her autobiography Willis's

language becomes polemical. She steps back from narrating the details of her experiences and makes a more general statement. Her approach is blunt; the effect is striking. I offer a small excerpt as an example, but the tone and diction is consistent throughout the four paragraphs that follow this one:

For twelve years I was taught to love my neighbour—especially if he was white—but to hate myself. I was made to feel untrustworthy, inferior, incapable, and immoral. The barbarian in me, I was told, had to be destroyed if I was to be saved. (199)

Echoed in Willis's language is the language of Christian doctrine, which is what justified the teachers' attempts to Christianize Native child subjects by eradicating their identities as Native people. While this final page represents a summation of the injustices Willis and others like her endured, the polemic here represents a marked shift in tone.

Although the book ends on a powerful assertion of renewed self-esteem and the accompanying assertion of freedom from colonial servitude—"Now I can, once again, say with pride, 'I am an Indian'" (100)—this assertion perhaps fails to convince, for the text as a whole represents a sophisticated examination of the tenacity of a racist colonial discourse that equates Indians with savages and barbarians. Indeed, the autobiography articulates what this naming of her *as* an Indian has cost the author. Within the text of *Geniesh: An Indian Girlhood*, the narrator both is and is not the "dirty savage." By repeating and ironically inhabiting the stereotype, Willis attempts to loosen its power to name her. She does challenge its "naturalness" and, in doing so, she diminishes its power. Yet whether or not she articulates an alternative liberatory subject position in the text is not so clear.⁸ There is no position *outside* of her brown body, her brown skin, as that skin continues to be inscribed by a racist colonial discourse, from which to write. As the Métis poet Marilyn Dumont acknowledges in her poem "Memoirs of a Really Good Brown Girl," "my skin always gives me away." The various narrative strategies Willis employs in this text—mixing English with Cree, using ironic commentary and mimicry to deconstruct stereotypes, inscribing blunt polemic—all contribute to, if not fully create, an autobiographical subject resistant to the authority of settler colonialism. Ultimately, however, *Geniesh: An Indian Girlhood* will only further the broader political project of decolonization if it finds an audience, for the racist colonial discourse that the text exposes and critiques can only be overthrown if both writers and readers situate themselves in relation to it.

NOTES

- 1 This paper was written with the assistance of a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowship. I am also grateful to my colleague Renée Hulan for her comments on an earlier draft.
- 2 The idea that the priority of the education system was to enact the wholesale assimilation of Native children into mainstream society continued to inform official policy until the federal government adopted proposals outlined in a position paper authored in 1973 by the National Indian Brotherhood (precursor to the Assembly of First Nations). In this paper, Native leaders argued that the control and administration of Native education should be in the hands of parents and communities and be designed in accordance with traditional Native philosophies of education which emphasized fostering pride in oneself, enabling understanding of one's fellow human beings, and learning how to live in harmony with nature (*Indian Education Paper—Phase One*, Annex A, 1).
- 3 The two-volume collection of essays titled *Indian Education in Canada*, edited by Jean Barman, Yvonne Hébert, and Don McCaskill, is comprehensive and insightful. Important case studies of particular residential schools have been written by A. Richard King, Celia Haig-Brown, Diane Persson, and Elizabeth Furniss. A recent collection of essays, *First Nations Education in Canada: The Circle Unfolds*, edited by Marie Battiste and Jean Barman, represents an important contribution to research into Native education. Many of these essays attempt to undo the stubborn legacy of Eurocentric pedagogical practices by articulating a specifically Native pedagogy.
- 4 More of these accounts are being published all the time. A partial list would include the collection of life narratives edited by Linda Jaine in *Residential Schools: The Stolen Years*; Isabelle Knockwood's *Out of the Depths*, Basil H. Johnston's *Indian School Days*, and Alice French's *My Name is Masak*. Ethnographies by Haig-Brown, Furniss, Persson, and Shorten also include the oral testimonies of former residential school students.
- 5 Bhabha also discusses this "primal scene" in Fanon (75-76).
- 6 The Disney film *Pocahontas* is a recent example of the rearticulation of the Indian Princess stereotype. While the Native woman in such a representation is "naturally" beautiful, noble, and desirable, she is also always savage and less civilized than a white person. See Rayna Green for a discussion of the ways in which the Pocahontas myth has circulated in American popular culture. Beth Brant offers an alternative account of the story of Pocahontas and John Smith.
- 7 In Beatrice Culleton's autobiographical novel *In Search of April Raintree*, the Métis protagonist and her sister are lectured by a social worker on the "native girl syndrome." More fully articulated than in Willis's autobiography, this "syndrome" constitutes a seemingly inevitable and natural fate:

It starts out with the fighting, the running away, the lies. Next come the accusations that everyone in the world is against you. There are the sullen uncooperative silences, the feeling sorry for yourselves. And when you go on your own you get pregnant right away or you can't find or keep jobs. So you'll start with alcohol and drugs. From there, you get into shoplifting and prostitution and in and out of jails. You'll live with men who abuse you. And on it goes. (66-67)

- 8 Linda Hutcheon notes that one of the lingering questions about irony, even in its post-modern formulation, is that while irony can subvert dominant discourses from within and raise political consciousness, it is not clear whether it can move beyond "the destabilizing and dismantling to construct something new" (45).

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thirteen other ways of looking at Stevens' blackbird

- xiv through the pupil
of another blackbird
marvelling
- xv the only constant thing
in the eye of a blackbird
is the horizon of death
- xvi with a blank page
in its beak
the blackbird flew to and fro
across the frozen waters
- xvii to find the centre
of circles
to trace the direction
of tangents
is each blackbird's un-
acknowledged goal
- xviii a series of notes
flight patterns
a single feather
in a snowy field
- messages
in a language
I am trying to remember
- xix a blackbird's empty nest
hangs askew
among broken reeds
- spilling the weight
of sky

- xx counting blackbirds in a marsh
I lose track
and have to start over again
- xxi under sooty clouds
from the ashes of evening
rises a blackbird
just one
- xxii over the mud of the path
glides the blackbird's shadow

in that brief moment
I catch a glimpse
of tracks
- xxiii a surprise of silence
just after
the blackbird's call

an echo of astonishment
- xxiv sighting along my outstretched
pointing arm
I aim desire
at the red shoulder of a blackbird
into swaying cattails
and swirling mists of morning
- xxv the planet is spinning
a blackbird must be dying
- xxvi learn to draw
the tilt of the blackbird's head
and wonder at the beating
of its heart

The Deciphering of the Code of Time

After the wars of religious hate
the children of farmers
were sent to the rivers
that flowed down from the forest
to gather pebbles,

which their fathers set into the plaster
of the outside walls of the castle
of peacocks and mirrors,
in the dense mathematical patterns
of a Bach fugue,
a sombre dirge
for the end of the age of the earth
and the beginning of the paradise
of glass and jewels.

That was long ago
in the country of cherry trees and eels,
yet after the wars of human hate
the castle and the river are still there,
a wind that has blown across time.

Today Mozart has awoken for the hundredth time
in a pigeon, his throat banded with jewels,
his feathers glowing with the light of rain. He sits
on the pink sandstone sill
of one of the hundred windows
of the front façade of the castle
among the old beech trees,

while the goldfish swim
in the algal water of the pools,
glinting occasionally as they turn
in a shaft of sunlight;

following the pattern of the stones.
After a hundred incarnations
he has uncovered only half of the design
of grief and hope
in one wall of the castle,

but he continues with his work,
with his small dark eyes
and his yellow beak.

Every afternoon he flaps down with the others
to eat the yellow grain
children from the village scatter
across the broad black paving stones
of the courtyard,

because he has learned
that patience and silence too
are music.

Verse in the Bush

Levi Adams

Jean Baptiste: A Poetic Olio, in II Cantos, ed. Tracy Ware. Canadian Poetry Press n.p.

John Strachan

Poetry by John Strachan, ed. Wanda Campbell. Canadian Poetry Press n.p.

Reviewed by Warren Stevenson

Of these two books in the Canadian Poetry Series put out by the University of Western Ontario, Levi Adams' *Jean Baptiste*, a Byronic imitation written in pseudo ottava rima and originally published in 1825, is the easier to read as well as the more lightweight, physically and intellectually. In his useful introduction Tracy Ware focuses on the poem's "bilingual diction and carnivalesque aesthetic," while also observing the inferiority of Adams' slippery "olio" to George Longmore's *Beppo*-esque "The Charivari," which had appeared a year earlier. Adams' verse lacks the saltiness of Byron's and (occasionally) Longmore's, and his frequent recourse to asterisks, whatever the reason, appears less suggestive than apathetic. Also, Adams' mock parody of a parody (Byron's *Don Juan*) lacks polish: many of the lines do not scan properly, being either too long or too short; and while some of this may be intentional, Adams' irregular use of the Alexandrine results in a hybrid "Spenserian ottava rima," which

creates an effect of defying gravity but not really going anywhere, something like backing up the Magnetic Hill in neutral:

I must allow, to me there is no charm
 In seeing every day new fashion, or
Ma's pet,
 Push'd in the face of common sense—a
 starch'd coquette!

Adams' most memorable passages are the ones where he forgets to Byronize and expresses his own poetic feeling for the Canadian landscape, as at the beginning of Canto II.

Variouly described as "the most dangerous and spiteful man in Canada" (Lord Durham) and "the dominant personality" there, a measure of John Strachan's influence may be gleaned from William Kilbourn's remarks (quoted by Campbell in her Introduction) that he "badgered the British into granting him charters for two universities in Toronto and persuaded his brother-in-law, James McGill, to found one in Montreal. . . . He [also] became the first advocate of Confederation [and the] first Bishop of Toronto."

What, then, of his poetry? Much of it falls into the category of ceremonial or occasional verse. There is an elegy to Strachan's younger brother who died in Jamaica after taking part in an attempt to put down the "ferce Maroons," and there are poems for Strachan's students (he taught school before becoming a bishop).

A refreshing clerical humour peeps out toward the end of one such poem or some 300 lines entitled "The Day":

By dealing out some mental food,
I think I've done some little good;
And to sin, I lack'd the occasion,
Who does ill without temptation?

Most of these pleasant clunkers are written in ho-hum couplets or quatrains, often with an eye on Strachan's native Scotland ("our land"), and betraying more than a hint of bitterness that he was unable to find advancement there. Apart from a few poems written in jaw-breaking Scots showing the influence of Burns, and a few Byronic echoes in some of the later poems, what one misses most in this collection is more awareness of the contemporaneous English Romantic Movement. The partial catalyst appears to have been the publication of Scottish poet Thomas Campbell's *Gertrude of Wyoming* (1809), whose poetics Strachan admired, but whose politics he strongly opposed. Whereas Campbell glorifies the rebel Americans and vilifies the Loyalists and the Natives who fought alongside them, Strachan—a staunch monarchist convinced that the policy of the United States was "to exterminate the natives"—sought to set the record straight by writing his own poetical version of the matter.

The tragic protagonist of Strachan's major poem "The Missionary" is a half-breed named Logan, who (Wanda Campbell argues) is an amalgam of the historical John Logan and Joseph Brant, both of whom had suffered at the hands of the whites. The poem's antagonist, "Crafty Rankins," appears to be another amalgam, comprising two Detroit fur-traders named, respectively, "Rankins" and "Rankin," as well as (Campbell argues) a Congregationalist missionary named Samuel Kirkland. Strachan, whose own

motives were complicated by the fact that he was a royalist connected by marriage with wealthy Montreal fur-traders, is evidently attacking what he sees as the United States' duplicity towards the First Nations; but he leaves the geographical frame of reference sufficiently vague—[Lake] "Ontario's shore" could refer either to Upper Canada or upstate New York—that the poem may be said to attain a kind of backhanded universality. As Wanda Campbell observes, "in contrast to [Thomas] Campbell and others, who relied mainly on travel narratives . . . [Strachan] gathered information from his own experience and the testimonials of his friends. . . . Strachan believed in the human family."

Judging "The Missionary" as a poem, one cannot help but be impressed by the revisionist anger it shows over injustices inflicted by whites on the First Nations. Moreover, what Northrop Frye referred to as the romantic sense of God welling up from below can be seen in Strachan's empathetic portrayal of fur-bearing animals as victims, likewise striking a new note in his poetry:

In blankets chang'd for beaver robes they
dress,
And Rankins urges to begin the chase.
Impell'd by him, the warriors quickly fly
In quest of fame, and numerous martyrs
die.
The skilful beaver in his dam they watch,
And in their gyves the cunning foxes
catch. . . .

Rankins next gets the Indians so drunk that they begin killing one another, thus victimizing them as they have the animals. The Great Chain of Being is implicitly stood on its head.

Since Rankins is portrayed as a fur-trader rather than a missionary, it is

arguable that the poem's title, which Wanda Campbell concedes is problematic, could refer to both the protagonist, Logan, and, by a sort of self-reflexive irony, to Strachan himself, in his belated attempt to honour Joseph Brant's dying words: "Have pity on the poor Indians; . . . endeavour to do them all the good you can" (xxiv). Such an interpretation of "The Missionary"'s title finds support in the following passage:

The surly warriors Logan sends to spy
What foes advance while they in ambush
lie.
To Logan oft the dang'rous *mission*
[emphasis added] falls,
Where prudence keen a steady courage
calls. . . .

Like his real-life namesake, Logan has had some of his relatives massacred by whites, whom Strachan empathetically calls his "barb'rous foes." However one interprets this impressive poem, it is a hard-hitting indictment of the excesses of the fur-trade and the exploitation of the First Nations by white governments.

Partners in Crime

Margaret Atwood

Alias Grace. McClelland and Stewart \$32.50

Reviewed by Aritha van Herk

Quilting is an art that pulls together pieces of the past into a cover promising a warm future, and Atwood's employment of the quilt of experience as visual and textual metaphor for *Alias Grace* is wrought with a fine stitch and a deliberate hand. That inherent notion of recyclable piecework functions as an persuasive riposte to those who contend that Atwood should shun history, or that history is a territory for which her writing is not suited. Like Grace Marks, the Grace of the novel's title,

Atwood knows that a story depends on its teller and its listener more than its narrative content or setting, that control and design together create a field. And Atwood knows that the celebrated murderess, Grace Marks, is a superb set of patches from which to piece a quilt and quell contentious territorial histories.

Alias Grace speaks eloquently for Atwood's writing as chronicle of both past and future, a barometer of time and its testings. Of all the textual challenges that Atwood has risen to, this historiographic intervention takes on the syntax of the past in a brilliantly decisive way. Although decisive might appear to be the wrong evaluative phrase to employ, for this novel does not provide the reader with particular answers, either to the question of Grace Marks's innocence or guilt, or to the question of the presence of such murders in their own and in our time, Atwood convinces the reader that the story she relates is about listening and hearing, about the complex stitching of circumstances not always visible to the naked eye, not always plausible or clearly delineated. "Pick any strand and snip, and history comes unrav-elled," says the historian Tony in *The Robber Bride*. In *Alias Grace*, stitching and unravelling occur simultaneously, offering a wonderfully immediate sense of the purely arbitrary nature of history and its recordings. "Just because a thing has been written down . . . does not mean it is God's truth," says Grace, a subtle hint to those who would seek a historical re-verse or revision in this fiction.

As she has already demonstrated so often, Atwood's greatest writing skill is in her employment of narrative voice, the instrument by which a story is made public. Grace Marks tells her story to a fascinated (and distinctly prurient) listener, Dr. Jordan, who aims to make his reputation

as a psychological healer on her case. Resonant of the enigmatic Offred's story in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Grace's version is pragmatic and perceptive, aware of politics and the duplicities of manners, subtle and fascinating in its focus on tangible detail, but exercising also a silent double-text, an intricate awareness of what she should not and cannot say. In her telling, we readers are made privy to Grace's private construction of her story. And Atwood's rendering of Grace's construction is complex and brilliant, powerfully effective.

For all that she is the object of so much scrutiny (on the part of doctors and keepers, other inmates and the general public), Grace is herself a subtle snoop, "skilled at overhearing," and wary of the readings that others impose on her. It is difficult to be a "celebrated murderess," to live up to the expectations of those who want to peer and pry, of those who want to smell the blood of an acrid past. Grace is watchful, not quite skittish, more concerned with exercising a day-to-day caution that enables her to enjoy the small liberties she is permitted than with the larger concealment of her infamous crime. Grace's bargain with recovery becomes a poignant counterpoint to concealment, to necessity, to guilt and innocence and their configured articulations. Even more important, Grace's amnesia reiterates that events are inflected by more than memory, itself a construction, a fiction, a quilt.

Alias Grace invades the inaccuracies of confession, its narrative drive the promise of absolution. Both confessor and listener are subject to Grace Marks's pragmatism, what can only be seen as a down-to-earth perusal of inescapable events. Like the vegetables that Dr. Jordan tries to use as instruments to awaken her memory, Grace's remembrance and forgetting are

driven by survival, by sturdy realism in a world which wants to sink its teeth into fantasy. An apple or potato are solid, plausible objects with which to interrogate a murderess. But Grace's reading of them simulates her way of dealing with the disappointments of life. Throughout, she speaks the nostrums of her time, employing various saws and sayings—"necessity makes strange bedfellows," "kind words butter no parsnips"—using vegetable chores to counterbalance the extremities of her reputation. "Things do have a design if you only ponder them long enough," Grace claims. Lessons are available everywhere—in a parsnip, in a quilt pattern.

Alias Grace effectively sets out to test the limits of listening and hearing. For Grace's story to take shape, it requires a listener, and Dr. Jordan is only too eager to provide Grace with ears, his undivided attention. Gentle and empathetic as he appears to be, the doctor figures as listener, collector, invader, voyeur to Grace's story. "If I am to listen to you, you will have to talk to me," he asserts, but Grace is well aware that his offer is contingent, that there are other desires hidden beneath his desire to "help" her. The novel's premise, then, of a criminal Grace telling her story to an avuncular doctor, becomes a quilt that represents the dearth of listeners in a world of noise, of imagined perception, of black and white, of truth and its inscrutable permutations, of women as dangerous quilts, the fine stitching hiding a secret and subversive signature.

In eliciting Grace's story, it becomes clear that Dr. Jordan sees himself as combined confessor and conjurer, a man who knows how tricks are performed. But Jordan has not much practice; he is prone to deafness, has not learnt to read lips or to listen to subtleties, and he is upstaged by a more powerful (and certainly less inhibited)

conjurer, one for whom mesmerism is not a game but a means of survival. Placing the mesmerism scene so squarely in the position of solution, and then refusing to "solve" the question of Grace's involvement with the murder, Atwood manages one of the most brilliant narrative sleights of hand possible. At the same time, that pivotal moment in the novel reminds the reader that it does not do to trust any story too much, that every inquisitive reader is prurient.

Above all, the novel makes clear that readers need to take responsibility for their own voyeurism, for a pan-Victorian tendency to lick lips and to believe all the contradictory things that are said about Grace. Grace knows herself as a romantic figure on the basis of the elision between her as murderess and paramour. Sex and death are a stylish combination, a confection that no self-respecting pornographer can resist. And Grace personifies the public's ongoing macabre fascination with death; in any story, "the ladies must have blood, there is nothing delights them so much as a weltering corpse." Coming from the mouth of Thomas Kinnear (the man Grace allegedly murders), this statement can be read as mere irony, but in the larger context of *Alias Grace* itself, takes on a more sinister contemporary application. The reader, then or now, pants after the story of a celebrated murderess, and wants even more to hear the details of her seduction. That desire reveals every reader's susceptibility to mesmerism, as we are mesmerized along with Grace, by Grace, by the whole sad story, an alias reader cast in the role of salivating voyeur.

With Grace, Atwood continues to test her long expressed interest in the configurations of madness, its seductions and designations, its companion role to women. Grace inhabiting another's body

acts as a metaphor for how such experience can be shared. Within the steamy and over-dressed parlours of the mid-nineteenth century, the notion of women's volition becomes fraught with the genteel odour of laudanum and the circumscribed lives available. *Alias Grace* is an effective disquisition on the few choices possible for laundresses and housemaids, prostitutes and wives and landladies. Again, Atwood's touch is deft, slicing so thinly that the oblivious reader will hardly be aware that s/he is being offered a sharp lesson in the daily difficulties of women's lives, especially women without the advantages of husbands or money. More than any other Canadian writer, Atwood manages to work with social details, employing the daily aspects of history in a way that is superlatively informative, but without ever resorting to dictatorial teaching. The milieu that the novel enters is complete in its tiny stitchings, its very atmosphere breathing from the novel's patches.

The lesson of *Alias Grace* is embedded in the ongoing attraction/repulsion of the "criminal" woman. Everyone is afraid of Grace because a woman like her is a temptation. In that small acknowledgment, the reader must pinpoint her own wariness and interest. The temptation of such a character to both writer and reader, of which there are so many versions in this novel (whether doctor/listener/governor's wife, or the rabble milling about and eager to witness a hanging), is undeniable; that erotic fear makes readers resist the historical suspicion of this story, for it clairvoyants the present time and present readers, whose own fascination with death and dying is only too morbidly inescapable.

Like every Atwood fiction, *Alias Grace* does not let its audience off the hook. Being a "celebrated murderess" is much

like being a celebrated novelist/poet/writer, and weak readers peer at Atwood in much the same way that Dr. Jordan listens to Grace, with half an ear, waiting for the juicy bits. Who is the real voice speaking here? A mesmeric hypnotist? Who is the authority? Who writes the story? Is a contemporary audience as much to blame for the grisly fall of the axe as any murderer, simply by entertaining its telling? *Alias Grace* persuades us that the watcher and the watched are mutually responsible, and those sitting in judgment should be careful of their presence at the scene of the crime.

Living As Spirits

Sage Birchwater

Chiwid. New Star \$16.00

J. R. Miller

Big Bear (Mistahimusqua): A Biography. ECW \$14.95

Don Fiddler and Linda Jaine, eds.

Gatherings Vol. VI: The En'owkin Journal of First North American Peoples. Theytus Books \$12.95

Reviewed by Catherine Rainwater

The voices of Chilcotin people, both Native and non-Native, tell the fascinating story of Chiwid, also known as Lillie Skinner. When Chiwid was in her late twenties, she was beaten almost to death by her husband. She only partially recovered physically, and the emotional scars of an abusive marriage and earlier, familial dysfunction perhaps account for her subsequent aversion to society and the indoors. Chiwid survived on her own for the next fifty years in the rugged Chilcotin wilderness, where she apparently thrived on the barest essentials. Her remarkable ability to endure the harshest of winters with only a makeshift lean-to or a tarp to keep her warm made her the subject of

myth and legend. Locals often recall that animal sounds like those of a shapeshifter sometimes pierced the darkness in the vicinity of her camp. Chiwid was extremely shy, but many comment upon her stunning beauty and her obvious, radiant happiness. She rarely visited with people for more than a few minutes before she disappeared back into her element, and many believe that she lived more "as a spirit" than "as a body," for no one living primarily "as a body" could have endured as Chiwid endured.

Chiwid is a pleasure to read. It is an excellently constructed oral history that presents through diverse voices the story of Chiwid and the region she inhabited from 1903 until she died in her early eighties. These people's memories provide a rich, readerly experience of time, place, and personalities—the next best thing to actually visiting.

J. R. Miller's *Big Bear* recounts the story of a better known figure, the chief of a Plains Cree community in western Canada in the late nineteenth century. Mistahimusqua (his Cree name) was a traditional Indian—a powerful political force as well as a respected spiritual leader of his people—who lived at the height of Euro-Canadian immigration and settlement in his lands. Miller's biography is aimed at a general audience who might wish to learn for the first time about the Plains cultures of the past century and their difficult relationship with white settlers. Miller draws together previously published, more scholarly material on Big Bear and the period when he lived into a volume that, in this reviewer's opinion, would be especially well-suited for high school courses or for introductory courses in the university curriculum.

The original creative works of prose and poetry contained in volume six of *Gatherings: The En'owkin Journal of First*

North American Peoples range from those written by children to contributions from such notables as Jack Forbes and Greg Young-Ing. Subtitled "Metamorphosis: Manifesting and Respecting Diversity in Our Transformation," the volume features works by authors not only of different ages, but of different tribes and political views, as well. Some of the authors are published here for the first time, and many of these show promise.

A truly outstanding piece is Kateri Damm's "The Blackbird Cage," an apparently autobiographical narrative concerning the author's experiences with illness, healing, and death. "The Blackbird Cage" is poetically and richly nuanced, with many passages in a relatively short work of seven pages that a reader will want to linger over. Damm develops her central metaphor of a bird cage with the finesse of a verbal artist who understands the multivalent, aesthetic potential of language. The writer reveals her protagonist-narrator's growing spiritual maturity as the character learns about opening "the cage door" as the ultimate healing action for both departed and bereaved.

Tiffany Midge's poem, "Pieces of Glass Resembling a Human Heart," also deserves attention as a carefully wrought, sophisticated work of art. The speaker invokes the memory of her "Cousin Cookie," maker of star-quilts and healer of hearts: "She stitches Alice's heart with ancient/ strands of her grandmother's hair. The needles she uses are slivers of her children's bones." Cookie mends hearts, leaving "Pain" no "place to sleep." Midge's poems are witty, even as they deal with such serious, near-mystical subjects. One poem "1-900-Deliver Me," humorously melds Midge's gently satirical view of New Age nonsense with her obvious sympathy for disappointed spiritual seekers.

Two poems by Daniel David Moses included in this volume of *Gatherings* are also especially rewarding discoveries for the reader. "A Spell in the Red" and "Lines Upon the Flow" reveal the poet's deftly managed, self-conscious awareness of his medium in their metapoetical layering. Overtly, both poems deal with subjects other than writing poetry, but both are focused upon the ways in which the poet's sensitively attuned "ear" for life is one and the same with his "ear" for language. Overall, this volume of the En'owkin journal is well worth the time spent in browsing through it, discovering new authors and new works by known authors. The anger of oppressed people comes through the pieces in the collection powerfully and steadily; however, frequently and in all of the best works, this anger is transformed into the even more powerful instrument of art.

Improvisations and Rehearsals

E.D. Blodgett

Apostrophes: Woman at a Piano. BuschekBooks
\$14.95.

Reviewed by Jon Kertzer

Since E.D. Blodgett begins *Apostrophes* with an epigraph from Wallace Stevens ("... but plainly to propound"), I will offer one of my own:

On the motive! But one looks at the sea
As one improvises, on the piano.
("Variations on a Summer Day")

This collection of poetry offers a series of improvisations, through which the poet conducts an impassioned meditation by inspecting a generalized setting whose

decor is more or less romantic (water, wind, rose, rain, star, bird, tears, light). Looking at the world always has a motive—musical, perceptual, emotional—that makes thought lyrical. In these apostrophes, there is always an “I” addressing a “you,” whose presence is felt as a focus of attention, yearning or obsession, but whose identity is left vague. They all might be addressed to the same person, a loved one, friend or parent who has died, although death is not always implied. Perhaps these improvisations are also rehearsals: poetic hearses or elegies. Certainly the tone is often elegaic, and is strongly marked by the passing seasons, which appear more as mood and image than as subject. Perhaps the poems are all part of a single, sustained work—Blodgett’s “In Memoriam”—although I do not detect a progression through them. Another motive is falling: page after page presents a lapsing, subsiding, sinking or waning. A dying fall often echoes in the final lines:

Within my hands space cradles
infinities of roses, the fallen look of dark.

...

Recalling is a dying gesture,
cadences of hands
that keep the sun’s time, hands stroking
silence, and nothing more.

...

we are both of us asleep, the
silences of flowers
filling us, the ground where music in its
absence falls.

Another romantic motive shared with Stevens is intimacy: the desire to draw ever closer to an elusive reality that vanishes just as it is about to be seized. Through imagery of hands, grasping and gesturing, Blodgett reaches out to “touch” a scene, object or person with startling immediacy:

I want to open my mouth becoming
blue, becoming the dark, leaning into
stillness, touch touching touch.

At moments like this, he imagines the real as tactile and literal. He grasps reality as nothing but itself.

This is music of the merest
things — : of stones and wood and fallen
pieces of the earth.

But through a subtle paradox or shift in diction, the contact of mutual intimacy (“touch touching touch”) dissipates into abstraction. Thus the passage just quoted continues:

We cannot get away from this, you and I,
this music in
absentia, this utter innerness.

The merely physical reveals itself as metaphysical absence, as if reality has suddenly turned inside out.

What other finitudes am I to offer you but
these small stones,
being only what they are, and infinite
wearing away?

Finitude erodes infinitely. The humblest physicality becomes, not just the ground, but “an essence of the ground.” “Let me speak of simplest things,” he begins, only to discover the intricacy of things, of speaking and even of simplicity. For a poet of mere being, Blodgett is extraordinarily fond of the insubstantial. He cultivates negatives, silences and impossibilities, which tease him out of thought with intimations of purity, essence, immortality, eternity or divinity.

of music that could not find finality,
of music where the din dissolves, the

music of nothing outside
but music's desire unfolding into air.

...

No nearer can
we come to some divinity than this trans-
lation of the sun
bearing witness over us.

However, if Blodgett is in search of God, he gets no closer than this translation of light into silence.

He writes like a seasoned poet so confident of his own powers that he speaks with authority even when he declares himself disoriented. Partly the masterful tone arises from a rigorously controlled style. He composes in sturdy stanzas of six or seven lines, with long lines and longer sentences, which offer a rich, intense, dense texture to his meditations. The voice is compelling but oddly self-absorbed. This, too, could be an effect of mourning, although I offer the suggestion hesitantly. His monologues continually appeal beyond themselves to what cannot be said, yet they permit no intrusions. Their celebrations of remembered intimacies between "I" and "you" offer no invitation to the reader to join the interchange or to touch what the poet touches. It is easy for the reader to feel disoriented, too, because one poem sounds so much like another, and because there are few conventional markers, such as familiar places, dramatic meetings or declarations of intent, to offer guidance. The result is dazzling but daunting.



Remembering the Great War

Joanna Bourke

Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War. U of Chicago P \$32.50

Martha Hanna

The Mobilization of Intellect: French Scholars and Writers in the Great War. Harvard UP \$39.95

Reviewed by Peter Buitenhuis

Joanna Bourke's and Martha Hanna's books offer insights into lesser-known aspects of the Great War: respectively the image of the body and the contribution of French scholars and writers. The books belong more to the category of intellectual than to military history—a growing trend in the historiography of the war.

Joanna Bourke, a lecturer in economics and social history at Birkbeck College, University of London, has drawn on an extraordinary range of materials for her work—as the seventy-five pages of her notes and sources indicate. In fact the catholicity of those sources is sometimes overwhelming: she uses a shotgun to get at her target, rather than a rifle.

Most books about the Great War are about remembering: this one is about *dismembering*—"the impact of the First World War on the male body." At first sight this should be a simple proposition—shells, bullets, gas, flame-throwers, and other deadly weapons had a devastating impact on the vulnerable bodies of no less than 722,000 British soldiers killed in that war. But Bourke is more interested in "the social construction of masculinity" than the actual destruction of the body.

Bourke divides her work into five long chapters: "Multilating," "Malingering," "Bonding," "Inspecting," and "Re-membering." The risk of mutilation was greater in the First

World War than in any previous or subsequent one. There were five casualties for every nine men sent out. The effects of wounds were catastrophic for the men, their families, and the state. On the eve of World War II, 419,000 men were still being paid disability pensions. During and after the war, ex-soldiers took preference over those who had been injured at work. This generated a good deal of bitterness among the the civilian disabled. By the mid-1920s, however, ex-soldiers, like crippled civilians, had been consigned to the ranks of the passive and the useless—on the scrapheap of history.

Malingering was a more complex issue. In order to save their bodies from potential dismemberment, according to Bourke, 21 soldiers out of every 10,000 deserted in the year after October 1914. The rate fluctuated between 6 and 9 every 10,000 for the rest of the war. Given the nature of the Great War this strikes me as a surprisingly low number. There were of course less dramatic ways of escaping the front lines. Feigning sickness or insanity, self-inflicted wounds, hiding, forging signatures, and many other tricks by artful dodgers no doubt inflated the numbers of malingerers who went unreported. Of the 3080 condemned to death for desertion and other crimes in the British Army, however, only 11% were executed—which indicates the reluctance on the part of the authorities to invoke the ultimate penalty, as well as a desire not to tarnish the reputation of a regiment. Shell shock, or neurasthenia as it was called, was a more difficult form of complaint to diagnose and treat. In 1916, neurasthenia accounted for 40% of the casualties in combat zones. Since more officers than men went down with neurasthenia, it would have been politically difficult to accuse these men of cowardice. In fact the dominant view in

medical hospitals was that most men diagnosed as neurasthenics could not be accused of malingering.

“Bonding”: this strikes me as a dubious category in the context of dismembering, but Bourke uses the chapter to question the prevalent idea that the war caused the overthrow of male inhibitions and led to the growth of close male companionship. She claims that, although war experience may have injected a new intensity into masculine relationships, these same experiences ultimately crushed such sentiments. Her evidence is not particularly convincing. While it is true that divisions between rank, class, race, and region, and even between regiments, militated against bonding, close relationships did develop between men in units—as her own evidence suggests. Men became *members* of a section, platoon, company, and a regiment, and frequently relied intensely on their pals (an omnipresent Great War term) for support in battle and comradeship behind the lines.

“Inspecting” is a more persuasive chapter, although I would say that it has less to do with dismembering than with remembering the body. Since the Boer war there was a widespread belief that the British race was degenerating. At the outset of the Great War many were rejected for service on physical grounds. Using four categories of fitness, medical examiners discovered that 42% of recruits fell into the last two grades. Needless to say, as the war went on, these categories were less and less rigorously applied. Military drill and plentiful food rapidly improved the physique of many of the men who joined the armed services. Moreover the pursuit of fitness through physical training became for the first time an essential ingredient for preparing men for battle. Behind the front the men were often organized to play

competitive games as a means of sustaining both fitness and morale

The last chapter, "Re-membering," goes into the post-war period and examines how the nation set about evoking the dead in civic and religious rites. The elaborate rites attached to the burial of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey was a way not only of commemorating but also of sanitizing death. Such sanitizing of the brutal reality of death in the trenches was also carried out by the Imperial War Graves Commission, which pioneered the idea of mass grave sites in which identical crosses in neat rows surrounded by manicured lawns and gardens gave the illusion of permanent peace to relations and friends. Spiritualism also gained enormously in popularity after the war, as it seemed to affirm continued 'existence' in another sphere.

Bourke concludes by asserting that, despite fundamental differences between the experiences of officers and men, the war saw a narrowing in the way men of all classes "experienced their corporeality" and led to a sharing of gender identities. Class barriers may have broken down to some extent, but it seems to me that the imposition of the income tax and the sharing of the work of war had more to do with that change than the experience of corporeality. Nevertheless, this book is a challenging look at some shibboleths of the Great War.

In *The Mobilization of Intellect* Martha Hanna, a historian at the University of Colorado, analyzes the way in which French scholars and writers reacted to the Great War. In October, 1914, they were galvanized into action by the publication of "An Appeal to the Civilized World" by a number of leading German scholars and writers. The appeal was a thoroughgoing attempt to justify Germany's embarking on the war.

French writers on the left and right united in vilifying this document. Subsequent discussions seldom showed such unity. French scholars quarreled over the contribution made by Kant to German nationalism, and then divided over the relevance of the classical and the modern curriculum to the survival of French culture. *The Mobilization of Intellect* elaborately, and rather bloodlessly, analyzes these debates which raged on while in the trenches men fought for their very survival. Hanna argues that nevertheless the contribution of the intellectuals "positively influenced morale both behind the lines and at the front."

Hanna pays little attention to the propaganda churned out by some of these intellectuals—much of it bloodthirsty and revengeful; nor does she give much space to Romain Rolland or Henri Barbusse, who tried to present opposing arguments. Rolland argued against the intellectuals on both sides of the Rhine who abandoned their objectivity to become handmaidens of the state; Barbusse tried to demonstrate the futility and waste of the war as it was being waged. As Hanna admits, many in the front lines believed that the intellectuals should have kept silence during the war, and taken time to visit the front line, abandoning for a while their comfortable offices. But she claims that the highly educated front-line troops were not nearly as disaffected with the intellectuals as they were in England. Instead, she claims, the mobilization of intellect "did not alienate combatants from non-combatants; in the main it united them."

Be that as it may, she does not deny that the intellectual mobilization had some unfortunate post-war consequences. The study of German culture and language practically dropped out of school and university curricula, and some writers even

ridiculed the achievements of German scientists and technologists. In reaction to modernism—identified with German culture—the school curriculum was redirected towards classical education. This reaction had consequences for the fate of France in World War II, as the conservative republicans joined forces with neo-royalists to repudiate the cosmopolitan, rationalist, and moderate aspirations of the Third Republic. These reactionaries paved the way for an inward-looking defensive nationalism that ensured the defeat of France and the installation of the Vichy government.

Like Joanna Bourke, Martha Hanna has gone to many obscure sources to flesh out her arguments, and she demonstrates a sure command of her material. She would have done well, however, to dramatize the issues in order to lend more colour to debates that were surely carried on with all the fervour that the French are capable of in matters of the intellect.

In a Minor Key

Elizabeth Brewster

Footnotes to the Book of Job. Oberon n.p.

Reviewed by Linda Lamont-Stewart

Elizabeth Brewster has been publishing poetry for over half a century. In 1985 Oberon published her *Selected Poems* in two volumes, 1944-1977 and 1977-1984. *Footnotes to the Book of Job*, published in 1995, may be seen as an extension of the *Selected*, offering selections from the three volumes of poetry Brewster published between 1985 and 1995, as well as a group of new poems not previously published in book form. While the *Selected* is arranged chronologically by decade, the latest volume is arranged in reverse chronological

order, moving from new poems back through selections from the preceding three volumes. Thus, reading through the poetry here, one works back towards the point at which the *Selected* concludes.

In "Cloud Formations," the speaker responds to the question, "Why write poems?" by recollecting her childhood recognition of her poetic vocation, and goes on to remark, "All the years since / there have been these / written conversations." Readers familiar with Brewster's earlier work will recognize the conversational voice in this volume—thoughtful, meditative, often melancholy, occasionally celebratory, marked by a dry and subtle wit. Her thematic concerns will also be recognizable: the loneliness of the isolated individual; the inexorable passage of time and its accompanying losses; the beauty of the natural world; the necessity and difficulty of faith. Familiar motifs recur: imagery drawn from dreams; the cycle of the seasons of both nature and the Christian calendar; memories of family and friends who have died; reflections on contemporary events; allusions to admired writers.

Stylistically, Brewster's work is deceptively simple and straightforward. She writes primarily free verse, usually in relatively short lines shaped by natural speech rhythms; there is in her work, however, an acute awareness of form. "Marching Feet" begins,

Back in those early days
when I first wrote verses
I wanted couplets, quatrains, villanelles,
sonnets, Spenserians, everything difficult,
rhymed mostly, but at least a good blank
verse. . . .

The next stanza asserts the speaker's hard-won independence from traditional poetic form:

Escaped, made my own line
 (a balance
 not as easy as it looked).

The speaker goes on to contemplate going back to "essay those forms again": the following two poems, "The World's Age" and "Reflections," are sonnets; a later poem, "To Spenser, Who Wrote of Mutability," expresses nostalgia for the "antique virtues" celebrated in the sixteenth-century poet's verse in four elegant Spenserian stanzas. Throughout Brewster's work one encounters the occasional poem written in regular metre and rhyme. More often, though, she employs her own line; it is not without artifice, but her devices are unobtrusive.

The melancholy sense of time's passing which has marked Brewster's work from the 1940s onwards is not surprisingly intensified in her most recent volume. Frequently the speaker in these poems remarks on her advancing age and displays an acute awareness of her own mortality; her sadness is, however, tempered by awareness of the beauty of the world and the possibility of redemption. The title poem, "Footnotes to the Book of Job," is a sequence of twenty-one brief lyrics which recount and comment on the Biblical narrative of Job's trials. As she contemplates Job's story, the speaker is aware of the great gulf between the contemporary world and that of the Biblical account, between a contemporary moral vision and the Old Testament God, who is just yet unjust, and finally unfathomable. In one segment, she dreams of offering up a modern burnt offering of newspapers:

What for?

To tell the All-Knowing
 what goes on here
 on this small planet, agony
 columns touching the sky?

The speaker, in search of consolation in a world which is both beautiful and cruel, wonders whether the beauty can compensate for the cruelty:

No answer is possible.

An answer is not required.
 If an answer comes
 it will be only a touch.

"Let not your heart be troubled."

But it is.

Although Brewster has been writing sensitive, intelligent and artful verse for many years, her work has received little critical attention. The speaker in "On Minor Poets (23 May)" comments wryly on this situation. Recalling Pound's description of Yeats as "the greatest minor poet who ever lived," she is "cheered / (for a reviewer has called me a minor poet / and who would not be minor with Yeats?)" Brewster's poems are written largely in a minor key, but the body of work that she has produced over a lifetime of recording events, thoughts, feelings, moods, sensations, is surely a major achievement.

Visions and Voices

Shannon Cooley, ed.

Eye Wuz Here: Stories By Women Writers Under 30. Douglas and McIntyre \$19.95

Reviewed by Laurie Kruk

The psychedelic cover swirls its title, *Eye Wuz Here: Stories by Women Writers Under 30*, like spray-painted graffiti. The book echoes "Kilroy was here," and displays just a hint of "attitude" borrowed from "Riot Grrls," the latest female punk movement. So this collection of twenty-eight stories

boldly announces both its youthful outlook and its feminist spirit. Editor Shannon Cooley put out a national call for stories in 1993, when she was a student in the Creative Writing Program at University of Victoria. This book is the result. While suggesting "Generation X" angst, this group of stories is more importantly, for Cooley, work of "the first generation of women to be born into a dominant culture influenced by feminism....[Y]oung women have developed a sometimes contradictory, sometimes in-your-face culture of our own. Beyond the commercialism, convenient mythologies and lazy labelling are the stories of a generation of young women fully capable of identifying ourselves and our world" ("Particular Eyes: Mixed Messages from the Wall"). Cooley is wise to recognize her contributors' ambivalent responses to a world at once full of choices for women, and also confusingly complex. Yet, though her introduction starts with reference to the particularity of this collection's "vision"—and note how tropes of vision and voice continue to be drawn upon by female artists—it ends with the hope of furthering understanding: "Through sharing point of view comes empathy, and through empathy, the lessening of loneliness and isolation—a goal common to all art and literature—and an important facet in the process of working towards positive change." It is not surprising, then, that Cooley chooses the words of Margaret Laurence as an epigraph—way of linking this group of Canadian female writers with a revered Canadian foremother. (Continuing the inter-generational dialogue, the dedication is to the editor's grandmother, and the final story, "Home Free," offers a portrait of one woman's distinctively rendered Nana.)

Divided into four parts using suggestive

titles taken from the stories, the collection defies simple thematic divisions, although these titles hint at different attitudes or proclivities the writers share: investigation and curiosity, pragmatism and anger, reflection and forgiveness, tenderness and trust. True to her introduction, Cooley includes a diverse assortment of writers, ranging from the established and acclaimed (Karen Connolly, Larissa Lai, Hiromi Goto, Lesley-Anne Bourne) to several barely post-adolescent writers who blend precocious talent with slightly self-absorbed perceptions (Amanda Hathaway Jernigan, Jenna Newman). Diversity of experience in terms of cultural/class background also is a factor in this anthology, enlarging the usual middle-class WASP perspective that weakens feminist initiatives. Mostly, though, there is evidence of diversity of style, and range of possibilities within the short story form. Although more of these stories than I would have expected—judging a book by its cover!—are delivered in the realist mode Margaret Laurence used, the anthology does not shy away from experimental prose, veering towards prose poem or performance piece. Nor does it retreat from difficult subjects: sexual abuse ("That's My Girl," "Cerebus and the Rain"), emotional breakdown associated with women's rigid gender roles ("Bonfire Angels," "The Curse," "Uncertain Angles") or family breakdown, betrayal and loss ("Glass Anatomy," "A Real Present," "Outrunning," "Write Me Sometime"). References to blood—menstrual, hymenal, spilled blood—reappear regularly, an index of female, as well as human, physicality. However, this is not a collection which reinforces simplistic notions of women as "victims." The treatment of peer relations is frequent here—perhaps given the age group of the contributors—and female friendship and

intimacy is given equal attention in stories such as “Living Dangerously,” “Canadian Culture 201,” “Nosebleed,” “The Catwalk,” “The Peacock Hen.” Erotic connections between women are portrayed in styles ranging from the lyrical (“The Pool”) to the buoyantly utopian (“Sista to Sista”) to the epic (“Esmeralda”). Humour is possible here, too, as in T. J. Bryan’s exploration of “gaydar”: “My one real friend at work, Leslie, a short blue-Black woman with serious granola-lesbian leanings and reddish locks reaching halfway down her back, always looks for natural hair and sensible footwear. ‘When you are *confused*, check out girlfriend’s *do* and her *shoes*,’ she always says” (“Sista to Sista”).

Some gestures in the direction of commonalities are called for in such a project—and in reviewing it. It is worth remarking, for instance, that twenty of the stories are related in the first person voice. Without replaying simplistic equations between writer and persona, this fact seems to point to a greater emphasis on subjectivity, intimacy and individuality. Is this emphasis a function of gender, or of age? Or of neither—simply a popular literary convention of contemporary writers? I don’t know, but the collection title does assert that the “I/eye” is an important element in this world of young women writers. Perhaps, as feminist critics have speculated, women writers have a greater need than men to establish a “voice”—which must be done before this voice can be subverted, critiqued, fragmented. Similarly, more of the stories are in the realist mode than not, though there are interesting and provocative experiments from Shannon Cooley, and her comical schizoid drama between three “heads” (“Cerebus and the Rain”). Suzanne Buffam’s “In the Red” offers a witty meditation on the connections between three

generations of women and the way the colour red symbolizes female danger, desire and transgression. Nick Nolet’s “Bonfire Angels” sustains the other-worldly observations of a “mad” woman, fighting her female flesh, her victimization, in remarkable observations like: “As youth recedes into the background, lining the brain as pictures in a photo album, an amalgamation of class pictures and counting rhymes, first steps, first teeth, etc.—so does the paradise of pure fantasy, the ability to read more into clouds than mere clouds, the ability to project yourself into the fairy robes, into the crown, into the wedding procession.”

I enjoyed this collection. It promised diversity, energy, talent and an emphasis on women’s lives today. It did not disappoint. Margaret Laurence would be proud of the way in which the next generation has learned to record, describe and celebrate “the sight of [their]own particular eyes.” So our female literary heritage continues to grow.

Wilderness Dwellers

Chris Czajkowski

Diary of a Wilderness Dweller. Orca \$15.95

Betty Shiver Krawczyk

Clayoquot: The Sound of My Heart. Orca \$16.95

Reviewed by Rebecca Raglon

British Columbia is blessed with so many remote mountains, fjords, and valleys, that even in the declining years of the twentieth century, a few intrepid souls may still venture into these areas and find solitude, genuine adventure, and a chance to recreate their lives. Such stories are not entirely rare, and the tale of a former urbanite transformed into a wilderness dweller can be found in books such as

Theodora Stanwell-Fletcher's *Driftwood Valley*, Tommy Walker's *Spatsizi*, and Isabel Edward's *Ruffles on my Longjohns*. Features of this wilderness genre usually include an account of an intense struggle to put up shelter and pack in supplies before winter arrives, descriptions of visits from other backwoods dwellers, surprise encounters with animals, and close calls of various sorts. Depending on the skill of the author, stories of homesteading in the wilderness range from enthralling to downright dreadful.

Chris Czajkowski's *Diary of a Wilderness Dweller* is a compelling, briskly told story. It is a sequel to *Cabin at Singing River* (1991) which was also about a struggle to build a home in a remote (roadless) area. In her latest book, though, she is really on her own, with no near neighbor to help with raising the roof beams. This time she is also at a higher elevation, has staked a claim to the land where she hopes to build, and has future plans to run a guiding operation from her new location just east of the southern end of Tweedsmuir Park. Although she is only forty miles from her old homestead this is new country, both harsher and more open than the valley she inhabited earlier, and surrounded by swampy meadows. The trees appear stunted and oddly shaped—which adds to the difficulty of building a log cabin—and it is only after she has built her cabin that she realizes she has built in a wind tunnel.

What is most attractive about Czajkowski as a writer is her lack of pretension. She never looms over the landscape: her hopes, desires, memories, and despairs for the most part remain out of sight. While this might initially seem to be a drawback in that it is difficult to “know” such a narrator, this discretion, in the end, becomes the book's greatest strength.

Czajkowski is no wilderness philosopher—rhapsodies over sunsets and mountain vistas seem hard-earned when grabbed between swats at black flies, and the necessity to tread lightly on the land is hardly an exciting new insight for most readers. What is worth noting, though, is the unusual seamlessness of Czajkowski's life: lake, tree, home, fire are clearly made of a single fabric. While there are other people in this book, they are consigned to bit parts. And perhaps that's the point—they are only part of what composes “life” in a wild area. As if to underscore this point, life at Czajkowski's homestead is busy and full even without conversations to record. She worries about the ginger-colored bear haunting her camp site, she sees a moose on a small island in her lake, and she battles the mice who want to share the good life with her inside her cabin. At one point she notes that she is not the “only creature hauling material endlessly back and forth” when she sees a squirrel wrestling with his own burden—a large dried mushroom—as he, too, prepares for winter.

This dedication to an unfragmented, whole way of living is further emphasized by an exchange with a bush pilot who delivers supplies to her. He urges her to improve her landing wharf by cutting a dead snag that the plane's wing brushed against. But Czajkowski rebels. “I love this snag. It is elegant and unusual” and it appeals to her artistic sense. Later she reflects that she lives in “what must be the only society in the world to separate art from life and condemn it as unnecessary frill, or, even worse, a hobby.”

In the final pages of the book Czajkowski travels to Toronto for an awards ceremony for magazine writing. On the trip, she is interviewed by Peter Gzowski on “Morningside.” On her way out she notices the time, and realizes that, including the

twenty minutes she spent cooling her heels, she had been inside the CBC building for only three-quarters of an hour: "And therein lies the only major difference between my life and anyone else's. At home, three-quarters of an hour is hardly time to say hullo. In Toronto, it constituted a complete episode of my life." Part of the interest in accounts such as these is that they allow the reader a chance to fantasize about escape from such hectic, urban life, and the comfort of knowing that alternatives to the ever growing "global village" do in fact exist.

Betty Shiver Krawczyk's *Clayoquot: The Sound of My Heart* is an autobiographical account of how she came to live on ten acres of land overlooking Cypress Bay, and, more to the point, became involved in the blockades set up to stop clearcutting in the area. The bulk of the book covers her life in Louisiana (where she was born and raised), Arizona, Virginia, and Ontario, the birth of eight children, the men in her life, her struggles against war, racism, and sexism. Along the way she wrote for "true confession" magazines, and her prose here is laced with expressions obviously gleaned from both her southern background and writing career. In these pages there's plenty of swooning and trouble abrewing, sassing and raising hell, and lots of cornbread, and turnip greens. At one point in the narrative she's not sure whether or not the two trees shading her turnip patch in Cypress Bay will have to be sacrificed—"I am a Canadian citizen now, but my stomach still holds citizenship in Louisiana."

Much of the narrative hinges on the idea of "awakening"—the emergence of a feminist out of an oppressive, bigoted, Southern background—and Krawczyk writes of crucial encounters with people and books that awakened her to other

ideas. At the same time there is evidence throughout that this woman was no timid shrinking violet, and that for most of her life she did as she pleased, and damn the consequences. At the end of her book, though, after spending four and a half months in jail for her part in the blockade, she finds that she has lost her optimism. When she returns home to Cypress Bay she feels life in the cove has turned away from her. What more can she do, she wonders: "I'm only one person, for Pete's sake, and an old lady at that." The answer to her despair comes from her human ties: ashamed that she had ever grown tired, she ends the book with a affirmation of love for her children and grandchildren, and a renewed determination to fight for them, "for Cypress Bay, for the Clayoquot Sound, for the earth itself, for life."

Ferron and the Other

Jacques Ferron

Le Contentieux de l'Acadie. VLB Editeur \$19.95

Ginette Michaud, ed.

L'Autre Ferron. Fides \$34.95

Reviewed by Mary Ellen Ross

While a posthumous compilation of Quebec author Jacques Ferron's writings about l'Acadie and a voluminous collection of new studies of Ferron's work might appear at first glance to have in common only the name "Ferron"—admittedly one of the most important names in Quebec literature of this century—each of these books testifies to the complexity of Ferron's work, its tortuous intertextuality, and the author's fascination with questions of identity and otherness.

Le Contentieux de l'Acadie contains little that is new, but its editors have conscientiously combed through Ferron's work to

assemble the various texts that deal with Acadia and the Acadians. After attending a Moncton conference on mental retardation in 1966, Ferron wrote a series of one-page articles about his trip for the periodical *L'Information médicale et paramédicale* and a further two articles for *Le Maclean*. He also authored prefaces to two of Antonine Maillet's works, *Les Crasseux* and *La Veuve enragée*, reviewed Régis Brun's *La Mariécorno*, and fired off letters to the editor of *La Presse* after Louis Robichaud's election as the first Acadian premier of New Brunswick in 1960. It is clear that Ferron's interest in Acadia was longstanding and that his perspective was consistently that of a Quebec author.

Pierre L'Hérault notes, in his introduction to a section of this book which describes Ferron's uneasy encounter with a lecture audience at the University of Moncton in 1972, that the Acadian intelligentsia perceived some grounds for accusing Ferron of imagining Acadia in relation to a set of Quebec parameters. As L'Hérault puts it, Ferron's vision of Acadia is like a fragmented mirror image which reflects, among other things, the author's quest for his own "uncertain country" of Quebec.

Le Contentieux de l'Acadie also provides an insight into Ferron's working method: readers familiar with *Les Roses sauvages* will recognize in the vignettes from *L'Information médicale et paramédicale* a "draft" version of episodes in the novel. The studies contained in *L'Autre Ferron* explore Ferron's use of such fragments as well as a much wider range of questions.

L'Autre Ferron is an indispensable book for anyone interested in Ferron. It includes studies by well-known scholars and by graduate students, using a variety of approaches, but all of high quality. Among the threads that run through the book is that of Ferron as a voracious and occa-

sionally duplicitous reader. Ginette Michaud's brilliant essay deserves to be singled out in this regard: quoting previously unpublished extracts from Ferron's correspondence, she reveals a writer fascinated by those authors who, like him, are literary mediators or intermediaries between two cultures. The Ferron she studies is a complex, "double" figure, avowedly the opposite in literary taste and vocation of his own political persona, a writer whose correspondence reveals him to have been profoundly affected by such works as Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, yet who remained a staunch opponent of the federal policy of official bilingualism and a champion of the French language in Quebec.

Questions of intertextuality resurface in essays by Pascale Sirard and Pierre L'Hérault: Sirard analyzes the Narcissus figure in Ferron's work, while L'Hérault's article on generation, death and identity in *Le Saint-Elias* points out the importance of the Baroque writer Rotrou for Ferron. Marcel Olscamp provides a biographical study of the intellectual influences Ferron felt during the formative years he spent as a young doctor in the Gaspé. Jean-Pierre Boucher's contrastive reading of two key *contes* calls into question a tendency on the part of editors and scholars to group together all of Ferron's tales, regardless of their original publication in distinct collections. The novel *Le Ciel de Québec* as epic and rehabilitation of the past is the subject of an article by François Chaput. And Ferron's translator Betty Bednarski reflects on "Englishness" and problems of translation in his work.

Ferron scholars will be interested in Patrick Poirier's presentation of previously unpublished extracts from the unfinished work *Le Pas de Gamelin*, a perceived failure which, for a variety of reasons, haunted Ferron. Add to all this letters

between Ferron and his editor Clément Marchand, and others written to his translator Ray Ellenwood, as well as the text of an interview Ferron gave to Pierre L'Hérault in 1982, and the result is a veritable feast for the reader.

In her preface to *L'Autre Ferron*, Ginette Michaud notes that Ferron's literary legacy now seems assured. Although Ferron's work has yet to receive in English Canada the attention it deserves, and that European scholars have already granted it, the ongoing publication of posthumous works and of new scholarship in Quebec can only confirm that judgement.

Oral Tradition in Print

Joan Finnigan

Dancing at the Crossroads. Quarry Press \$16.95

Alice Kane

The Dreamer Awakes. Broadview \$24.95

Reviewed by J.R. Wytenbroek

The renowned Irish-Canadian story-teller Alice Kane has collected seventeen of her best tales in *The Dreamer Awakes*. She calls them "wonder tales," tales that relate the wonder of life, of the human spirit, to the listener or reader. We know these tales more commonly as fairy tales, yet Kane's term seems to capture the essence of tales which do, indeed, evoke wonder.

In a time of computers, telecommunications and digital technology, when so many of us in the north live in urban centres far removed from the direct influences of the natural world, Kane's wonder tales are refreshing. Unlike many fairy-tale versions, there is a playfulness in Kane's tales which lifts the heart even while reminding us of the importance of the courage, strength, determination and passion of the human spirit, elements of ourselves that become so

easily under-valued in our non-stop, information-packed society. We have exalted our minds above the rest of ourselves, and Kane's tales remind us that to be truly functional, we must reintegrate our minds, bodies, hearts and spirits into one whole, nourishing each part so that the other parts can function properly. The simplicity and beauty of Kane's tales remind us about our humanness, and remind us that qualities such as courage, hope and passion are as relevant to and needed in our world today as they were in the dark and difficult lives of the Irish and Russian peasants who first told many of these wonder tales in the Middle Ages. Through these tales, Kane reminds us that no matter how dark our own times are, there is always the hope that some determined, brave younger daughter or youngest son will outsmart the powers of darkness once again.

Although the wonder tales in *The Dreamer Awakes* are obviously from the oral tradition, they work well as written tales for the most part. The frequent repetition of phrases in dialogue becomes tedious at times in print, which it would not in the oral telling. However, this is a minor problem overall. The tales are told with the rhythm of the spoken word and retain a freshness and immediacy too often missing in the retelling of fairy tales. Although these tales will be enjoyed by children, this book is aimed at adults, and perhaps in our time, it is the adults who need the wonder tale the most.

Another writer of Irish descent, Joan Finnigan, has also recently published a book of tales, entitled *Dancing at the Crossroads*. These tales are very different from Kane's, however. Set in an imaginary town in the Ottawa valley, they chronicle the lives of the Irish who settled there generations ago, most taking up farming. She sets most of the stories in the early twentieth

century, but some are set later in the century, making it difficult for the reader to find continuity amongst the stories. Indeed, the main link is that the stories are about the people of Lost Nation, and that most if not all are of Irish descent.

The tone of the tales differs also. From the amusing exploits of wild Lenore O'Donnell in "A Blossom Gathered in No Man's Land" to the sad and surprising decline of newly-widowed Brye Costello in "How Old Brye Came Down from The Mountain" to the poignant yet passionate love of old Bille for his land in "A Simple Life," the tales reflect the vagaries and variety of human existence and relationships. They are simple tales, well told for the most part, with the occasional startling image, but without the oral cadence of Kane's writing.

Unfortunately, the order of the stories was badly chosen. The first tale in the book, "The Woman Who Named All Her Cows" is the one that remains most clearly in the mind. It is the story of Gilleen McGarrity, a seventy-nine year old woman who has been kept a virtual prisoner in her home all her life, first by her emotionally abusive father and then by her emotionally and sexually abusive brother. The story is so ugly and sordid that it remains in the mind after the gentler stories have faded, souring the memory of the book. Many readers may not read past that first dark tale, which is a pity given the beauty of many of the rest of the tales, tales which give the reader a quick but profound glimpse into the lives of a proud people who once formed one sub-culture in the fascinatingly varied land of Canada.



History and Writing in Indonesia

Nancy K. Florida

Writing the Past, Inscripting the Future. History as Prophecy in Colonial Java. Duke UP \$18.95

Susan Rodgers

Telling Lives, Telling History. Autobiography and Historical Imagination in Modern Indonesia. U California P \$70.00/\$25.00

Reviewed by Tineke Hellwig

The average reader in Canada may not be very familiar with literature from Indonesia. He or she may not even know where to locate this archipelago geographically, or how to frame it historically and culturally. Those who have been introduced to Indonesian literature most likely have read translated works of modern fiction, such as Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Quartet from Buru: *This Earth of Mankind*, *Child of All Nations*, *Footsteps*, and *Glass House*, or Mochtar Lubis's *Twilight in Jakarta*, or one of the many publications by the Lontar Foundation, amongst others the anthologies *Menagerie 1* and *2* (ed. John H. McGlynn). Indonesian poetry, too, has found its way to readers of English, most notably poems by the revolutionary Chairil Anwar (*The Voice of the Night*) and by W.S. Rendra (*Ballads and Blues: Poems*), who every so often finds himself arrested when he expresses a dissident opinion. More recently, scholars in Australia, one of Indonesia's closest neighbours, have made writings by women available in English, e.g. *Women's Voices* (ed. Pamela Allen) and *Letters From Kartini* (ed. Joost Coté).

The two books under review examine non-fictional texts from Indonesia. These thorough studies by American researchers are intended for experts in the field. Susan Rodgers discusses two autobiographical

narratives from the island of Sumatra, whereas Nancy Florida examines a historical poem in Javanese. Both authors offer fluently written translations of the original works. More importantly, however, is that through their approach to the texts they engage in a discussion around issues of history, national identity, and post-colonial discourse.

Rodgers presents the reader with two childhood memoirs published in 1950. *Me and Toba* by P. Pospos and *Village Childhood* by Muhamad Radjab give an account of what life was like growing up from the mid-1910s to the 1930s in North and West Sumatra respectively. The worlds of the two boys differ in substantial ways: Pospos is born into the Christian Toba Batak community which is patrilineal, while Radjab's Muslim Minangkabau society is matrilineally organized. Both areas, however, are part of the Dutch East Indies and the boys go through a series of similar experiences. Relating their passage through childhood into maturity, they reflect upon their families and crowded households in small village settings, their personal relationships with their fathers, Dutch colonial education, and the influential role of religion and local customs in their communities. The issue of language is an essential one, too. Both authors have chosen to write their memoirs in the national language, Indonesian, rather than in Batak or Minangkabau. And it is precisely the awareness of their respective individual identities, connected with the imaging of a modern society, that is an independent nation free of Dutch control and not restricted by narrow ethnic traditions, which is at the heart of both narratives. By writing about their childhood years in late colonial times Pospos and Radjab foreshadow the future of an imagined Indonesia.

Here we find parallels between the study of Rodgers and of Florida. *Writing the Past, Inscripting the Future* is an admirable study of the anonymous epic poem in Javanese, *Babad Jaka Tingkir*, which relates events during the time when Java was converted to Islam, around the turn of the 16th century. It is the text's prophetic tendencies, however, which compelled Florida to this research. She discovered the manuscript among the correspondence of the Sultan of Surakarta (1807-1849) who was sent into internal exile to the island of Ambon by the Dutch in 1830. The manuscript is incomplete as it abruptly breaks off in mid-sentence even before the protagonist Jaka Tingkir has fully emerged in the story. Florida finds indications in the text which lead her to believe that this manuscript was written on Ambon between 1848 and 1850, and that its author was either the Sultan himself or his daughter who was with him in exile. In the second stanza of the poem there is the confusion as to the dating of the writing. Then there are four pen and ink drawings which suggestively interpolate the text and refer to a dream of the young king in exile. Florida argues that the *Babad Jaka Tingkir* be read as the prophecy of the young Sultan's fate to live and die in exile. A number of episodes in the poem foreground the potential scenarios of the future for Java and disclose that the writing of history is writing the future.

In my view Florida has successfully given meaning to "a text that itself both explicitly and implicitly questions the centrality of any center that would attempt to exclude margins" in order to "provoke a stutter in the universalizing projects of a dominant discourse that effaces marginal voices even as it would speak for exoticized others." Through these studies both Florida and Rodgers make literary texts from Indonesia a serious part of post-colonial discourse.

The Narrative Cure

Charles Foran

Butterfly Lovers. Harper Collins \$27.00

Bill Gaston

Bella Combe Journal. Cormorant \$18.95

Reviewed by David Leahy

As in their previous novels and other writings, Charles Foran's *Butterfly Lovers* is often at its best when it explores the tensions between individuals from different cultures and Bill Gaston's *Bella Combe Journal* is often most pleasurable when it glides back and forth between realistic exaggeration and the fantastic.

Butterfly Lovers' protagonist is David Leclair, an epileptic who is in constant denial about his condition. He abandons his love/hate relationship with his mother, his increasingly alienated relationship with his divorced wife and estranged daughter, his HIV-positive best friend, the ethno-language war in Québec, and his insularly comfortable "Groucho Marxist" world in Montréal's multicultural Mile End district, to escape to China as a teacher of English. Ivan, David's dying friend, provocingly says: "You think you're going to China to do some good. To be of help to those people." David categorically denies it: "I'm going only for myself. Because I need to. It has nothing to do with being good or helping anyone. It's not about that." In spite of himself, however, once David gets to China his being good to himself inevitably entails trying to help others; most noticeably Wang Hua, a dissident student who videotaped the Tianamen massacre and is eventually arrested, and Zhou Hong, a foreign affairs officer at David's Beijing college and the love interest of the story. Both relationships get David in serious trouble with the authorities. Moreover, like the ultimate impossibility of the love of the

young protagonists in the Chinese violin concerto from which the novel draws its title, David's and Zhou Hong's shortlived affair is doomed from the start.

The fundamental difference from his previous personal failures prior to escaping to China—from which he is expelled—is that David has nevertheless finally taken control of his life. This shift is pithily summed up by the differences in a framing story which begins and ends the novel. The first time, David tells a rather sanitized, self-serving version of his life with his former wife which he imagines some day telling their daughter. His self-portrait in the final version, which closes the novel and has actually been told to his daughter, is of someone who "figured sleeping was the best way to deal with things. . . . He even decided it was the age they were living in." In this final version David is no longer as heroic as his wife, and his recognition of his formerly fearful, self-inhibiting nature is foregrounded. Yet in both versions it is their mutual love of their daughter which concludes the story. Some readers might experience this narrative frame as too pat a marker of David's personal growth, but it is perfectly consistent with David's repeated attempts to connect with his daughter and to narrate and thereby understand his own life.

The violin concerto allegory is a little too contrived, however, especially since it is not sustained by the characterization of Zhou Hong. *Butterfly Lovers'* Chinese bureaucrats are quite possibly as psychologically complex and compelling as anything else written—including Foran's own *Sketches in Winter: A Beijing Postscript*—about the psycho-socially wounded and the unofficial heroines and heroes of China's on-going cultural and political revolutions. Nevertheless, Zhou Hong remains too much a cypher of the book's

allegorical title, and David's first-person account of her is often too understated, for the reader to fully grasp or feel the power of his attraction to her.

The protagonist Vaughn Collin of *Bella Combe Journal* also has to find a cure for the fears and wounds of life which haunt him and, even more explicitly than David Leclair, Vaughn follows or, more accurately, is directed to the writing cure. Through his personal memoir we gradually learn that his life-long—though most often estranged—love, Lise Delacourt (since renamed Annie), has become his guru and that she has convinced him that: “[t]he past's where your start is, it's where you can be fixed. [Your] story must begin in mythology, then gather in memory, then explode into your present.” But Vaughn is reticent at first: “I start, but was hard to convince. I explained to her that to sit down to an autobiography is the truest waste of time.” Fisherman that he is: “I added, quite cleverly I thought: words are a net trying to catch a river. But then Annie . . . said, ‘Well, you should know how water-heavy a net can get.’”

The river of life caught in the net of Vaughn's journal is nothing if not heavy. Having begun life in the 1920s as an autistic boy who is literally beat into learning and sociability by a Winnipeg psychologist and Vaughn's Métis nursemaid's daughter, Lise, he is a kind of Canadian Oskar (although less allegorical than Günter Grass's creation). Vaughn is dead to emotions throughout much of his life, mimicking outward signs of “characters” who make the strongest impressions upon him—totally unaware of the contradictions in his consequent hybrid comportment or language. He is attracted to the “fire” he sees and feels emanating from people such as Lise, but he is dumbfounded by their emotions and resultant actions.

This gap between his ability to recognise passion and his inability to feel or understand it is at various times superseded or masked by sex, his bizarre career in hockey in Victoria and southern France, booze and, eventually, drugs. But by the end of the 70s, at the age of fifty-five, he is a solipsistic, drug-crazed, self-pitying wreck. Or as he reflects back upon that former self, before he escapes to and begins to be cured by Annie in *Bella Combe*: “[s]olipsism explains basically everything. It also provides a supreme cure for the shaky ego. Where it leads is schizophrenia, a sickly form of egomania.”

The journey to *Bella Combe*, like much of the novel, is quite Rabelaisian; while Vaughn's painful epic journey from autism, provincial small town Manitoba, and the excesses induced by his profound fear of life, to self-acceptance, frequently echo the mythopoetic types, scenarios and simple triumphs of Margret Laurence's *Manawaka* novels or Robertson Davies's *Deptford* trilogy. This is not to say that *Bella Combe Journal* is derivative in any regrettable way. Most particularly, Vaughn Collin's earthy, Canadian dharma-bum voice is very much his own; though once again the narrator/protagonist's inspirational female lover is not always as plausible as she might be. As with Foran's novel, the burden of creating a pivotal character from the outside—a challenge which is exacerbated by Lise/Annie literally being a guru figure—sometimes proves to be too much for the first-person narrator. Likewise, her climactic disappearance into the woods to die, leaving her own journal for Vaughn to read as the final part of his education as the next guru of *Bella Combe*, is too romantic and melodramatic not to detract from the many strengths of her characterization.

Foran's novel is more sober than Gaston's, in keeping with its greater dependence

upon classic realism, yet no less fascinating a read; while *Bella Combe Journal*'s masterful use of the fantastic is quite inseparable from the seemingly effortless, convincing, referential effects at which both authors excel. These two tales about perseverance, about the necessity and joys of accepting the mistakes and conquering the fears of living, are quite unlike in their settings, plots, styles and narrative voices, but their entertaining, artful, virtues warrant both of them lots of readers.

Man of the Far Right

David Frum

What's Right: The New Conservatism and What It Means for Canada. Random House \$29.95

Reviewed by Michael Keefer

What kind of phenomenon exactly is David Frum? And what claim can he make upon the readers of this journal? For although he produces books (first *Dead Right*, now *What's Right*, a collection of articles dating from 1988 to 1995), Frum is not, in any sense that counts, a writer.

David Frum's domain is current politics, and yet he has little in common with political scientists, who reputedly feel some concern about verifying what they represent as historical facts. Frum, in contrast, reprints here a piece written in 1994 in which he complained that "Ontarians have been cheated by an NDP government that has doubled its spending in a decade." (Does he really think the Rae government was elected to office in 1984?) And in October 1995, just before the Québec referendum, he wrote in the *Financial Post* that English Canadians "have calmly agreed to be ruled by national governments that the majority of English-speakers had voted against: without its Quebec seats, the

Liberal Party would have spent the forty years 1953-1993 in opposition." (Has he never heard of the Tory governments of Diefenbaker, Clark, Mulroney and Campbell, which ruled Canada for sixteen of these years, or forty percent of the total?)

Although Frum often adopts a prophetic tone, this is not a vein in which he has been uniformly successful. In September 1995, for example, he wrote that "unlike the soon to be utterly forgotten Bill Clinton, Newt Gingrich . . . is poised to dominate American politics for a generation." Well, now he's got Clinton to kick around for another four years.

It's easy enough to be mistaken in that sort of way, but when Frum combines sanctimony with prophecy the results can be less amusing. In 1988 he attacked Canadian anti-apartheid campaigners in these terms: "Political morality is a morality of consequences, not intentions. You may intend to achieve a peaceful, non-racist South Africa—but if the predictable consequences of your actions is [sic] civil war and dictatorship, then you are behaving immorally." Since he elsewhere signals his hostility to what he calls "the ANC view of South Africa," Frum must have found Nelson Mandela's peaceful and democratic succession to power—due in large part to mounting international pressures against apartheid—a serious disappointment.

Yet if he is neither a political scientist nor altogether a prophet, Frum is more than just a journalist. Most of the pieces reprinted in *What's Right* belong to the familiar category of political punditry. Others, however, such as his address to the 1994 convention of the Ontario Conservative Party (which concludes with the exhortation, "You must not be intimidated. You must be of glad heart. You must

not surrender. You must win.”), are clearly something else. A person who serves as adviser to a political party, speaks from the rostrum at its annual convention, and then analyzes and celebrates its electoral victory in the mass media, is practising something more than traditional journalism. George F. Will pioneered in this line when, after serving in 1980 as Ronald Reagan's paid coach for his television debate with Jimmy Carter, he faked a pose of journalistic neutrality in the *Newsweek* column which solemnly awarded his own man the victory. But Frum is out in the open—at least since achieving prominence as a marriage-broker with his 1996 “Winds of Change” conference, in which Conrad Black and other media right-wingers, acting as shapers rather than mere analysts of Canada's political destiny, were meant to agree in closed sessions upon a plan for pushing the Conservative Party into the embrace of Preston Manning.

A means of describing Frum emerges in his own statement that “It's the job of political entrepreneurs to devise coherent messages, based on sincere conviction, and to sell them.” The message of this political entrepreneur is indeed coherent: Frum wants to eliminate welfare, medicare, equity policies and programs designed to benefit visible minorities, human rights commissions, student loans, government funding for the arts, the humanities, and public broadcasting, as well as programs in support of advanced technology, fuel efficiency, transportation, agriculture, waste recycling, and exports. Government, he believes, has no business “monkeying around in the private economy”: in his view there is no other kind of economy. Frum also believes—and he shared this wisdom with Ontario's Conservative Party convention in 1994—that “The key to political courage is knowing to whom to

listen and whom to ignore.” Thanks to advice of this kind, Ontario's premier has turned the legislative buildings at Queen's Park into a fortress, and his education minister, a grade 11 drop-out, shuts his door in the faces of university presidents, though not those of corporate executives interested in profiting from the privatizing of public institutions.

It may be significant that Frum's definition of the job of a political entrepreneur contains no reference to truth. He does indeed state that he's “a conservative because conservatism is true.” But like fundamentalists of all kinds, Frum finds that the possession of one large Truth absolves him from any need to give serious attention to the smaller but less simple truths that are bound up with the material realities of our social being. In 1988, for example, he scoffed at opponents of the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement who warned that it would do irreparable damage to the industrial sectors of the Canadian economy. In 1995, by which time their warnings had been borne out by the slump of the Ontario and Québec economies and by falling family incomes across Canada, Frum found it expedient to blame these effects upon high taxes. If he weren't so obviously “sincere,” one might be tempted to accuse him of intellectual dishonesty.

This book is littered with parallel examples of factual errors, statistical manipulation, gross distortion, and those strategic lapses of memory that I have elsewhere termed “subtractive politicizing.” Applied to his own work, Frum's claim that “the ideas with the most power are conservative ideas” seems idiotically mistaken: in comparison with opponents such as Linda McQuaig, John Ralston Saul, John Warnock, or Maud Barlow, he is a water-spider.

But how, then, can we explain the accolades Frum receives from such American

right-wingers as William F. Buckley, Jr., Peggy Noonan and George Will? The answer lies, I think, in his extremism. Where other neoconservatives call for budget cuts, Frum says that \$300 billion (one-fifth of the total expenditures of the US government) should be chopped in a single day; where others propose to cut back welfare expenditures, he wants to abolish welfare. Sub-Nietzschean posturing of this sort apparently has its pleasures (the underclass resents the treatment it's getting? we'll show them *ressentiment!*), as well as earning the admiration of one's neoconservative peers. There may also be political benefits to it: as Frum says, "People are tired of the constant moaning they hear about the poor. . . . I don't think Republicans should go out of their way to be callous. But . . . [i]n the current environment, being accused of callousness might even be to the party's advantage."

There is a sense, however, in which Frum's claim that "the ideas with the most power are conservative ideas" is perfectly correct. In John Ralston Saul's apt phrase, the man is a "courtier" of an anti-democratic corporatism—or, to be more blunt, a cat's paw of Conrad Black. There is indeed power behind his ideas. If we owe it to ourselves to expose the vacuity of David Frum's claims to moral or intellectual cogency, we also owe it to whatever sense of collectivity, community or mutual sharing we wish to sustain in this country to take him—and his backers—very seriously indeed.



Twice the Culture Cringe

Greg Gatenby, ed.

The Wild Is Always There: Canada Through the Eyes of Foreign Writers. Knopf \$29.50

The Very Richness of That Past: Canada Through the Eyes of Foreign Writers, Volume II. Knopf \$32.95

Reviewed by Kevin McNeilly

Greg Gatenby asserts in the introductions to both of these volumes that he is performing a much-needed historical recuperation: working to compensate, at least in part, for a sense of inadequacy he feels has informed Canadian literary and cultural production. His two anthologies compile various accounts—some of them ponderous and others hilarious, some extensive and others all-too-brief—of Canadian life and landscape principally from the last two centuries (although in the first volume there are a few pieces from earlier writers, such as Voltaire and Cyrano de Bergerac). What distinguishes these selections is their authorship: all are produced by "foreign writers," whether actual literary tourists offering first-hand descriptions of their experiences here, or mere imaginary visitors constructing incredible adventures. (Wilkie Collins, for instance, did not visit the country until the 1870s, long after he'd achieved notoriety for *The Frozen Deep*, his melodramatic retooling of the tale of Franklin's doomed arctic expedition.) Most of the foreigners Gatenby represents are British and American, although there are some selections from French sources in both volumes—including work by Camus, Chateaubriand, Breton, Cendrars, Tournier and Verne—and from a few Italian writers—including Umberto Eco's famous foray into the Robarts library at the University of Toronto, and, interestingly,

excerpts from the libretti of operas by Rossini and Donizetti. There are only two writers of non-Western European extraction—Jorge Luis Borges in the first anthology and Khushwant Singh in the second.

While this obvious bias confirms Gatenby's main interest in the literatures of Canada's so-called founding cultures, the English and the French, it also leaves much room to wonder about the constituency of the "more than 1200 sources" depicting "Canada through the eyes of foreign writers" which he claims in his introduction to have "discovered." Given the multicultural potential in an undertaking such as his, and the numerous ethnic and language backgrounds that make up contemporary Canadian culture, it is a shame to have overburdened these texts with canonical, and often sub-canonical, British and American figures. There is certainly substantial work by African, Asian, Eastern European, Arabic, Australian, Asian and Caribbean writers about Canada—the Toronto episode from Derek Walcott's *Omeros*, for instance, springs to mind—work which could replace some of the more trivial or inconsequential of Gatenby's inclusions. (There seems to me to be absolutely no reason—except for passing references in a conversation with Morley Callaghan that Gatenby reiterates in his introduction—to include the pointless fragments from John Dos Passos in the first volume.)

Gatenby's choice and arrangement of material seems to have depended on a certain notion of readership or market. To alleviate potential academicism, he juxtaposes longer, more serious "literary" texts with doggerel, anecdote and light history, following what he calls a "constellation" model, a loosely contrapuntal organization which tends to defeat any sense of an overarching narrative or coherent perspective

from the accounts collected in each volume. He provides extensive historical background for many of the selections, situating works in their historical and authorial contexts, and providing useful and illuminating connections among the various texts. There are long introductions (sometimes for relatively short primary passages) for Faulkner, Hemingway, London and Doyle (among a few others) in the first volume, and Cobbett, Dreiser and Chandler in the second, many of which appear to derive from Gatenby's initial project, a literary history of Toronto. While the photographs, letters, and vestigial critical commentary these prologues provide are presented with clarity, and gesture toward the complexity of Canada's cultural tradition(s), they are not sustained through the work; some introductions, such as Fleur Adcock's, are merely a few lines, and many run at most to a page or two, their length dictated (I assume, since no rationale is given) by Gatenby's apparent interest (or lack of interest) in the material and his sense of relative merit. This shifting editorial framework creates a somewhat haphazard, hit-and-miss structure for both of the books, and suggests an unevenness, a lack of sustained critical rigour for the project as a whole.

Both anthologies are aimed at the coffee-table-book crowd, a general reading public rather than any scholarly audience, although Gatenby does include an unobtrusive set of notes and sources at the end of each collection. Provoking, he supposes, a mixture of surprise and mild bemusement in its readers, his collection is informed not by the plurality of response or the diversity of context and expression he says he associates with Canadian culture but by a species of uniformity, a homologous reaction with which he implicitly associates a certain form of middle-class

Canadian nationalism. Gatenby is explicitly nationalist throughout his introductions and notes, offering a heroic rhetoric of place and history with obvious pride and patriotism, as he pleads for the recognition that "our country, our people, our past [are] rich beyond comparison."

But of what precisely does that writerly heroism consist here? The sustained thematics which binds "us" together as a people, in Gatenby's many strings of collective pronouns, and the motivating urge, apparently, behind both of these collections, is not a simple nationalism but a reactionary cringe, a wilting submission to the rather perverse flattery of being noticed culturally from abroad. Australian critic A. A. Phillips first coined the term "cultural cringe" in 1958 to denote the post-colonial anxiety, particularly among so-called settler nations (such as Australia and Canada), to be acknowledged as worthwhile by the "centres" of culture and civilization in the European mother countries. "Cultural history," Gatenby writes, "for the English-speaking world at least, had been written and in some sense continues to be written in the powerful imperial centres of London and New York." Gatenby recreates in his introductions a literary *topos* that has haunted debates over Canadian literary self-sufficiency since the late nineteenth century. He pleads for a "new" coherent vision of, and a renewed pride in, Canadian literary production. That vision, however, and that sense of national self-worth are sought in these volumes not through Canadian work but from outside, and thus Gatenby inadvertently replicates the exact colonial dynamic he claims to be motivated to overcome, caught in a rather uncritical and very dated sense of the latent hegemonies of empire. His subjects, he enthuses, "were overwhelmed" by Canada's "spectacular uniqueness," which

gives him cause to rethink his self-abasing cultural education: "Having been taught that I lived in a cultural desert uninteresting to sophisticated foreign folk, this was the biggest, and most pleasant surprise of my research." Admittedly, a sense of inadequacy or of second-rate status no doubt persists in much of Canada, and no doubt this general notion of disempowerment has been carried over from the economic and cultural imbalances of the colonial world. But for an editor such as Gatenby to base his project on rectifying his conception of the Canadian by turning for validation to "sophisticated foreign folk" is to misdirect his energies and enthusiasms almost entirely.

He confesses to having "mischievous fun watching the jaws of these Canadian naysayers drop in astonishment as [he] began to cite the legendary names among the hundreds of foreign authors for whom Canada had been an irresistible subject." His task, apparently, is to convert his readers to his own sense of national pride by informing us that what we in our ignorance assumed was pervasive condescension from abroad is actually admiration, and that if these "legendary" foreign writers can see us as powerful, amazing, beautiful, then so should we: "Through the eyes of some of the most famous and respected authors of the world, what follows in these pages [in the second volume] is a remarkably invigorating, and for many readers, completely new way to see our country, an amalgam of refreshingly affirmative and always curious images of Canada." Rather than be ashamed, we ought to blush at our embarrassment of riches: "Canadian readers will be flattered to learn that most of the authors in this volume, as in the first of the series, relished the vistas of the country, even the seemingly (to us) mundane." Foreign writers, he suggests, teach us how

to look at ourselves and to admire “the very richness of our literary past” better than we could have managed alone. The problem, the troubling contradiction here, however, remains intact, since Gatenby’s nationalism still relies on these “foreign” eyes to sustain a vision of a worthwhile Canadian culture. And that reliance is not a necessary outcome of a project such as this, of collecting the work of non-Canadian writers. It could, after all, have been managed in any number of ways: by suggesting, for instance, how the many tensions between Canadian and non-Canadian idioms of place or perspective can potentially contribute to a complex, even overdetermined, sense of “nation” as a field of multiple and conflicting voices, or by studying how the artificial borders and limits drawn by these “foreign” discourses reflect our alternatively permeable and opaque cultural formations. There is an enormous amount of critical potential in these collections, but Gatenby chooses instead, certainly in part because of his preconceptions about the “uninformed” character of his audience, to rely on a reductive and sentimental nationalism that offers no particular insight into this as yet unexplored Canadian literary field.



Burning Down the House

Jonathan Goldberg, ed.

Reclaiming Sodom. Routledge \$21.50

Reviewed by Jim Ellis

Jonathan Goldberg begins his introduction by citing Michel Foucault’s description of sodomy as “that utterly confused category,” and suggests how this confusion can be powerfully effective. Certainly this generically mixed volume, encompassing literary criticism, anthropological research, journalism, memoir, fiction and other modes of writing, is a challenging tribute to the power of heterogeneity. The collection is unusual in that all of the essays have been published before, and many are in fact well known. (Leo Bersani’s “Is the Rectum a Grave?,” included here, is perhaps the most-cited essay in queer theory.) Moreover, the essays aren’t always addressing the same issue: they are not, as might be assumed, all about Sodom, historical or otherwise, or about sodomy, or about anal sex or about homosexuality, although these are the central points of reference. They function at times rather like extremely elaborate footnotes to an argument that remains implicit. The onus is thus more than usual on the reader to construct a meaning for these occasionally disparate texts.

All the essays in the book share (or at least do not contradict) the Foucauldian premise that sexuality is socially constructed, and that the meaning of any particular sexual act is historically and culturally determined. This would seem to be the point of the inclusion of Gerald W. Creed’s essay on institutionalized homosexuality in Melanesia, in which he argues that this institution functions to subordinate women and younger men. Institutionalized homosexuality is not

therefore sodomy (much as it might appear so to the untrained eye), since it does not function in opposition to the dominant order. This is, for many of the essays, the key defining point, and is perhaps the central premise of the book: sodomy is not a private act, but rather a public scandal, and this is precisely its value.

The opening essay in the volume (after an excerpt from Genesis recounting the events of Sodom) is Robert Alter's "Sodom as Nexus: The Web of Design in Biblical Narrative," which investigates how the Sodom narrative fits into the larger Abraham and Sarah story. Alter argues that Sodom functions in the Biblical text as anti-civilization or rather anti-nation, as Israel's perverse double: "The biblical writers will rarely lose sight of the ghastly possibility that Israel can turn itself into Sodom." In Jonathan Ned Katz's discussion of Puritan New England, sodomy functions in much the same way: everyone is potentially a sodomite, and sodomy is a crime precisely because it negates the principles of the nation. Katz argues that the anti-sodomy laws make sense in a society so heavily focussed on the family structure, and in need of labour power: "Anal intercourse of males with males or males with females, like masturbation, the intercourse of women or men with animals, and adult males with prepubescent girls, were sins because they were unproductive." Sodomy was a social offense, not a sexual or private one. And, argue many of the writers on contemporary society, so it remains.

In spite of the fact that American society is no longer so dependent upon reproducing labour power through the family structure, sodomy remains a crime against the social order. This is at least implicitly shown in the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the *Bowers vs. Hardwick* case

(reprinted in this volume), which concluded that Georgia's anti-sodomy laws were not unconstitutional. Janet E. Halley's discussion of the ruling argues that the case should not have been argued on the constitutional guarantee of rights of privacy, since it is not a privacy issue. In a dissenting opinion, Justice Stevens notes that Georgia had not prosecuted anyone according the statute in over twenty years, and in fact the incident on which the case was based (Michael Hardwick was caught having oral sex in his bedroom) was never brought to trial. Why then is it important that the law remain in force?

Part of the answer must be: it is what sodomy represents—the idea of sodomy—that is offensive (and sodomy is in one sense nothing other than representation) and not any particular act. Both Lee Edelman's "Seeing Things" and Neil Bartlett's "Evidence: 1870" investigate why the vision of sodomy is inevitably traumatic for society. Edelman looks at Freud's constructions in the *Wolf Man* case, and, in a move similar to one made by Judith Butler elsewhere, argues that heterosexuality is essentially the product of trauma. The sight of sodomy offends because it shows that the threat of castration, which resolves the oedipal crisis, was not in fact real: pleasure has been foregone for nothing. For Freud, however, the oedipal crisis is the very foundation of civilization, so the sacrifice is absolutely necessary. Once again, sodomy figures as the spectre of our own anti-social (in the literal sense) desires.

This is an awareness that animates the excerpt of *Philosophy in the Bedroom* by the deliriously rational Marquis de Sade, for whom sodomy is the perversion par excellence: the triumph of nature over civilization. It is Nature, declares Sade, who puts these ideas into our heads in the first

place, so sodomy cannot possibly be construed as a crime against that entity: "far from outraging Nature on the contrary . . . the sodomite and the lesbian serve her by stubbornly abstaining from a conjunction whose resultant progeniture can be nothing but irksome to her." According to Pierre Klossowski's reading of Sade, the sodomite's existence "consecrates the death of the species in him as an individual; his being is verified as a suspension of life itself." This is perhaps the most radical claim made in the text for sodomy: the slightly less radical, though related, position is represented by Guy Hocquenghem's "Towards an Irrecoverable Pederasty" and Leo Bersani's "Is the Rectum a Grave?" Both of these essays are uninterested in taming sodomy for polite society, and argue (in Hocquenghem's words) that homosexuality should be "a permanent state of questioning norms." Neither argues for sodomy as an inherently utopian or even politicizing practice, but both nonetheless for its political potential. If Sodom is to be reclaimed, the volume suggests, it is not as place of residence, but rather a state of mind.

Melancholy Memories

Kristjana Gunnars

The Rose Garden: Reading Marcel Proust. Red Deer College Press \$12.95

Reviewed by Stefan Haag

On the surface, *The Rose Garden* is a narrative account of Gunnars's summer in the German city of Trier; on a second level, it is an essay taking its cues from Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* and other meditative books that Gunnars read during her stay in Trier. However, referring by way of introduction to Trier seems already misleading, for Gunnars does not

become involved in her environment in any significant way. I mean "involved" here in the sense of getting to know some of the idiosyncrasies of land and people of a foreign region beyond the reiteration of first impressions and stereotypes. What keeps Gunnars from such knowledge is an utter lack of curiosity about her material surroundings and a "continuous need to escape" the world.

Gunnars introduces the biblical image of the rose garden very skilfully. In this way, Gunnars presents herself as innocent and strives to guard that innocence by isolating herself. As a matter of course, *The Rose Garden* needs to be seen as an attempt to escape the world. It is the only reality that counts. Take the first sentence of the book: "The only thing I truly remember from my sojourn in Germany during the summer of 1992 was a garden out back." Ultimately, she wants to live in her books, and her writing becomes a continuation of her reading so that her escape is stylised into an existential condition.

Citing Proust, she establishes a connection between the train station as a symbol for her existential condition and her continuous need to escape. Ironically, however, her escape from Trier is made by car, and back in Canada, she feels trapped again: "Before I knew it, I was home . . . buried in my own work in the office." *The Rose Garden* in this way confirms the impossibility of escape because, as a meditative essay, the book is Gunnars's return to Trier and the unresolved issues she confronted there.

Gunnars is very successful in raising highly compelling issues, but she does not pursue them far enough. This penchant for the unfinished thought complements her infatuation with the sentence fragment as a rhetorical device. All in all, Gunnars's stay in Trier emerges as a number

of melancholy memories: being convinced that she cannot communicate anything to us, she isolates herself in a string of meditations. For her, the semantic and syntactic breakdown of language is an opportunity to claim her innocence not because she is innocent but because she is ignorant of the outside world. *The Rose Garden* told me little about the meditative texts and even less about Trier, but it spoke volumes about our postmodern sensibility.

Dance of Difference?

Evelyn Hinz, ed.

Idols of Otherness: The Rhetoric and Reality of Multiculturalism. A special issue of *Mosaic*, Volume 29 Number 3 \$15.00

Winfried Siemerling, ed.

Writing Ethnicity: Cross-Cultural Consciousness in Canadian and Québécois Literature. ECW Press \$19.95

Reviewed by Guy Beauregard

An urgent task in contemporary Canadian literature is the need to theorize “cultural difference” as a discursively constituted and materially significant issue. A number of recent special issues of Canadian journals have taken up this task and begun the work of untangling its complexities. The most significant of these special issues includes *Colour: An Issue* (1994), a double issue of *West Coast Line* that presents a disparate array of creative and critical attempts to grapple with “race” and its effects; and *Testing the Limits: Postcolonial Theories and Canadian Literature* (1995), a special issue of *Essays on Canadian Writing* that contextualizes what editor Diana Brydon calls the “current renegotiation of Canada and Canadianness” within an invader-settler postcolonial frame. The two

texts I am reviewing here—*Idols of Otherness* (1996), a special issue of *Mosaic*; and *Writing Ethnicity* (1996), an ECW Press reissue of an identically titled special issue of *Essays on Canadian Writing*—continue to pose questions about cultural difference and the role it plays in the “renegotiation of Canada.” These various special issues put forward critical terms—“race,” postcolonialism, multiculturalism, ethnicity—that compete for attention, bringing with them complex histories and divergent possibilities in the ongoing debates over “cultural difference” in Canada.

The most significant contributions to *Idols of Otherness* are the seven review essays that conclude the volume. The review essays respond to a wide range of theoretical texts published between 1990 and 1995, and as a whole successfully contextualize the texts they review and engage with broader issues and conflicts that inform the inter-related fields of Canadian literature, postcolonial studies, multicultural studies, Native literature, women’s studies, comparative literature, ethnic studies, and cultural studies. Winfried Siemerling, for instance, points to a future of comparative literature that can “pursue cultural studies, not as a totalizing field that claims to cover everything and at once, but as a research strategy emanating from specific expertise and local disciplinary engagement, interest, and epistemological necessity”; Douglas Barbour gestures towards the significance of postcolonial theory for Canadianists; and Norman Ravvin makes nuanced connections between canon formation and “the larger discussion about the manner in which we teach, write about, and legislate the multicultural ideal.”

Perhaps the most compelling and sophisticated review essay in *Idols of Otherness* is by Francesco Loriggio, who situates

academic discussions of multiculturalism in the context of mass-media conservative commentary on the issue. Loriggio insists that the multicultural debates are *not* just about dismissing the right's theoretical or argumentative bankruptcy; rather, they form a moment that "presents academic criticism in its ambivalence, forever caught between the desire to escape itself, to be relevant, to participate in the discussions of value to society at large, and the constraints that it must impose on itself." Loriggio takes up the issue of relevance and value in multicultural theory—and in academic discourse in general—by arguing against a critical practice defined by a "romantic-absolutist, must-start-again-from-scratch philosophy"; he instead calls for a renewed engagement with temporality and the "terror of history which has dominated the century." Loriggio's essay, like the best of the review essays in *Idols of Otherness*, manages to engage with a range of highly complex theoretical concerns without ever losing sight of how and why they matter.

Writing Ethnicity does not have a series of review essays to contextualize its concerns; it instead offers a substantial "Introduction" by editor Winfried Siemerling, an essay that provides an impressive bibliography and an extended discussion of "ethnicity" as "a meeting ground of often conflicting desires and investments." Siemerling brings together developments in the social sciences, Canadian legislative history, social theory, the history of institutional practices in the formation of national literatures, and the many layers of ethnic literary research in Canada (ranging from "archeological" retrieval to reconceptualizing "ethnicity" as "a factor in the 'politics' of reading"). Despite—or perhaps because of—this wide range of concerns, Siemerling never convincingly engages with the significance

of "race" as a social category in Canadian cultural production. He makes the acute observation that Canadian multiculturalism, in contrast to U.S. formulations, emerged as "an extended response to the historical and demographic dimensions of bilingualism," and not out of "arguments about race." While this kind of careful historicization helps to explain the elision of "race" in Canadian debates, it doesn't help to address it: Siemerling locates critiques of "ethnicity" "out there" in African-American contexts, and relegates Canadian critiques of racism to a parenthetical aside and a footnote referring us to Marlene Nourbese Philip. So although Siemerling tells us that "there is no shortage of other terms that seek to understand and engage with aspects envisioned by ethnicity," he fully addresses neither the extent to which "colour" is "an issue" (to quote the title of the *West Coast Line* special issue mentioned above), nor the substantial and ongoing *Canadian* critiques launched by writers of colour and First Nations writers against "ethnicity" as a category that levels the consequences of "difference."

While Siemerling may elide "race" in his "Introduction" to *Writing Ethnicity*, Janice Kulyk Keefer consistently downplays its importance in an essay that combines critical speculations with a personal narrative tracing her journey to Kiev. Kulyk Keefer's focus on the complex imbrications of ethnicity and history is ostensibly a means of mapping what she calls "the connective differences between us," but the mapping of such contested terrain cannot, it seems to me, move forward by treating categories of difference as somehow interchangeable or "equal." In her sympathetic reading of *Other Solitudes*, a text that has been heavily critiqued for its pluralist formulation of difference, Kulyk Keefer writes that its editors "came out of the ethnic closet" and

presented “race and ethnicity . . . as equal partners in the dance of difference.” Kulyk Keefer here appropriates a trope (“the closet”) specific to homophobic oppression to describe “ethnic” self-identification, and puts forth an image (“the dance of difference”) that at best recirculates a multicultural stereotype, and at worst attempts to flatten out differences between the putatively “equal partners” of racialized and ethnic identification. Kulyk Keefer may anticipate being critiqued, but such awareness does little to lessen the offensiveness of her essay’s rhetorical manoeuvres. I’m left wishing that her “search for commonality” would have been configured more closely to S.P. Mohanty’s influential formulation (which doesn’t appear in either text under review):

It is necessary to assert our dense particularities, our lived and imagined differences; but could we afford to leave untheorized the question of how our differences are intertwined and, indeed, hierarchically organized?

It is precisely the question of hierarchies that Kulyk Keefer glosses over in her attempt to join the so-called “dance of difference” as an “ethnically” identified subject.

I’d like to end with a brief comment on the packaging of *Writing Ethnicity*: while it is understandable that the folks at *Essays on Canadian Writing* would want to capitalize on its topicality by reissuing it through ECW Press, it is less clear why they would slap onto the reissue a shoddy cover whose colour I’ve heard described as “remainder yellow.” The positions put forth in the collection, however flawed, deserve better.



Displacements

Smaro Kamboureli, ed.

Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature. Oxford UP \$24.95

Reviewed by Sherry Simon

Every observer will have his own version of how and when English-Canadian literature acquired its new public face. One of my moments is recent. It’s when Robertson Davies died and the Canadian writer on the CBC radio news commenting on his career was not Margaret Atwood but Rohinton Mistry. The reshuffling of genealogies suggested by this moment of passage was startling. The great old Anglo-Celtic patriarch was giving his place to a novelist whose prize-winning book was about an unconventional family in Bombay. Mistry won the Giller prize in 1995; the previous winner was M.G. Vassanji, for a superb novel about East Africa.

No wonder then that Smaro Kamboureli suggests in her introduction that there may be one word too many in the subtitle of this collection. Shouldn’t *multicultural* be superfluous, virtually synonymous with *Canadian*? Yes, we nod, at the same time beginning to articulate the many objections which could be brought to bear upon a project such as this one. Considering the importance of so many of these *multicultural* writers within contemporary Canadian literature, why not simply propose an anthology of the best of contemporary writing—which would necessarily include them? Why foreground writers’ cultural origins rather than their writing projects?

While these objections can never be put to final rest, they can be indefinitely deferred by the coherence of the anthologist’s work, the insights gained by bringing texts together, and the vigour of the writing

selected. This is very much the case for the collection put together by Smaro Kamboureli. The anthology includes work by many of Canada's best-known writers, such as Daphne Marlatt, Michael Ondaatje, A.M. Klein, Irving Layton, Joy Kogawa, Rudy Wiebe, Sandra Birdsell, Marlene Nourbese Philip, Kristjana Gunnars, Mary di Michele, Neil Bissoondath, Fred Wah, Lee Maracle, Thomas King, Aritha van Herk. These are not writers whose work has necessarily been associated with their cultural origins, but their texts speak of the displacements they have known. Their work, next to that of lesser-known writers, like Arnold Itwaru, Andrew Suknaski, Renato Trujillo, Cyril Dabydeen, Frank Paci, Jim Wong-Chu, Ven Begamudré, Yeshim Ternar, Ashok Mathur, Hiromi Goto, provides for a wide range of styles. And its sheer mass points to an impressive body of writings.

Over and above the selections themselves, what makes this volume really work are the excellent headnotes. For each of the seventy-one authors included in the anthology, Kamboureli has written a succinct, informative biographical sketch, including remarks on the way the authors view their work and especially the ways in which they position themselves in relation to the *community* to which they belong. These remarks make for a very satisfying pivot between the framing design of the anthology and the writing itself. In particular, they allow the writers to create all the distance they wish between their identities as writers and the communities they have found themselves representing. Or, on the contrary, to ground their work confidently in the collective identity they have assumed.

While there is nothing said in the title, or indeed in the introduction, about the content or themes of the chosen texts, there is a resolutely social focus to the

works represented here. This is not only an anthology *by* writers making up an array of Canadian differences; it is also an anthology *about* the experience of such differences within Canadian life. Such a focus makes sense, and adds to the coherence of the collection, allowing as well for a fine display of the variety of genres and esthetics through which cultural diversity plays. Almost all of the writing is interesting. I would have quibbled over the inclusion of a few of the pieces, but not many.

There are nevertheless two aspects of the anthology that seem to me somewhat problematic. The first concerns the first eight authors included in the book. Out of a concern to show that multiculturalism is not a recent phenomenon, Kamboureli has eight 'precursors'. My argument here is that the cultural context in which these writers contributed to Canadian literature was fundamentally different from today's. These were immigrant writers, writing for a scene which did not include the radical diversity which we see today. The Yiddish writing world, for example, was a rich one and it spawned a very diverse progeny. Including these few 'precursors' (Frederick Philip Grove, Laura Salverson, Rachel Korn, A.M. Klein, George Faludy, Vera Lysenko, Irving Layton and Helen Weinzwieg) does not really seem to make sense here. The anthology, arranged according to the birth dates of the authors, should more properly have begun with Skvorecky—the eldest of the writers of new generations.

The second objection has to do with Québec. While a number of the writers included here live or have lived in Montreal, there are no writers representing the specific realities of French-language Québec. As is usually the case, then, multiculturalism has occluded the existence of French Québec. Why not have

included in translation the work of Naim Kattan, Marco Micone, Abla Farhoud, Dany Laferrière, Mona Lattif-Ghattas, Monique Bosco, or others? If the work of Antonio d'Alfonso is meant to stand in for this entire group, as he has published in both English and French and has played an important role in publishing Italo-Québécois authors, this is regrettable, because the selections from his work are particularly weak.

Is it a *given* of the publishing world that an anthology of Canadian literature includes only those works produced in English? Though Kamboureli thought there was one word too many in the subtitle, one might argue that words pointing to the fact that, under the current Constitutional regime, *Canadian* literature is written in English and French (at least), might have been included. Is it that the really problematic word in Kamboureli's title is not *Multicultural* but *Canadian*. . . ?

Kleinland and Coalbanks

A.M. Klein

Notebooks: Selections from the A.M. Klein Papers
eds. Zailig Pollock and Usher Caplan
U of Toronto \$55.00

Michael Wex

Shlepping the Exile. Mosaic n.p.

Reviewed by Norman Ravvin

It is difficult to maintain a relationship with A.M. Klein's work that is not sentimentalized, made melancholy and nostalgic, by the events of his later years. Klein's frustration with the Jewish community's reception of his writing, and with his success in the larger world of literary endeavors, his hatred of his employ under Sam Bronfman, his growing depressions and silence, blanket his marvelous and varied

work in an atmosphere of melancholy and self-disgust. *Notebooks: Selections from the A.M. Klein Papers* has the unintended effect of heightening this atmosphere of gloom and defeat; included in its contents are numerous incomplete and failed efforts, as well as a gathering of "Selected Notes and Fragments" that are often bizarre in their eccentric subject matter and high-flown diction.

The editors date the manuscripts from which this volume has been gathered from the early forties through the early to middle fifties. The earliest work in *Notebooks* is by far the most readable and the least tortured, and as well, it will prove most useful to Klein's readers in their hunt for the background material that fed his better known work. In lightly fictionalized autobiographical studies, Klein creates strikingly clear portraits of family, Montreal life, and of the position he felt himself in as a literary man among compatriots who'd gone in for more lucrative vocations:

my mother's greatest boast—her defense-mechanism against the mothers of rich sons—was always that her son, without worldly possessions, without property or cars, had "a name in the town."

In the mid-forties Klein began reworking these sketches into a prison novel he intended to call "Stranger and Afraid." With its claustrophobic portrayal of an articulate man's incarceration for an unnamed crime, this work recalls Albert Camus' *L'étranger*, which Klein may have read after its appearance in 1942. "Stranger and Afraid" is intriguing as well for its treatment of the Holocaust—one markedly different from that in *The Second Scroll*. Unencumbered by the latter novel's insistence on making the declaration of the State of Israel a redemptive

final chapter to the war, Klein's response in "Stranger and Afraid" is more direct in its consideration of Nazi crimes, as well as in its portrait of the effect of their discovery on Canadians at home.

Unfortunately, Klein's diary entries included in *Notebooks* cover less than ten pages, but the few entries we have here, from 1944 and '45 offer insight into Klein's half-hearted political involvement as a candidate for the C.C.F., as well as a wonderful re-creation of a visit he made to the University Club at McGill—in his words, a "club right out of a cartoon in *Punch*"—to arrange a visiting lectureship in poetry.

Two major projects, each resolutely strange in the fragments Klein left, are a second unfinished novel modeled on the detective genre, and a treatment of the legend of the golem of Prague. Though the former was to be set in Klein's Montreal, and the latter in medieval Prague and Venice, both are meditations on the narrator's struggle with the contradictory claims of an observant and a secular life. Pimontel, Klein's alter-ego in the untitled detective novel, is explicit about the role literature must play once he has rejected normative religion: "it would be with words, themselves a kind of deed, that he would serve his Author." Klein, it would seem, was in many ways our Graham Greene, a religious writer whose value lay, as John Updike has said of Greene, in "his agonized sense of faith's shaky ground in the unhappy human condition." Why, then, did Greenland become such a familiar topography, while Kleinland faltered, so many of its plans and characters foldered in an Outremont study? The manuscripts published in *Notebooks* will prove invaluable to anyone dedicated to unravelling this question.

In *Shlepping the Exile*, Michael Wex creates his own bizarre cultural landscape—a

late-fifties southern Alberta town nuzzled against rolling coulees, where Jewish newcomers from Europe have settled among cowboys and farmers, "Ukrainians all." Still rooted in its European past, but moving, warily, toward an acceptance of Canadian ways, the Jewish outpost at Coalbanks is seen through the eyes of Yoine Levkes, who dresses like a yeshiva boy from pre-war Poland, but sneaks Elvis Presley records into his room when his orthodox parents aren't looking.

Wex is a lover of crazy juxtapositions and the carnivalesque possibilities that lie behind the prospect of Yoine trading his *yarmulke* for more stylish headgear:

The world was going beatnik, and you didn't have to be good in gym. . . . secret admirers were wooing Genia Mandelbroit with valentines of bongos, and compared to a plain old yarmulke, my new black beret was the bendin, solid-sendin, the all-offendin . . . livin' END.

Wex's narrator is prone to this kind of riffing; his language is a conglomeration of Lenny Bruce, Borscht Belt shtick, with a liberal sprinkling of Yiddish. In his use of the latter, Wex can be set apart from the typical North American Jewish writer who learned a few dirty words as a kid. Himself a translator and teacher of Yiddish, Wex tries, in *Shlepping the Exile*, to convey the imaginative and emotional world that was inextricably linked with the workaday language of Jewish communities before the War. To aid the general reader, Wex's publisher has included a glossary of Yiddish and Hebrew terms. But these may not serve to unlock some of the idiomatic oddities Yoine and his family make use of. Wex's narrator points to the fact that even for Jews after the War, Yiddish literature had fallen into a strange no man's land:

"most of the people who could still read it were too religious to want it."

Wex has performed parts of *Shlepping the Exile* at night clubs and folk festivals, accompanied by a jazz troupe reminiscent of early-1960s poetry readings. His work seems most at home in this milieu of resurrected bohemianism. Like Wex's fiction, the bohemians thrived on crazy juxtaposition, on the surprising brew that came of mixing Buddhist chants, Yiddishist leftism, and Times Square sleaze, all of it seasoned with the strong scent of Arabic bean and French cigarettes. In *Shlepping the Exile*, however, the scents that stir the memory are garlic and herring.

Talking Writing

Robert Kroetsch

A Likely Story: the writing life. Red Deer College P \$16.95

Jean Royer

Interviews to Literature. Guernica \$20.00

Eleanor Wachtel

More Writers & Company. Knopf \$28.95

Reviewed by David Creelman

For decades post-structuralists and cultural historians have been reminding us that the subject/self is an unstable construct of an unstable language, and that the author—if alive at all—is a function of the culture and not an independent creative identity. Yet despite these admonitions, we are still tempted to explore the inner-workings and reflections of the besieged writer. A collection of essays by Robert Kroetsch and two volumes of interviews by Jean Royer and Eleanor Wachtel sharpen this sense of temptation as they promise to inform us about the writer's life.

Although promotional materials refer to the collection as "confessional," the

acknowledgement page of Robert Kroetsch's *A Likely Story* distances the text from the problems associated with autobiography, noting that "these fugitive pieces . . . are concerned with the writing life, not with the personal life, of the writer." A well known star of Canadian literature, Kroetsch frequently addresses literary conferences, and this volume brings together some of the talks he has given since 1989. The pieces are designed for public presentation; they are witty, humorous, allusive to personal experience, and strongly oral in their style and tone. Kroetsch is a brilliant story-teller and these essays mix disarmingly casual narratives from childhood and early adulthood with incisive comments about literary texts. Arranged according to the dates when they were produced, the informal essays address some of Kroetsch's key concerns as a writer.

Beyond all else, Kroetsch is fascinated with the process of writing. Steeped in contemporary theory, he employs his poetic sensibility and develops metaphors, symbols, and simple narratives to examine the writing game without suggesting that the process can be stabilized or contained. Though he does not develop new or innovative critical positions, Kroetsch insists that writing is a mixture of desire and promise, trace and absence. Multiple analogies are suggested. Writing stories, he claims, is like venturing into the north to discover the "silence that would let me tell stories of my own." The writer then mutates into a wanderer like the mad trapper Albert Johnson who "wore the silence of the artist like a badge, an indication of his will toward self-destruction." Texts eventually function like scrapbooks which allow "us to bring into play whole areas of memory. And desire. And laughter." The collection reiterates the idea that literature

is a form of play and is finally impossible to pin down.

At the same time as Kroetsch insists that writing constantly slips away from definitive interpretation, he also suggests that writers are deeply influenced by culture and geography: "the plains or the prairies enable us to recognize ourselves as writers." He claims that prairie writers have been educated in the assumptions of the European tradition, but they simultaneously recognize their existence on a geographic margin and thus must always reinscribe and resist the centrist discourse. For a writer who claims to suspect essentialist practices, Kroetsch comes close to reading geography as a transcendental signified, capable of defining all those who write within its bounds: "we who are twice marginalized cannot forget, dare not forget, the unspeakably empty page. The page that is our weather, our river, our rocks." But then Kroetsch has always loved to dance along the edge of deconstruction and essentialism and these essays provide entertaining examples of his skill on the tightrope.

Besides the talks which examine literary absence and regional presence, *A Likely Story* also includes some fine discussions of specific writers including Wallace Stegner, Rudy Wiebe, Rita Kleinhart, and Margaret Laurence and two lyrical poems which are anchored in family experiences. For Kroetsch scholars who have been mining *The Lovely Treachery of Words* for nearly a decade, patiently waiting for a collection to document Kroetsch's latest critical shifts and innovations, *A Likely Story: the writing life* offers little fresh material. But for readers who are looking for witty, challenging, and entertaining reflections on a writer's experiences, this is a fine, pleasurable text.

Written by Jean Royer and translated by Daniel Sloate, *Interviews to Literature* is a less impressive text. Associated with the

renowned L'Hexagone press, Royer has interviewed some of the most important figures on the Quebec cultural scene during and after the Quiet Revolution. Featuring the voices of such writers as Gaston Miron, Michel Tremblay, Anne Hébert, Mavis Gallant, Roch Carrier, and Nicole Brossard, *Interviews to Literature* would seem to be a necessary handbook to any student of Québécois literature. Unfortunately, the interviews are not as informative or revealing as they might have been, and the source of the problem lies in the style of the interviews.

Hoping to avoid seeming "scholarly or academic," Royer aims his text at the "general public" by rewriting and reorganizing the material into long monologues which are supposed "to echo as closely as possible the speech and ideas of the writer." Royer's decision to omit his questions removes the sense of give and take which sets the rhythm of the interview and locates the author in a clear discursive context. Even more problematic is his belief that the interviewer can "grasp the essential of what [the author] has set out to do," "understand his reality as a novelist, poet, or essayist," and then turn "the encounter into a narrative." The notion that artists can be reduced to their essentials is suspect. His determination to transform interviews into narratives is insensitive to the fact that narratives have their own guiding principles and ideological assumptions which inevitably change and slant the speaker's replies. Royer's techniques of revision produce some troubling gaps in his interviews.

This is not to suggest that *Interviews to Literature* is not a serviceable tool for readers of Quebec's literature. Some interesting statements surface from the twenty-one encounters. Marie-Claire Blais's aesthetic vision and deep humanism

emerge in such concise statements as "Love, art, these are values which help people stay on earth. As in life, Art like love transfigures." Roch Carrier's reflections on the artist's responsibility to the language borders on the lyrical: "We have received a rich, magnificent heritage. Have we truly explored this richness . . . Have we sung its music sufficiently?" But other interviews seem oddly superficial and full of strange omissions. The 1982 *Le Devoir* interview with Nicole Brossard examines her feminism and her insistence that women need "positive reflections, captivating images of themselves," but the piece is silent about the energy and power which Brossard's own texts have drawn from her lesbian experiences and politics. Such gaps raise important questions about the implicit agenda of some of these interviews and the silences seem all the more apparent when Royer's text is compared *More Writers & Company*.

More Writers & Company, Eleanor Wachtel's second collection of material from her CBC radio program, features interviews with major writers from all over the world, including two Canadians, Carol Shields and Nicole Brossard. Wachtel's interviews are sensitive and wide-ranging. Her questions are included, the shape of the interview is clearly documented, and the interviews with Shields and Brossard dig deeper than Royer's into the passions and interests particular to each writer. Wachtel does not adopt a pretentious tone, but she does trust that her subjects are interesting on their own, and she gives them room to move. Royer would be a better interviewer if he trusted his writers and his readers just a bit more.



Dismembered Culture

George F. MacDonald

Haida Art. Douglas & McIntyre / Canadian Museum of Civilization \$65.00

Reviewed by Robert Bringham

Thousands of works of Haida art were destroyed under missionary pressure at the end of the nineteenth century. Thousands more were shipped to museums and private collectors around the world. The entire cultural milieu was physically dismembered and the pieces scattered to the winds. By 1920, very little Haida art remained in Haida Gwaii, where every major village had once been packed as densely as the Louvre.

The biggest American collections—in Chicago, New York, and Washington, DC—have been static or have shrunk since 1920, but Canadian public collections—notably those in Ottawa, Vancouver and Victoria—have grown. The Canadian Museum of Civilization, guided by George MacDonald, has shown particular regard for Haida art and now houses one of the best Haida collections in the world. MacDonald's recent book, which is a first-rate piece of printing and design, is full of lovely illustrations of works from that collection (though because it shows the holdings of the CMC alone, it is not and cannot be "the definitive book on Haida art" as the publisher grandly claims). And there are serious flaws in the text. It is a better book to look at than to read.

MacDonald's magnum opus, *Haida Monumental Art* (1983), is famous for its wealth of clerical errors as well as for the wealth of information it contains. Photographs, photographers and sources are often misidentified, Haida names are cavalierly mangled, and major figures of Haida mythology whose names resemble one another (*Nang T'il Dlistlas* and *Nang*

Kilstlas, for example) are confused. Yet the value of that book outweighs its imperfections a thousandfold. It will reign for some time yet as the standard reference to the lost world of classical Haida sculpture.

The new work, titled simply *Haida Art*, lacks the comprehensive scope of *Haida Monumental Art* but has preserved its propensity for error. There are too many simple slips, such as the claim that the village of Chaatl is located on Skidegate Inlet, and the curious insistence that Anthony and Kunghit Islands are the same. (This is equivalent, in continental terms, to saying that Vancouver is on the St Lawrence, and that Cuba and Jamaica are the same.)

Other misstatements are somewhat more complex. MacDonald tells us, for example, that "All the inhabitants [of Qaisun] belonged to an Eagle lineage known as the People of Sea Lion Town." It was indeed once probably the case that all the *household headmen* of Qaisun belonged to the Qayahl Llaanas (Sealion People) lineage. But household headmen all have wives. In the Haida social order, wives necessarily come from the opposite moiety, thus from a different lineage, and children are assigned to the lineage of the mother. A town in which all the *inhabitants* belonged to a single lineage would be a town in which men married their own sisters. Neither in history nor in myth was there ever such a town in Haida Gwaii.

MacDonald trips from time to time on his sources as well as on his words. An example is the case of James Swan, who made a tour of Haida Gwaii in 1883 and kept a wonderfully detailed journal (now in the library of the University of Washington). Much earlier, Swan had met Gitkuna, the headman of Tanu, but when he reached Tanu himself, the headman he had known was six years dead. The new

Gitkuna—nephew and heir to the previous bearer of this name—took Swan out to see the old man's coffin. Lucile McDonald, who published a biography of Swan in 1972, had trouble understanding Haida matrilineal descent. Her added version of the incident turns the nephew into a son, the shared name into two names, and to consummate the comedy, confuses the young headman's splendid house with the mortuary hut that held the family coffins. In 1983, MacDonald quoted Swan's account of his visit to Tanu. In 1996, he quotes Lucile McDonald's botched biography instead, inhaling all her errors and spreading them like germs.

There is no doubt of George MacDonald's love for the physical forms of Haida art, and no doubt of the service he has rendered to us all, by husbanding the Ottawa collection and by cataloguing older Haida poles through his study of the sites and early photographs. But reading Haida iconography is something else again.

We take for granted that a scholar of Greek, Roman, Chinese, or Italian art will acquire first of all a working knowledge of the languages involved. In Africa, Australia and New Zealand, indigenous arts and languages are studied hand in hand. In North America, such light has yet to shine. Historians of Native American art still routinely work in silence, knowing nothing of the language in which the work they study was commissioned and explained. The problem is systemic and far from being solved, but several recent archaeologists and historians, if they have not learned the languages themselves, have at least sought help from linguists to clarify the meaning and the spelling of essential terms and names. MacDonald has not moved in this direction. His spelling of Haida names remains chaotic. And strange as it may seem, not a single Haida poet or historian is quoted in

this book, while English-speaking visitors to Haida Gwaii are quoted by the yard.

"Most of what we know about shaman[s]," according to MacDonald, "is provided by commentary . . . by traders, travellers and ethnographers, but mostly by missionaries." In fact, there are many highly detailed Haida accounts of shamanic visions and performances. Kilxhawgins of Tanu and other knowledgeable people dictated these accounts, in Haida, to John Swanton in the fall of 1900 and the spring of 1901. They are accessible in Haida as well as in English translation. They tell more than any missionary yarns about what Haida shamans saw and did, and they afford no little insight into Haida visual art. So do the recorded works of Haayas, Skaay and other Haida mythtellers, who are all unmentioned here.

Excelsior! Religion and Reform in Nineteenth-Century Canada

Lynne Marks

Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario. U Toronto P \$55.00/\$19.95

Agnes Maule Machar

Roland Graeme, Knight, with an introduction and annotations by Carole Gerson. Tecumseh n.p.

Reviewed by Misao Dean

Recent works in the field of social history by Mariana Valverde, Carolyn Strange and others have done much to illuminate the cultural discourse of nineteenth- and early-twentieth century Canada. Lynne Marks works in the same vein to add complexity and nuance to our understanding of nineteenth-century Ontario culture. Marks sets out to test an assumption that

she argues underlies many current studies of gender and class in Canada: that nineteenth-century small-town culture was homogenous, dominantly Protestant, church-going and pro-temperance. She argues that the stereotype of middle-class church-going communities (defined by a margin of the classed and racialized), has been created largely through historical study of the ideas of opinion leaders and the cultural elite, while the traces of complex cultural patterns which remain in basic documents like census forms, church membership records and the personal columns of local newspapers have been neglected. *Revivals and Roller Rinks* uses a detailed analysis of census data, church records and the papers of organisations such as the Orange Lodge, the Salvation Army and the Knights of Labour to argue that patterns of religion, class and gender identity were much more complex than received wisdom would suggest.

Marks is interested in the ways that religion, class and gender intersect to create the identities of both individuals and communities, and argues convincingly that for this purpose, the methodologies of religious history, labour history, women's and gender histories must be marshalled simultaneously. The predominance of women in nineteenth-century churches cannot be fully understood without problematizing the absence of men, and investigating where exactly they were. Class as constructed in the workplace and the union hall must be contextualised by an analysis of leisure pursuits, clubs, lodges and church groups. The patterns of membership in individual churches must be related not just to issues of doctrine, but to the way that doctrine could be marshalled to form class-based critiques of society, and to support or undermine masculine and feminine gender identities.

Class must become visible in religious history; religion in works of labour history, and gender in both.

Marks compares the denominational affiliation claimed in the census records for 1881 and 1891 with the names listed in the membership rolls of churches, lodges, women's groups and temperance societies. She supplements this "quantitative" data with information gleaned from the society columns and obituaries of local newspapers, and comes up with some detailed knowledge of the complexities of both individual and group identities. She identifies individual families where the "head of the household" is well-known to be "freethinker" while his wife is a prominent member of a local church; she concludes that while many middle-class families did conform to the stereotype of family church attendance, the members of many working-class families went separate ways on Sunday, claiming different denominational affiliations. Interestingly, Marks concludes that only about 50% of families claiming a denominational church affiliation were represented in church records by a family member. This percentage remained approximately constant from the middle class to the working class, varying slightly from denomination to denomination, suggesting that the stereotype of the middle-class church-going family who looked down upon the working-class as apostate needs to be revised. The significant exception was in the Catholic Church, where the Church's role in promoting and extending Irish ethnic identity perhaps explains a significantly higher rate of church membership.

Some of the most interesting information, from the point of view of contemporary literary scholarship, comes from Marks' analysis of gender identities, and their relationship to class issues. While

church attendance was certainly prescribed as an element of feminine gender identity, Marks notes that female house servants were rarely church members, even if their mistresses were. Addressing the commonly held belief among feminist historians that most women's groups constituted a forum for middle class white women to "reform" their working-class neighbours, she notes that only some women's groups were likely to be dominated by middle class members (the WCTU, and missionary societies which required weekly dues) and others were likely to contain cross-class memberships. She sketches a pattern of masculine identity which includes competing stereotypes of masculinity: the unmarried "rough" who eschews church in favour of cock-fights and street-corner lounging, and the responsible family man who extends his "social fathering" to church governance and the leadership of lodges and societies. Surprisingly, neither of these stereotypes belonged exclusively to individuals or to classes; the same young man might access his identity as a "rough" by defying his family and refusing to go to church, yet later (after marriage) become a pillar of his denomination.

The complexities of gender, class and religious identity which Marks sketches out provide an illuminating context for re-reading Agnes Maule Machar's classic novel of the social gospel, *Roland Graeme, Knight*, reprinted with an introduction and annotations by Carole Gerson. While much of the extant commentary on *Roland Graeme* has been from the point of view of intellectual history (Ramsay Cook includes an extensive discussion in *The Regenerators*) and feminism (notably Gerson's previous work on Machar), I found myself re-reading the novel with Marks' commentary on "roughs" and

“social fathering,” class and church attendance, in mind. Machar’s text evokes some of the central intellectual issues of the social reform movement in Canada at the turn of the century, framing the debates which so concerned contemporaries like George Munro Grant and John Watson in the unabashedly didactic form of popular fiction. While Machar resolves the contradictions inherent in social Christianity with cries of Excelsior and frequent reference to Carlyle, I can imagine interesting ways to deconstruct the unities it asserts, supported by Marks’ re-reading of nineteenth-century small-town life.

Unlike some of the titles in Tecumseh’s series of reprints, this edition of *Roland Graeme* is physically attractive and highly readable, with a photograph of Machar engaged in charity work adorning the cover. Lorraine McMullen, general editor of Tecumseh’s “Early Canadian Women Writers” series, has been vigilant to ensure that the novels in this series are well-produced and well-annotated, very suitable for course adoption. Carole Gerson’s introduction draws on her extensive knowledge of Machar’s biography and of the intellectual movements of the time, and rightly argues for the centrality and importance of Machar as a thinker and activist in nineteenth-century Canada. Gerson’s annotations are a particularly useful addition to a text designed for student use, as the book quotes widely from Machar’s favourite authors—Browning, Emerson, Lowell, Whittier, Burns, Carlyle (and more Carlyle), Scott, Tennyson, George Cameron, Henry George and the Bible. While these were common and well-loved quotations for Machar’s audience of educated Protestant women and men—alas, they are only the province of the eccentric nineteenth-century Canadianist today.

Ivory Thoughts

Marybelle Mitchell

From Talking Chiefs to a Native Corporate Elite: The Birth of Class and Nationalism Among Canadian Inuit. McGill-Queen’s \$49.95

Robert McGhee

Ancient People of the Arctic. U of British Columbia P \$35.95

Reviewed by Renée Hulan

From Talking Chiefs to a Native Corporate Elite is a cogent, articulate addition to northern studies that sets out “to analyze the transformation of Inuit relationships from relatively egalitarian, apolitical, family-based units to ethnoregional collectivities in which class distinctions are becoming an important line of affiliation.” As a journalist for publications such as *Inuit Art Quarterly*, Marybelle (Myers) Mitchell brings the knowledge gained from first-hand experience, including “ten years of involvement with the arctic co-operative movement,” as well as academic training in sociology to the inquiry. Her richly documented and detailed study of class and nation in Inuit societies includes previously unpublished information, translations of speeches by community elders, and personal communications with prominent Inuit leaders.

The opening review of literature is somewhat dry reading, but, in it, Mitchell demonstrates the originality of her work by critiquing the “articulationist” and “dependency” models of sociological inquiry. According to Mitchell, the dependency model concentrates on relations of exchange between nations rather than on production relations and relies too heavily on external rather than internal factors. In contrast, although articulationism’s attempts to differentiate between different “modes of production” render the topic

too abstract, Mitchell concludes that it is a better option. Arguing for the existence of two modes, "a capitalist and a communal version, with transitional variations," Mitchell focuses on the conditions allowing the indigenous mode of production to serve capitalist interests. From this perspective, the Inuit co-operative movement accommodates indigenous production of art within the capitalist mode while it allows the Canadian state to contain ethno-regional politics.

In providing the background to this history, Mitchell moves quickly through the early period of contact, claiming that European explorers were not particularly interested in the Inuit. While this may be true, even those explorers who had only slight contact with Inuit, such as Samuel Hearne, described them in their journals. In this case, Mitchell relies too heavily on Wendell Oswalt's study *Eskimos and Explorers* (1979) rather than her own reading of the texts. However, her point is that social transformation was not a mere product of the encounter with Europeans; rather, it developed from the rapid increase in certain economic activities.

The study gives an impressive history of the co-operative movement and how it contributed to the emergence of class distinctions and national identification among the Inuit in which Mitchell presents the results of research on an astonishing range of documents from government, co-operative, and media sources. In it, she describes the mistaken, somewhat romantic notion that co-operative movements continue and extend pre-contact sharing in Inuit communities. In her research on the indigenous mode of production, Mitchell found that, while pre-contact Inuit societies were not egalitarian, existing inequalities were not institutionalized, except in the case of certain angakoqs (shamans),

and disparities resulted from the exercise of influence rather than class affiliations. The absence of class in pre-contact Inuit societies does not constitute a proto-communist state, Mitchell argues, as the indigenous mode of production combined communal and competitive practices. While Mitchell describes pre-contact Inuit society as not entirely communal, she also notes the disappearance of what collective practices there were.

Contact helped to institutionalize inequality by creating distinctions between Inuit. The class of "talking chiefs" who facilitated the early arrival of missionaries, traders, and police became employees and bosses in the co-operative movement and later executives in development corporations such as Makivik. Yet, the "corporate elite" resulting from this history remains marginal by virtue of its racial identity and dependence on state funding. Because it possesses no capital, it cannot be a ruling class in the capitalist sense. Where equality has been denied on the basis of race, resistance tends to emerge from racial solidarity, hence ethnic nationalism. Mitchell goes on to provide an account of recent political action, including the formation of Nunavut, and suggests that the Inuit history of co-operation with newcomers is gradually turning into forms of resistance.

From Talking Chiefs to a Native Corporate Elite appears at a moment when the Canadian public is in need of information and analysis of Aboriginal issues. As a contribution to this public discourse, Mitchell's work offers several important insights, among them: that Inuit people are agents of their own history, one that is more complex than the idea of cultural contamination allows; and that government involvement in Inuit affairs serves the interests of the state. These insights can only help to promote a sophisticated

approach to the position of the Inuit in Canada.

Ancient People of the Arctic makes a very different contribution as the companion to the Museum of Civilization's "Lost Visions, Forgotten Dreams: Life and Art of an Ancient People," an exhibit that opened on November 14, 1996 and that will eventually make its way across Canada. A beautifully designed book, illustrated with photographs, drawings, maps, charts, and colour plates of the artifacts in the exhibit, its style is accessible to a wide audience. The author, Robert McGhee, an experienced archaeologist and curator, synthesizes and compares the results of research on the Palaeo-Eskimos, giving a history of the archaeology of Palaeo-Eskimo material culture as well as conclusions resulting from that study.

McGhee describes archaeology as the study of "fossilized ideas," the remains of civilizations past. If the echo of Al Purdy's "Lament for the Dorsets," which elegeizes one of the groups McGhee describes, was not already unmistakable, McGhee's depiction of the archaeologist meditating on "a tiny but powerful carving representing a magical creature from the mind of an ancient craftsman" makes it so. Like Purdy's speaker who imagines the artist carving the ivory swan that is now an artifact, McGhee evokes the romance of studying the past by contemplating the meaning of art. Yet, while he often muses on the possible spiritual relevance or cultural value of art to the Dorsets in particular, McGhee settles on material significance, indicating that the art objects have value primarily as artifacts.

The cold, dry Arctic climate preserves artifacts from thousands of years ago exactly where they were left by their owners. While McGhee articulately conveys the wonder finding such a scene inspires, he

also walks the reader through the reasoning process that takes place as evidence is considered. What can be reasonably concluded from sparse archaeological findings is impressive. Radiocarbon dating shows Palaeo-Eskimo sites to date from 3,000 to 4,000 years ago, much earlier than was previously thought, and comparisons of tools and dwellings reveal important similarities between Palaeo-Eskimos and Euroasians, particularly in Siberia, suggest that Palaeo-Eskimos were not, as originally thought, an inland North American people who moved north but "the most northern of a sequence of rich maritime economies that developed over the past few millennia along the coasts of the North Pacific Rim from Japan to British Columbia."

Another startling discovery points to the extent of Palaeo-Eskimo economic activities. When "a small copper coin, minted in Norway during the late eleventh century AD" was excavated from an Indian village in Maine, it was at first taken as a sign of early Norse presence. Further excavation, however, revealed several other artifacts made of a stone used by Palaeo-Eskimo people. In the absence of other European evidence, this discovery points to trade linking the Palaeo-Eskimo and archaic North American Indians.

While McGhee is careful to distinguish between ancient Arctic people and modern Inuit, suggesting that knowledge of the ancient way of life should not lead to assumptions concerning the way modern Inuit should live, he frequently bases speculation about ancient social practices on the ethnography of later cultures. For example, he presents the division of labour as strictly gendered, an assumption about pre-contact Inuit that is now disputed by anthropologists including Jean Briggs. The analysis of archaeological evidence is somewhat speculative, but it is grounded

in demonstrable proof and rational explanation whereas more detailed images of daily life among the Palaeo-Eskimo peoples are not. Such passages add colour, but McGhee might have expressed his vision of “lives lived richly and joyfully amid the dangers and insecurities that are beyond the imagination of the present world” by sticking to the explanation of evidence and without including details of imaginary events. Or, rather than include fictionalized accounts of Palaeo-Eskimo life, he might have explored the evidence offered by Inuit oral tradition in greater depth. One of the innovative parts of the text is McGhee’s use of Inuit stories of the Tunit and his conclusion “that the Tunit legends are historical accounts referring to the final generations of the Palaeo-Eskimos.” Although it is presumed that the Dorsets were overrun by the arrival of the Thule, the story of their demise remains an intriguing mystery. McGhee argues that traces of Dorset culture remain in details of material culture dating from the time when the Thule culture would have encountered the Dorsets, and he believes the Dorsets could not have become extinct as marriage, adoption, and abduction would no doubt have occurred between the Dorset and Thule. If, as he believes, the Palaeo-Eskimo are part of the cultural and biological heritage of modern Inuit, perhaps more than the “ivory thought is still warm.”



Embracing Truths, Lies

Dave Margoshes

Long Distance Calls. Coteau \$14.95

Keath Fraser

Telling My Love Lies. Porcupine's Quill \$16.95

Karl Jirgens

A Measure of Time. Mercury \$14.50

Reviewed by Brett Josef Grubisic

Taken together, Dave Margoshes' *Long Distance Calls*, Keath Fraser's *Telling My Love Lies* and Karl Jirgens' *A Measure of Time* enact a debate concerned with differing ways of recounting stories. While Margoshes seems at home with a traditional realist ordering of the world, Fraser and Jirgens discard realism's relative comforts in favour of free-wheeling play. The results of the latter two are mixed, suggesting both the benefits and possible dangers of literary experimentation.

Long Distance Calls is an accomplished and elegant story collection. Dedicated to Margoshes' father and featuring an epigraph by Faulkner—"The past is never dead. It's not even past"—the majority of the dozen stories involve narrators recollecting their pasts, often with keen interest in male relationships. Oft-played variations on a theme—"From the Burns Family Table," "A Book of Great Worth," "Feathers and Blood," "Pennies on the Track" and "A Distant Relation"—depict young men looking back one or two generations to fathers and father figures. Their memories, though, are not sepia-tinged nostalgia. The youths are witness to violence and deceit as well as love, and learn that what they desire and receive are rarely one and the same.

In addition to an insistent focus on the patrilineal, many of Margoshes' stories explore moments of intersection between loss and triumph. The exultant "This Moment, With All its Promise," describes

Kathy, a Vancouver woman searching in an almost picaresque fashion for her birth parents. The gentle humour of “Night is Coming” comes from its canny depiction of an elderly man desperately trying to reconnect with Ardis, a woman he had abandoned a half century earlier. “A Message From the Brontës” tells of a bookish girl’s unpleasant marriage to a brutish farmer in Canada. Emphasizing cross-cultural (cross-class, cross-gender) miscommunication, these latter tales of Margoshes resonate with a curious oxymoron: well-mannered passion.

Keath Fraser initially signals his playful resistance to realism in *Telling My Love Lies* with twin epigraphs—Wilde on the pleasures of “lying for its own sake” and the Book of Psalms: “Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips and from a deceitful tongue.” With an additional dedicatory quip from the Wife of Bath, Fraser is clearly signalling he’s *up to something*. Fraser’s literary conceit is further explained in *Telling’s* foreword, written by Patricia Melmouth (Sebastian Melmoth, of course, being Wilde’s post-Reading pseudonym). The chair of a ten-member reading club nestled in the Fraser Valley, Melmouth explains, “Instead of opening us up to new experiences, fresh symmetries, our critical exchanges were commanding boredom.” The group’s solution is to have each member write a story set in “Perumbur,” the fictional name of their “semi-rural world.”

Considering his self-imposed task, Fraser does not reach as far as you might expect. He has suggested that each person is a novice writer, yet surprisingly there are no ineptly plotted, grammatically disastrous and inanely misdirected stories. They are all similarly well-wrought, in fact; Fraser takes no pains to establish the individuality of his authors and their styles. They are equally skilled writers who all share the

same writerly characteristics—also those of Keath Fraser, author of *Popular Anatomy*. So T.S. Saini (author of “Sikh”) sounds like flight attendant Robin How (“Foster Story”), who echoes former Olympic rower Anne Tanice Reid (“The Girl with the White Light”), who might be mistaken for lawyer Jim Constance (“Flight”). Fraser promises a bravura performance—himself utilizing ten ventriloquist’s dummies—but he speaks with only one voice.

Past the large structural problems, the tales of *Telling My Love Lies* are crafty and amusing interrogations of a wide array of topics. Beside plentiful instances of deft humour (see “The Girl with the White Light,” “Sikh” and “Damages”) and strange permutations of pathos (especially in “Sturgeon,” “My Honour, Your Honour” and the title story), there is always Fraser’s distinctive play with language. Never exactly smooth and symmetrical, its beauty is of the kind found in Gaudí’s Casa Batlló—eccentric and unexpected but striking. Visiting the house of dead Mr. Foster in “Foster Story,” Robin supplies a typical descriptive flourish—

Insects had squeezed out eggs into the breadbox, strung up hammocks in cupboard corners, pushed far into the drawers of his desk on colonizing expeditions, and preyed as big populations do on one another everywhere—web over wing, a misfortune of the world.

The nine fictions comprising *A Measure of Time* enact a kind of literary syncretism. A magpie, Karl Jirgens, rifles through popular culture, world history, current events and his own past and then fuses the bits into bizarre unwieldy narratives. In any given piece Jirgens is likely to muse upon historical figures and events (Einstein, Rothko, cosmonaut Sergei Krikalov, Marcel Duchamp; world wars, atomic

blasts, cultural atrocities, especially Russian ones), quasi-scientific matters (“I somehow understood that these were cytoplasts, dendritic forms in the brain. I sensed that a biochemical, NE-4, I think it was, had something to do with healing damaged dendritic forms”), dreams, mundane obligations, time travel, and UFOs.

Each story is related by a narrator named Karl Jirgens. Typically, one begins with his sitting in his cramped apartment in Toronto when a sudden errant occurrence or thought transports him (literally, in the case of “Fire, Dusk on the Desert”) to another place. And while he travels to remarkable and unexpected places, it’s never certain whether the fanciful inventiveness is particularly interesting or worthwhile. It’s eye-catching, certainly, but after the pyrotechnic flash little remains.

As a whole Jirgens’ *A Measure of Time* is a forceful compendium of thoughts and images. And while information overload may be his point, it is not a point that gets developed. Jirgens’ affinity for eccentric cultural detritus (like Einstein’s brain in “Albert Einstein’s Brain is Falling from the Sky in Kansas or Indiana or Maybe New Mexico” or washed-ashore running shoes in “Panta Rei Ouden Menei!”) is compelling, but he stretches everything too far for integrity. Like a crazed man insistent on relating each of his thoughts to you, Jirgens convinces you only that *his* experience of those thoughts is exciting (even if what information gets conveyed is not). And at other times, the writing appears dully overwrought—

That desperate loneliness becomes aggressive and grievous at the mind-fuck infinite deadbeatness that buries the soul in an avalanche of snow, until the body, buried alive, becomes a body of snow, until the mind, thinking thoughts of snow, becomes blank and crystalline and the

ears can hear but the body no longer feels the winds pass over the white blanket, and a rigid and icy calm pervades.

Fitfully intriguing, but more often simply puzzling, *A Measure of Time* is so idiosyncratic and packed with insular logic it leaves readers frustrated, attempting to break through the encrypted words and images Jirgens is sending.

Italian-Canadian Diversity

F.G. Paci

The Rooming-House. Oberon \$14.95

Fiorella De Luca Calce

Vinnie and Me. Guernica \$12.00

Alda Merini

A Rage of Love. trans. Pasquale Verdicchio.
Guernica \$12.00

Marilia Bonincontro, ed.

L’Esilio della Poesia: Poeti italo-canadesi.
Noubs n.p.

Reviewed by Joseph Pivato

Italian-Canadian writing has expanded and diversified over the past decade in ways that Pier Giorgio DiCicco could hardly have imagined when he first edited *Roman Candles* in 1978. The books reviewed here indicate some of this growth both in the number of titles which appear every year and in the quality of the writing itself. *The Rooming-House* is Frank Paci’s seventh novel since he wrote *The Italians* in 1978. Paci, one of the founding authors of Italian-Canadian writing, is best known for his second novel, *Black Madonna*, a work still popular in university literature courses. *The Rooming-House* is the fourth novel in the series that began with *Black Blood*, and tells the life story of Marco Trecroci, a young man who grew up in an Italian immigrant family in Sault Ste

Marie, Ontario. In the previous volume, *Sex and Character*, Mark, as a student at the University of Toronto, is encouraged to write by Margaret Laurence when he shows her his manuscript for a novel. She asks him, "Why didn't you write about your background . . . you know, your family and roots. . . ?" Paci has followed this advice; ever since he has devoted his novels to exploring the lives of Italian immigrants and their children. The series of four novels is a *Künstlerroman*, an apprenticeship story about the development of the artist. In *The Rooming-House* Mark has finished his degree and is working as a proofreader for Dave Godfrey at Adanac Press, a nationalist publisher. The senior editor, Charlie Macrae, is not willing to recommend Mark for a junior arts grant to finish his novel: "According to Macrae, I don't even know the language well enough. As if I'm doomed because my mother tongue isn't English like his." This, of course, is a criticism often leveled at ethnic minority writers as if there was only one acceptable way to use the English language. Paci, Nino Ricci, Rohinton Mistry and M.G. Vassanji have demonstrated that people from other cultures can be successful English novelists. Individuals like Macrae are wrong in other ways as well; Mark needs to develop as a writer not by studying language but rather by growing into a well-rounded man. This narrative focuses on Mark's relationships with various women he meets in the rooming-house and in his work. He becomes infatuated with the older woman, Marian, an editor-writer at the press, and with Milly the sexually-active next-door neighbor. Despite his sexual fantasies, what Mark gets from these and other women is not sex but sad stories about their shattered lives. Mark learns to see them less as sex objects and more as real human beings who need love. This

maturity prepares Mark for Amanda, the woman he falls in love with near the end of the novel. They plan to go to Europe together, a further step in Mark's education as a writer.

Unlike the previous volumes in this series *The Rooming-House* is less concerned with abstract philosophical ideas and more with human relationships. Not since *Black Madonna* has Paci been so interested in understanding the psychology of women, and there are a variety of women in this novel. Through the naive Mark we explore the motivation and behaviour, their fears and aspirations. Maybe this son of immigrants can bring some new insights into our knowledge of human relationships. It is a pleasure to read Paci's characteristic plain prose style, a transparency that tries to reveal each character realistically and yet within the context of greater forces in civilization.

Fiorella De Luca Calce continues her exploration of human relationships in the Italian community of Montreal with her second novel, *Vinnie and Me*. This short narrative deals with the peculiar friendship of a young girl and boy, Piera and Vinnie, and their trials and tribulations at school and home. Piera is a bright student who aspires to be an artist while Vinnie is a free spirit who often gets into trouble. Vinnie helps his friend get into art school despite her lack of faith in her own abilities. Like her first novel, *Toni*, this work seems to be directed at younger readers who can identify with the characters, but the success of *Toni* suggests that Calce has appeal for a broad readership. This young writer has mastered the form of the short novel and we expect that soon she will produce a longer work of fiction.

With *A Rage of Love* the Italian writer Alda Merini gives us a memoir of her experiences as a patient in a mental hospital. In

poetic prose she explores the depth of mental illness with a clarity that will strike any reader. The Italian-Canadian poet Pasquale Verdicchio has rendered into English Merini's complex vision of a life buried in illness. Verdicchio is one of the most active translators of Italian poetry and through his work on Antonio Porta, Giorgio Caproni and Alda Merini he maintains the links between the literature of Italy and that of Canada. His own collections of poetry, *Approaches to Absence* (1994) and *Nomadic Trajectory* (1990) reflect the linguistic influence of these Mediterranean writers. His recent translation of Antonio Gramsci, *The Southern Question*, indicates the valuable work of these writers on questions of social and political import. Whether it is his translations or his original poetry Verdicchio is a writer who merits closer attention. Credit is also due to Guernica editions for supporting these translation projects.

Marilia Bonincontro's anthology of Italian-Canadian poets is meant for readers back in Italy and is an indication of the interest which these writers have stirred up in Europe. This bilingual collection includes work by Pier Giorgio DiCicco, Mary Melfi and Mary di Michele who write in English and by Fulvio Caccia and Filippo Salvatore who work in French. All the poems have the Italian version on facing pages. Even fans of Italian-Canadian writing will be surprised by the number of books, articles and theses that are now devoted to the work of these sons and daughters of immigrants. And now with the translation of their work back in Italy the pattern of cultural exchange has become an endless circle which we hope will go on forever.



Jobbery and Snobbery

Allan Pritchard, ed.

Vancouver Island Letters of Edmund Hope Verney, 1862-65. UBC Press \$65

Peter Neary, ed.

White Tie and Decorations: Sir John and Lady Hope Simpson in Newfoundland, 1934-1936. U Toronto P \$39.95

Reviewed by Ronald Rompkey

One subtle feature that British letters from abroad sometimes share with British travel writing is the landscape fallacy, the subtle device of admiring local landscape while at the same time diminishing the native found living in it. Colonial discourse is full of such descriptions. The landscape is beautiful, savage or picturesque but also a site for political and social judgements offered up by the correspondent and shared by the reader. In these two superbly edited volumes, the landscape fallacy appears again in the reflection of two colonial experiences, one from the deck of a British gunboat in Esquimalt, Vancouver Island, before the unification of the two west coast colonies, and the other from the the fifth floor of what used to be the Newfoundland Hotel in St. John's, at the beginning of seventeen years of commission government leading to confederation in 1949. The correspondents, despite differences in age, experience, social class and narrative ability, share remarkably similar assumptions about power and dominance as they present two distinct actualities for the benefit of readers at home.

From 1862 to 1865, Lieutenant Edmund Hope Verney, R.N., then in his mid-twenties, commanded H.M.S. *Grappler*, a three-masted gunboat just over 100 feet long based at Esquimalt. His letters, edited by Allan Pritchard, formerly professor of English at the University of Toronto, constitute one

side of an extensive correspondence he carried on with his father, Sir Harry Verney, a baronet and Liberal M.P. installed at Claydon House, Buckinghamshire. In tone and direction, the letters bear the influence and preoccupations of the older Verney, an altruistic, reform-minded evangelical Anglican who had married the sister of Florence Nightingale after the death of Edmund's mother. Consequently, Edmund's side of the exchange, apart from his renderings of routine activities, often consists of protracted and sometimes strained expressions of likemindedness and of his desire to please.

The activities aboard *Grappler* serve as a backdrop for the young naval officer, who is more interested in political and social matters ashore than the sometimes repetitive lighthouse and harbour duties of his vessel. Shaped by aristocratic Whig politics and the tradition of the quarterdeck, he endeavours to make sense of the colonial society unfolding before him: civic and ecclesiastical affairs, the economic impact of the gold rush in the Cariboo, the tensions between Victoria and the lower mainland, the relations between the European and the native populations, the importation of women, and the prospects for the future. Unfortunately, he conveys this with all the flourish of a ship's log, without much pretense to style or invention. He disapproves of local officials and calls into question the bishop's shortcomings. The natives are "dirty," the expatriate British "odious," Governor Douglas a "drag-downwards." Moreover, Verney himself is relentlessly self-absorbed. He tires both himself and the reader with his efforts to keep up relations with his father (who thinks him vain), and his preoccupation with promotion becomes, in the words of the editor, "tedious" as he importunes his father to intercede on his behalf.

The letters of Sir John and Lady "Quita" Hope Simpson are not intrinsically more interesting, but they are certainly more engaging. Edited by historian Peter Neary of the University of Western Ontario, they glisten with memorable sidelights and entertaining *aperçus*—all cast within the same colonial discourse as Verney's but heightened by the insight accumulated from long experience. A veteran of colonial and government service, Sir John was 65 and his wife 64 when they arrived in Newfoundland in 1934, Hope Simpson being one of six commissioners (three of them Newfoundlanders) with astonishing executive and legislative powers to "put things right." Like Verney, the two admire the landscape during their forays outside the capital but condemn virtually everything else about the people and their public institutions, confident that in the future the regulated folk society they were endeavouring to construct would improve matters.

The letters of the two Hope Simpsons also sustain an amusing counterpoint with each other. Sir John had over the years developed an earnest but occasionally self-mocking narrative voice and a facility for the apt phrase. Grand Falls, in his view, is not just an industrial town but "rather like an Indian station," the city of St. John's not just factious but "divided into watertight compartments." "Quita," for her part, had thoroughly mastered the domestic style. Nothing escapes her opinions and judgements, especially what she calls "social morality," but like Verney she is apt to drift into chats about household matters when she hasn't much else to say.

The two are dedicated to the task of reform (though privately they take the measure of their colleagues and acknowledge the Gilbert and Sullivan court life at Government House). Their sense of mis-

sion and certitude never wavers as Sir John goes about his business. He must not only develop plans for marketing salt fish but reorganize the civil service, not only found a rural ranger force but promote game preservation and land settlement and look after lighthouses. Not surprisingly, a year after his arrival, he complains of fatigue, and a year after that he would hand over to his successor, convinced that despite deep-seated resistance to change amongst the local worthies he had accomplished something.

Each collection of letters is raised beyond the ephemeral by the thorough introductions and careful footnotes of the editors. Professor Pritchard goes exhaustively into the circumstances of the Verney family, Professor Neary into the economic conditions which brought about the loss of Newfoundland's democratic institutions in the first place. The two collections succeed admirably, not simply as transactions of colonial enterprise but as representations of the colonial mind at work.

Trapped Tales

Eden Robinson

Traplines. Knopf Canada \$26.00

Reviewed by Dee Horne

In her first collection of short stories, Eden Robinson presents bleak portraits of four adolescents and their dysfunctional families. A Vancouver writer who grew up on the Haisla Nation Kitamaat reserve, Robinson sets her stories on the reservation and in Vancouver. Each story is told from the point of view of an adolescent who endeavors to negotiate constricting, often oppressive, social constraints. These slivers of life evoke the growing pains of adolescence; each character desires to

belong, to be accepted by their peers, yet also longs to escape from their family and community. While they survive, they never escape their surroundings. Instead, Robinson conveys the frustrations of characters who are helpless and disempowered.

Unlike Thomas King's *One Good Story, That One* or Sherman Alexie's *Tonto and Lone Ranger Fist Fight in Heaven*, Robinson's *Traplines* does not overtly challenge settler images or stereotypes of First Nations. Instead of asking us to "imagine the reservation" as Alexie does, Robinson draws readers into the darkness of her characters' lives. We feel their futility and disempowerment—and cringe.

A danger with this approach is that it can backfire. By describing these First Nations experiences without critiquing the colonial relationship, Robinson may well fuel colonial stereotypes. She depicts the violence and abuse that exists in the village as families face poverty, alcoholism, unemployment, drug addiction and suicide. She does not overtly suggest the causes of these problems, although there are occasional hints that these problems are symptoms of a dysfunctional, colonial society. In "Traplines," the first story, what little restraint Will's father exercises is to keep the social workers at bay: "Eric has no marks on his face. Dad probably hit him on the back and stomach. Dad has been careful since the social worker came to our house." In this instance, as in Alexie's *Tonto and Lone Ranger Fist Fight in Heaven*, fist fights are expressions of misplaced love and frustration in the face of settler intrusions. These allusions to the colonial relationship are rare, however. Robinson uses a strategy that is common in oral traditions; namely she does not explain or account for why things are the way they are. She just takes us into the situation and allows us to come to our own conclusions.

King and Alexie often resist colonial stereotypes and, to borrow Gerald Vizenor's words, "re-invent the invention" of "Indianness" (Blaeser *Gerald Vizenor* 39). They present characters who exercise, or strive to exercise, self-determination. In Robinson's stories, characters' efforts to determine their own lives prove futile. They remain trapped in lines not of their own making and are pawns in power games they cannot control.

Unlike Thomas King's story cycle in *Medicine River* where Will returns home, reconnects to the land, his community and its traditions and finds redemption through all his relations, Robinson presents communities where there is little promise of redemption. While some of the characters dream of Disney-like homes where parents never fight, money is never a problem and life is secure, Robinson demonstrates how these Disney ideals foster unrealistic goals and dissatisfaction and further ensnare her characters.

"Contact Sports" is about power and the mind games that people play in their efforts to manipulate and control others. Tommy, the narrator, is an adolescent struggling to help his mother make ends meet. When his wealthy cousin, Jeremy, comes to visit, his life takes a turn for the worse. Like the Disney characters Tom and Jerry, Jeremy and Tommy engage in cat and mouse games. Readers may well see a correlation between Jeremy's paternalistic practices and the wardship practices of settlers toward First Nations. By alluding to contact sports, the title suggests that the violence in contact sports (or cultural contacts even) is an expression of unequal power relationships.

Throughout the collection, Robinson focuses on the fine line between buying in, or in this case being bought, and selling out. Characters are seemingly driven to

acts of betrayal in their efforts to escape the violence of their surroundings. Robinson portrays these acts as forms of rebellion in which the characters attempt to exert what little power or control they have; ultimately, however, their actions alienate them from their families and communities. In "Traplines," for example, Will attempts to escape the abuse and violence of his home life by seeking refuge in the home of Mrs. Smythe, his high school English teacher. His father perceives his loyalty to his teacher as a betrayal of his family while his peers perceive his affiliation as a form of selling out, of becoming a "townie."

In "Queen of the North," Robinson challenges the idea of loyalty for loyalty's sake and demonstrates how family and community relations can become oppressive. Unlike the other stories, here Robinson presents a protagonist who not only survives but ends the abuse. The story is about incest and opens with a compelling image of a house in the village where the frogs used to sing. The house has since been abandoned and covered up with rocks and gravel. This image sets the tone for the story about Uncle Josh's sexual abuse of his niece, Adelaine. Like the frogs, Adelaine has ceased to sing. She has become covered up by rocks and gravel, by a hard exterior in which she acts out her abuse in displays of physical aggression, sexual promiscuity and other forms of rebellion. Uncle Josh tries to buy Adelaine's silence by giving her money and toys. The frequent time shifts lend a disjointed quality to the story that aptly conveys the narrator's fragmented identity.

Robinson suggests that while there is often a pattern of abuse, it is possible to destroy the cycle. As a result of seeing photographs of her uncle as a boy, Adelaine suspects that he was abused by his priest. She makes a montage in which she places

the photograph of her Uncle Josh when he was a boy on top of the body of Father Archibald and her face on top of Uncle Josh's. She stops Uncle Josh's abuse by calling him Father Archibald and telling him that she has said her prayers.

Robinson's skill as a writer is evident in her ability to craft haunting and, at times, humorous images that resonate throughout the story. "Dogs In Winter" begins with an image of a poodle who "greeted people by humping their legs." This image reinforces the theme of misplaced and excessive love. Using flashbacks and dream sequences, Robinson describes the efforts Lisa, the narrator, makes to come to terms with her mother's excessive, murderous love. Like Sethe's love for Beloved, in Toni Morrison's novel, Lisa's mother repeatedly demonstrates her ability to murder to protect those she loves. Like Sethe, she believes that betrayal—selling out—is worse than murder.

What makes these stories remarkable is the skill with which Robinson draws readers into the grim lives of her characters, snaring us momentarily in their traplines. She uses a sparse minimalist style that reinforces the starkness of her characters' lives. In the vein of oral traditions, these stories do not tell us what to think.

Instead, they are open-ended and leave readers to ponder the dilemmas and issues that they raise. In describing oral storytelling, Lee Maracle explains that "The listeners are drawn into the dilemma and are expected at some point in their lives to actively work themselves out of it. . . . When our orators get up to tell a story, there is no explanation, no set-up to guide the listener—just the poetic terseness of the dilemma is presented" (*Sojourner's Truth*).

Amazed that *Traplines* "got the critical acclaim it did," W.P. Kinsella recently dismissed Robinson's book on the grounds that it was "absolutely dreadful. Mediocre

writing. Unpleasant stories" (*BC Bookworld* Spring 1997). While the stories may be "unpleasant," they are not "mediocre." Robinson encourages readers to interrogate their assumptions and expectations. Why do stories have to be pleasant? What exactly is unpleasant about these stories and why? By presenting the futility of characters who are trapped in snares they have not created, Robinson encourages readers to question why these snares exist.

Villages, nouvelles

Pamela V. Sing

Villages imaginaires: Edouard Montpetit, Jacques Ferron et Jacques Poulin. Fides - CETEQ (Centre d'études québécoises du Département d'études françaises de l'Université de Montréal) \$24.95

Matt Cohen and Wayne Grady, eds.

The Quebec Anthology, 1830-1990. U of Ottawa P \$26/\$45

Reviewed by Marie Vautier

Pamela V. Sing argues in *Villages imaginaires* that the concept of "the village" has evolved in the Québécois literary imagination, but that its textualization remains constant. Based on her 1993 doctoral dissertation, Sing's work offers close readings of three texts which illustrate appreciations of "the village" in traditional, modern and postmodern thought: Edouard Montpetit's *Présences* (1955), Jacques Ferron's *Le ciel de Québec* (1969), and Jacques Poulin's *Le Coeur de la baleine bleue* (1970).

Présences forms part of the memoirs of Montpetit, a forward-thinking member of the highly traditional French Canadian elite of the early twentieth century. *Présences* reflects this elite's obligation to maintain the traditional role of the "Canadien français": pro-community, pro-Catholicism and solidly anchored in "la terre," but Sing's

analysis reveals ambiguity in Montpetit's portrayal of a seemingly calm, serene village. While the dominant ideology of the mid-twentieth century was to create "un mysticisme de la terre," and to actively promote the small communities of rural Quebec, Montpetit felt that Quebec should participate in the economic and technological reforms called for by the rapid urbanization of that period. Montpetit's idyllic vision of the village endows it with mythic qualities, and makes of it "l'âme du peuple canadien-français et la pierre angulaire de la nation."

Sing's analysis of *Le ciel de Québec*, published during the Quiet Revolution, illustrates how Ferron's humorous portrayal of the "confrontation" between two villages in rural Quebec moves the theme of the village beyond the *stasis* of Montpetit's traditionally paralysed-in-the-past "village traditionnel canadien français." Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of the carnivalesque are used to illustrate how the inhabitants of a small rural hamlet, the Chiquettes, upset the traditional social order represented by their neighbouring "grand village." With humour and irony, Ferron describes the happenings when the Chiquettes are visited by politicians and clergy from "away." The oppositions between "haut/bas, le clergé/la sage femme, la terre/le nouvel ordre," all underline the triumph of the Chiquettes and undermine the "grand village." And yet, as Sing underlines, in the end, the two villages have need of each other to face the future. In this novel, which expresses "la préoccupation du collectif" and illustrates "la volonté des Québécois d'entrer dans la modernité," the village has become a dynamic, *métissé* world, which is ready for action and not only looking toward the past. References to Poulin as a prominent post-modernist abound, but this evaluation is usually based on his later novels, especially

Volkswagen Blues (1989). In a subtle reading of Poulin's elusive prose, Sing proposes that in *Le coeur de la baleine bleue*, the urban space of "Vieux-Quebec" is somewhat the equivalent of a traditional village for the main character of the novel, a 30-year-old man who has recently received the heart of a young girl through a transplant. Here, "village" is portrayed as a protective "matrice" which affords the man the distinct possibility of nostalgia. However, in this indeterminate postmodern world, the experience of the village must be limited to moments, fragments of memories, and life's provisional little pleasures. Thus, the "village" is abstracted as the possibility of a space for spiritual growth, creative possibilities and an exploration of the feminine, seen as "la douceur."

Sing's brief overview of the major theories of postmodernism lead her to conclude that Poulin's expression of postmodernism does not correspond to the gloom and doom theories espoused by so many theorists, but to a postmodern appreciation of indeterminacy. While it is unfortunate that Sing does not refer to any recent works on community and postmodernism, and that she turns too frequently to the work of her thesis director, Gilles Marcotte, this work is an innovative appreciation of the village in Quebec in the twentieth century.

Quebec Anthology offers a comprehensive overview of twentieth-century Quebec through a collection of translated short stories from the nineteenth century (including the Aubert de Gaspés) and a solid collection from mid-twentieth century: Anne Hébert's "The Torrent," and stories by Alain Grandbois, Ringuet, Gabrielle Roy, Jacques Ferron, and Hubert Aquin. While the editors have chosen not to include contemporary writers such as François Barcelo (who appeared in their

previous collection, *Intimate Strangers: New Stories from Quebec*), they have retained Monique Proulx, Gaétan Brulotte, and others, while including new writers such as Claire Dé and Anne Dandurand. *Quebec Anthology* suffers occasionally from the same typographical and grammatical errors that plagued *Strangers*; although some of these were pointed out by a reviewer of the latter, they have not been corrected. However, these mistakes are minor, and this anthology's introduction and its presentations of the authors are substantial and informative. This would be a good text for an introductory course on Québécois literature in translation.

L'éclosion de plans

Sharon L. Sparling

Histoire d'oeufs. Trad. Michel Saint-Germain.
vib éditeur \$24.95

Mireille Calle-Gruber

La division de l'intérieur. L'Hexagone \$14.95
Compte rendu de Matthew Manera

Histoire de jumelles, de doubles, de faux, confusion d'identité—voilà le jaune dans *Histoire d'oeufs*, traduction de *The Nest Egg* de Sharon L. Sparling. Bien que l'intrigue tourne autour d'une course aux oeufs de Pâques Fabergé, l'on s'intéresse plus à Greer Payton, héroïne fortuite du récit, qui cherche à se définir dans un monde où l'on n'est jamais certain de l'authenticité ou de l'unicité des choses ni des personnes.

Greer et sa soeur, Leslie, sont de vraies jumelles, sauf que Leslie est souple, élégante et belle tandis que Greer est suralimentée et proche de l'obésité. Leslie, qui couche à droite et à gauche, est néanmoins mariée au célèbre, riche et sexagénaire sénateur Jules Dansereau, tandis que Greer semble être destinée à la vie de vieille fille.

Comme si elle voulait compenser ce manque de ressemblance, Leslie a donné naissance à quatre garçons identiques—les "Cats"—que l'on a décidé avec résignation après quelques années de traiter comme une seule et même personne. Mais si la maternité des Cats est certaine, la paternité ne l'est pas. Sont-ils les fils de Jules ou de son fils, Yves? Enfin, si Greer n'a rien en commun avec sa soeur sauf que toutes les deux ont partagé à la fois la même matrice, là où Leslie est incapable ou peu disposée à forger des relations sincères avec personne, Greer est très attachée à son grand-père, Connie, âgé de plus de quatre-vingt-dix ans et d'origine russe—d'où le lien entre Greer et les oeufs Fabergé.

Connie est apparemment entré en possession de quelques-uns des oeufs Fabergé—authentiques ou faux, on n'en est jamais certain—aussi bien que de plusieurs objets de grande valeur dont le moyen d'acquisition est suspect. Aussi suspects sont les manigances d'Ivan, frère de Connie, et l'attention amoureuse de Simon envers Greer, son ancienne amie estudiantine. Mais enfin, lequel des trois hommes est vraiment en possession des oeufs authentiques? Pourquoi les veut-il? La réponse à ces deux questions aussi bien que la façon dont chacun essaie de manipuler Greer en quête du prix la rendent tour à tour frustrée, déconcertée et déçue. Greer seule trouve à la fin le grand prix qui lui donne un certain éclaircissement, et qui lui permet d'éprouver une transformation inattendue.

La division de l'intérieur de Mireille Calle-Gruber traite aussi de la confusion d'identité, mais là il s'agit d'une confusion bien forcée, c'est-à-dire clairement et à dessein postmoderne. Sur la couverture du roman, on nous dit qu'il "met en fiction la crise du sujet moderne," et l'on pose la question, "Dans le décor de l'Europe centrale, que devient le sujet affectif et politique

dans la débâcle qui a suivi la chute du mur de Berlin?” De telles indications, bien qu’elles fassent remarquer les détails superficiels de “l’intrigue,” ne servent qu’à tromper le lecteur/la lectrice qui y cherche un récit traditionnel, parce qu’en effet il s’agit dans *La division de l’intérieur* d’un récit qui se déconstruit de façon délibérée. Ce qui importe n’est pas le récit ni l’intrigue mais l’échafaudage, l’acte de construire pour que l’on puisse à tour déconstruire—une Mecque en mots pour l’étudiant(e) et le professeur de théorie littéraire. La langue est admirablement architecturale et dans sa linéarité et dans son insinuation; et bien que l’on puisse tenter une analyse des circonstances, des actions ou des pensées des trois personnages principaux dont les vies s’entrelacent de façon nécessaire pendant la déconstruction et la reconstruction des systèmes politiques, des vies intérieures et des relations personnelles, il n’y a, enfin, rien de subtil. L’ombre de la main de l’auteur se projette sur chaque page, surtout sur les dernières.

Certainement le lecteur/la lectrice peut s’attacher intellectuellement au peintre, Eva, qui “se claquemure . . . réduite aux confrontations sur toile où elle s’acharne à figurer la défaite du corps” avant ou après, ou avant et après—c’est au lecteur/à la lectrice de choisir—s’être échappée d’une situation politique et sociale claustrophobique en faisant un mariage blanc avec le vieillard, Alexis Barrot. Ou à Ivan, psychiatre, qui ne cherche peut-être qu’à “obtenir le visa qui permet de s’éclipser vers l’ouest où il demande asile”—peut-être. Mais quel que soit le récit que l’on choisisse, qui que ce soit qui ait “vraiment” écrit le récit, dont l’auteur ne manque jamais de nous rap-peler qu’il est une fiction, l’aspect déterminant du roman, c’est l’échafaudage langagier qui affiche sur le récit le panneau, “ne pas lire cette affiche.”

Elusive Moodie

John Thurston

The Work of Words: The Writing of Susanna Strickland Moodie. McGill-Queen’s UP \$55.00

Reviewed by Carole Gerson

In view of the quantity of Susanna Moodie’s writing currently in print (two volumes of her private correspondence, one volume of selected short narratives, *Life in the Clearings Versus the Bush*, and two separate editions of *Roughing It in the Bush*), it is surprising that her work has not received the sustained focus of a book-length analysis since Carol Shields’ 1977 monograph, *Susanna Moodie: Voice and Vision*. The tendency of many, if not most, Canadian critics has been to construct Moodie as an author whose significance lies in her contribution to their project of identifying a national literature, an approach skewed in turn by the canonical power of Margaret Atwood’s several interpretations of Moodie’s representations of herself and her times. Through the various twists and turns of Moodie criticism over the past three decades (cogently summarized in Thurston’s Introduction), Susanna has proven a slippery subject; in her other book on Moodie, her novel *Small Ceremonies* (1977), Carol Shields deftly stickhandles the problem by passing Moodie to a fictional biographer who produces a book we never see, while admitting that she “can’t pin it all down.”

Thurston’s contribution to Moodie scholarship is to have pinned down more details of Moodie’s literary labour and social milieu than have been heretofore accessible, and to have written a study that includes all of Moodie’s writing: poetry, prose, and fiction. His Susanna Moodie arrives in Canada as a mature professional writer equipped with a complex literary,

personal and religious history. Thurston has done considerable research in compiling that history, consistent with his argument that Moodie's "life in England is as important as her life in Canada" and that her "relationship to society is more important than her relationship to the wilderness." Thus he promises a broad cultural studies approach which, in the words of the editorial blurb that precedes the title page, includes "current historicist and feminist literary criticism."

However, this proves to be a curiously uneven book, especially with regard to the application of current historicist and feminist concerns to its documentary research. We have a detailed account of Moodie's publishing history without any calculation of her earnings, intensive analysis of her positions within shifting class structures with very little attention to the intersections of class and gender, and a study of Moodie's various literary contexts without positioning her in relation to other authors, even those to whom she directly refers. On the one hand, until we have a complete Moodie bibliography and a methodically researched biography, I shall value Thurston's book—especially its appended provisional chronological checklist of Moodie's writings—as a reference text (despite the fact that on one occasion my own words are mis-cited). On the other, I found myself frequently pencilling exclamation marks in the margin alongside his interpretive comments. For example, Thurston nicely demonstrates how the continuity of Moodie's pre-emigration years with her Canadian life is emblemized by the ease with which she shrewdly recycled earlier, British poems in Canadian texts and contexts; only five of the forty-seven poems in *Roughing It* and *Life in the Clearings* are original to these volumes. Yet he then

disingenuously concludes, "The twenty-five and the forty-six-year-old were the same. Through this obsessive republication of early poems she sutured the wound of emigration." One would expect a critic whose focus is "work" to attend more diligently to the material reality that a woman of Moodie's class, talents and situation could produce few commodities other than literature, whose resale value she never hesitated to exploit as fully as possible, given her straitened economic circumstances.

Because they contain new information, I find the first three chapters, which situate Moodie's early years within the context of British social, religious and economic history, more rewarding than those on her Canadian life and work. A check against *Letters of a Lifetime* shows that Thurston has expanded somewhat upon the research of Ballstadt, Hopkins and Peterman with further information about the Stricklands' religious context, paying particular attention to connections between religion, politics, and social class, and to details of Moodie's Congregationalism. He reveals that, contrary to the received narrative of Susanna's life, her marriage in the Church of England did not signal her return to the fold, as, in 1831, non-conformist chapels were not permitted to perform the sacrament of marriage. Moreover, he discovered that the Moodies picked up this thread in 1844 when they helped found the Congregationalist Church of Belleville, from which they were soon expelled. Thurston finds signs of her religious non-conformity in her poetry, linking her latitudinarianism with the social analysis of her Canadian books.

If the appearance of this book is timely, some of its contents, unfortunately, feel rather dated. For whatever reason, Thurston cites only archival references to

the correspondence between Susanna and John Moodie that was issued in 1993 as *Letters of Love and Duty*. Missing also is the sense these letters convey of the flesh and blood woman who wrote to her absent husband, “A state of widowhood does not suit my ardent affections,” who detailed her sufferings from mastitis, and above all, who bore seven children in eleven years (1832-43), with constant concerns for their health and survival. In a very important 1990 essay on Moodie, Bina Freiwald points out that in *Roughing It in the Bush*, “[t]here is always a child at Susanna’s side,” thus demonstrating that a feminist analysis of a Victorian woman’s public self-representation must take into account the unwritten and unwritable aspects of her daily private life. Thurston treats *Roughing It* as autobiography to the point of denying the author Susanna Moodie any separation from the character named Susanna Moodie; for example, his discussion of the way the voices of other characters assert themselves against Moodie’s negates the author’s agency in creating the tensions of the text. Yet he remains oblivious to the domestic and maternal, despite their underlying force in shaping Moodie’s best-known book; his class-based analysis acknowledges her children only once, in a passage treating the eventual marriages and careers of several as markers of the family’s identification with “the new hegemonic class.”

The more successful portions of this book, those on Moodie’s class and religious contexts, show that new historicist approaches (via social and cultural history) yield important information critical to our understanding of her British and Canadian writings as products of their cultural and material contexts. At the same time, Thurston often seems driven

by the older mode of thematic criticism to present a reductive analysis of her work in an attempt to unify Moodie’s complexities and (what we perceive as) contradictions. The appearance of this book should lead to many other studies of her life and work through the insights of post-colonialism, feminism, material history, publishing history, and biography. Over all these academic efforts shimmers the ghostly figure of Susanna Moodie, forever elusive, as her current critics and readers, like the Moodies themselves during their decade of table-rapping, attempt to pin down the spirits of the departed.

Things As They Were?

Guy Vanderhaeghe

The Englishman’s Boy. McClelland & Stewart
\$27.50

Reviewed by Julie Beddoes

Guy Vanderhaeghe’s work has been consistently well-received and widely reviewed since his first publication, the short-story collection *Man Descending*, won the Governor-General’s Award for Fiction in 1982 as well as a prize in Britain. All three of his novels have been similarly recognized; *My Present Age*, 1984, was nominated for the Booker Prize; *Homesick*, 1989, won the City of Toronto Book Award; *The Englishman’s Boy* won him a second Governor-General’s in 1996. His stories and plays have also won awards and his work is frequently translated and published in Europe. In view of this, it is strange to find that Tony Horava’s recent bibliography (for *Essays on Canadian Writing*) lists so little that can be considered scholarly analysis. I can only guess that this is because his work has been read as squarely in the tradition of prairie realism;

this genre will probably never lose favour with reviewers and readers though it is understandable that scholars may find that most of what can be said about it has been said already.

There have been exceptions, however, and Constance Rooke, reviewing *Homesick*, found it "almost an experimental novel in disguise." *The Englishman's Boy*, whether or not it can be called experimental, no longer disguises what may turn out to have been Vanderhaeghe's project all along. By explicitly discussing the techniques of realism (one character says, "The truth of small things leads to confidence in the truth of large things"), it invites a rereading of his stories about small-town eccentrics and ne'er-do-wells, the ineffective and the marginalized, as discussions of the way Canadian realist writing has both mythologized and conventionalized such characters. They recur, after all, in the work of many Canadian writers, including two as different from each other as from Vanderhaeghe, Timothy Findlay and Alice Munro. This invitation to reassess has already been issued in the title story of *Things As They Are?*, Vanderhaeghe's last book but one, in which a blocked writer's obsession with Chekhov's ability "to see clearly" and accept "things as they are" prevents him from understanding the story of a tragically deluded young man he befriends. Read in this way, Vanderhaeghe's books become an anatomy of Canadian fiction: a metafictional examination of the way the stories told in our fiction have become part of our national myth. This latest novel adds the adjective "historiographic" to my preceding sentence.

First of all, *The Englishman's Boy* is a hugely entertaining page-turner; its layers of narrative are both so absorbing and so skilfully intertwined that the transition

from one to the other is always a shock but a shock that dramatizes rather than distracts. I will give away as little of the plot as possible so as not to diminish the pleasure of a first reading.

In fact, the book has three narratives. Its present is 1953 in Saskatoon whence the elderly narrator recalls his short career in Hollywood in 1923, and it is this earlier story which is told in present tense, an often used realist "reality effect." Interwoven is a third-person story of the Wild West in 1873 told from the point of view of the Englishman's boy. I guessed the connection between the two embedded stories early in the book but that did not reduce the dramatic tension of following them to their point of intersection. Only on a second reading did the parallels and resemblances between the stories of the two young men in situations they couldn't handle come to seem a little obvious.

The Saskatoonian narrator runs a movie theatre. He tells the story of how the myth of the Wild West was being created and of his part in trying to erect a "truthful" counter-narrative. He is commissioned to track down and write the story of an old movie-extra cowboy supposed to have an adventurous past. It turns out that the cowboy took part in the events that led to the infamous Cypress Hills Massacre that in turn led to the establishing of the North West Mounted Police, a story from Canada's legendary west. Critics will argue whether the book as a whole endorses the notion that such "true stories" exist independently of the stories we tell about them; its many reminders of the fascist use of bogus mythologized history suggest that it does. On the other hand, merely to raise the issue threatens the realist position and, furthermore, the book is constructed on a frame of ironies which

suggests there is danger in such comforts. The “true” story in one of its two main plot lines is to be reduced to the scenario of an epic silent western movie, to be the American *Odyssey* to D.W. Griffiths’ *Iliad*, *The Birth of a Nation*. But the climactic event of this founding myth takes place in Canada and is usually written as Canadian history; several of its characters are Canadian and so is the young man hired to write it. The interwoven stories ironise Hollywood’s nationalistic appropriation of the boy’s story by reminding us of the arbitrariness of “The Medicine Line” and the common complicity, contrary to Canadian myth, in acts of savagery against indigenous people on both sides of the border. So when the screen writer, appalled by the bloody consequences of his meddling with the borderlines of myth and truth, goes back home to a comfortable Canadian marginality, it is hard to say whether he is washing his hands or sticking to his guns. Saskatoon may be less mythologized than Hollywood but our hero spends his life there in a movie theatre.

Earlier Vanderhaeghe writing has often seemed overloaded with detail, an overdone “*effet du réel*.” In this novel, however, the abundance of movie trivia (I don’t know how much is invented, how much historical, which is probably the point) reminds us that Hollywood history is just as much a part of popular myth as the Wild West; it also reminds Canadian readers, as do several recent novels which retell stories of the Canadian West, how much more likely we are to know Hollywood’s version of history than the home-grown version. Perhaps the book’s references to the rise of Mussolini in one of its story-lines and the power of Joe McCarthy in another are its statement that the issue is not that of truth versus myth but of the political necessity both of recog-

nizing myth for what it is and of valuing the homegrown variety.

This novel avoids the weaknesses of Vanderhaeghe’s earlier writing, the excessive detail, the occasional crossing of the line between the moving and the sentimental; it develops its strengths, especially in structure and pace and a concern for integrity, and, with its more adventurous subject matter and more engaging characters (especially for a female reader) brings new stature to its writer.

Victorian Periodicals

J. Don Vann and Rosemary T. VanArsdel

Periodicals of Queen Victoria’s Empire: An Exploration. U Toronto P \$80.00

Paul Thomas Murphy

Toward a Working-Class Canon: Literary Criticism in British Working-Class Periodicals, 1816-1858. Ohio State UP US\$39.50

Reviewed by Corey Coates

Periodicals of Queen Victoria’s Empire offers chapters on Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, South Africa, and “Outposts” of empire, from Ceylon and Cyprus to the West Indies. It is difficult to generalize about a collection so broad in its scope and so diverse in its contents, but perusing it awakens the reader to a sense of the remarkable proliferation and vast variety of journals in the British colonies during the nineteenth century. Usually they were very short-lived, often they were irregularly published, and they could embrace ambitious miscellanies or single issue causes or pursuits. Frequently they were religious in aim or character and often, in early days of a given colony, they were closely tied to personal editorial or partisan political concerns. Rarely or never, however, did publishing in the imperium lead to the kinds of business

and financial empires familiar to us today through names such as Thomson, Black, or Murdoch. Normally, periodicals in the colonies had to compete against cheaper, slicker imports from Britain. Today, American publications are prominent in most English-speaking countries; Canadian periodical producers have lately seen their status become further imperilled with the World Trade Organisation's sanctioning of American split-run publications.

All the authors in *Periodicals of Queen Victoria's Empire* lament the lack or inaccessibility of information, but evidently discrepancies among the former colonies exist. The chapter on Canada, by N. Merrill Distad with Linda M. Distad, is almost a monograph in itself, and is twice as long as that for any other country. However fragmentary their accomplishments thus far may seem, information and archiving sources such as the Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproductions (CIHM) would be the envy of other nations. Ironically, despite the authors' admirable summary of English and French Canadian periodicals, it is particularly with this entry that one often wants to know more, and feels that interesting detail may have been suppressed for space reasons. Happily for the curious, ninety-three detailed footnotes, a bibliographical essay, and a twenty-two page annotated bibliography are included.

The entry for Australia, by Elizabeth Webby, is carefully classified, and emphasizes the difficulty Australians had in competing with their British counterparts, while the wryly written New Zealand entry by J. Reginald Tye provides helpful historical context for the publications it discusses. In the chapter on India, Brahma Chaudhuri observes a brevity indicating frustration and even exasperation before

the paucity of resources available and the rigors of research when "photocopying just two pages might take two or three hours" at the National Library in Calcutta. While all entries provide some essayistic overviews, absence of prior scholarly work can mean that sections such as those on South Africa and on Outposts furnish more in the way of bibliographical information and suggestions for or guides to research than synthetic literary historical pieces.

In *Toward A Working-Class Canon*, Paul Thomas Murphy defines a working-class periodical "as a periodical that is self-consciously directed toward the working-class and that clearly reflects working-class interests." He writes with a stout partisanship which refreshingly enlivens his work to a greater extent than it casts suspicion on his objectivity or the scholarly consequences of his ideological orientation. He sketches some literary history of the working-class periodical in the first half of the nineteenth century by looking successively at critical reactions to and inclusion in the periodicals of fiction, poetry, and drama.

Murphy focusses on significant early periodical editors, such as William Cobbett, Richard Carlile, and Thomas Wooler, and on important periodicals such as the long-lived Chartist *Northern Star* (1837-1852) and the fleeting and rather aggressively titled *Literary Test* (1832). An engaging aspect of Murphy's work is his observation of an evolving sense of a literary canon in writings of working-class journalists. At first, prose literature more or less stood or fell according to its sympathy with working-class causes, or authenticity of representation of the working-class, but as the prestige of the novel form grew, working-class periodicals came to adopt increasingly nuanced views of fiction, and to include fiction that spoke to class concerns within them.

Notably, working-class periodicals helped to canonize the work of now famous American and European authors, by being the first to publish writings by individuals such as Marx and Engels and George Sand.

In poetry, the working-class periodical publishers likewise sought out material germane to their political views. Shelley, Byron, and Burns were favourites, and Murphy demonstrates how working-class writers, if they could not find a way to make poets of past ages fit contemporary contexts, sometimes would merely take to revising earlier poetry for parodical and satirical, as well as literary and political, ends.

What both *Periodicals of Queen Victoria's Empire* and *Toward a Working-Class Canon* amply suggest is that a great deal of academic research and publishing on Victorian periodicals is yet to be done. The conviction, dedication, and will to communicate displayed by so many involved with the production of periodicals during the nineteenth century, certainly deserves the tribute of continuing scholarly work.

Rattling a Noisy Hyphen

Fred Wah

Diamond Grill. NeWest \$16.95

Reviewed by Guy Beauregard

In Fred Wah's *Diamond Grill*, the first-person narrator repeatedly makes his presence known by gleefully kicking doors open with a "Whap!" With similar energy, *Diamond Grill* announces itself as a significant publication: it had the largest initial order of any book ever published by NeWest Press, becoming something of a "multicultural" literary phenomenon for the small Alberta publishers; it is Wah's

first published book of prose—what he has called a fake "biotext"—and it thus marks a generic shift for one of Canada's most accomplished poets; and it succeeds in extending over the course of an entire book the stylistic and thematic implications of the brilliant "Elite" series in *Waiting for Saskatchewan*, a Governor General's Award winner from 1985. *Diamond Grill* consists of little sections, 132 in all, that provide Wah with a flexible form to explore issues of identity, "race," and culture without being locked into a linear narrative—as Wah writes, "Maps don't have beginnings, just edges." The result is a sophisticated and moving text that is multivocal and insistent in its questioning of generic stability.

Diamond Grill begins with a description of Fred Wah Jr. moving through the "two large swinging wooden doors" that lead into the kitchen of the Diamond Grill, a cafe operated by Fred Wah Sr. in Nelson B.C. in the 1950s: "I pick up an order and turn, back through the doors, whap! My foot registers more than its own imprint, starts to read the stain of memory." Wah thus begins what he calls the "heterocellular recovery" of identity as it has been racialized and erased in Canadian social spaces and narratives. The doors—or rather moving *through* the doors, noisily, dramatically—become a recurring metaphor for this process of recovery. Through the doors, Wah performs an ongoing act of cultural negotiation; through the doors, he articulates the potential for movement between cultural spaces. Consider the book's last—but because I'm always flipping back, not final—section, which narrates Fred Sr. opening the cafe in the early morning, unlocking the dead bolt and the padlock, jarring open the door, which "clangs and rattles a noisy hyphen between the muffled winter outside and

the silence of the warm and waiting kitchen inside.” Fred Sr., in the apparently simple but increasingly heroic act of opening the cafe, moves through the liminal space of the doorway; his historical agency emerges as the ability to move noisily *through the hyphen*, to unlock the doors that separate outside and inside.

This movement, however, is risky business in a racist society, and *Diamond Grill* neither glamorizes the act of crossing cultural boundaries nor discounts the costs of doing so. Exemplary in this regard are the often painful passages that deal with Fred Jr. internalizing anti-Chinese racist imperatives and choosing to “pass” as white. In one scene, Fred Jr. has gone fishing with one of the “old Chinamen” who is friends with his dad: “We’re walking back up the hill with our catch of suckers and some kids start chinky, chinky Chinaman and I figure I’d better not be caught with him anymore. I become as white as I can. . . .” The decision to “pass” as white, however, is never settled, for although Fred Jr. describes himself as “racially transpicuous,” being in certain social contexts calls his “invisibility” into question. While in Toronto’s Chinatown, for example, Fred Jr. hesitates but eventually crosses the street to visit a childhood friend in the kitchen of King’s Family Restaurant, where he suffers “the negative capability of camouflage” when he listens to his friend relate in Chinese something Fred Jr. neither understands nor knows. What makes this scene especially powerful, however, is the way Wah narrates the “covering over” of the “ambiguous edge of difference” Fred Jr. had been forced to confront:

back outside, on the street, all my ambivalence gets covered over, camouflaged by a safety net of class and colourlessness—the racism within me

that makes and consumes that neutral (white) version of myself, that allows me the sad privilege of being, in this white world, not the target but the gun.

In this passage and elsewhere, Wah narrates the implications of racism with an honesty and clarity that insist that “the real last spike has yet to be driven.”

Perhaps Wah’s most significant contribution to driving home this “last spike” is his engagement with the complex interpenetrations of “whiteness” and “Chineseness” in a family where these cultural and racialized categories could not (and cannot) be separated. The implications of *Diamond Grill* are therefore profound for anyone engaged in anti-racist projects that refuse to collapse “race” into “colour,” and instead attempt to theorize “Canada” as a “hybrid” cultural space. By hybridity, I do *not* mean a postmodern free-for-all in which we playfully and freely “choose” identities. Rather, following Asian-American cultural critic Lisa Lowe, I refer to hybridity as a form of cross-cultural contact marked by massive asymmetries of power and ongoing racist exclusions that may nevertheless become a site of significant social transformation. And without backing away from these asymmetries and exclusions, Wah has produced a memorable account of how we might begin to move through them, rattling a noisy hyphen along the way.



Seeing Emily, Seeking Carr

Stephanie Kirkwood Walker

This Woman in Particular: Contexts for the Biographical Image of Emily Carr. Foreword

William Closson James. Wilfrid Laurier UP \$34.95

Reviewed by Robert Thacker

Midway through this excellent and important book, Walker encapsulates the view of Emily Carr that emerged from the years immediately following the writer's death in 1945: "By mid-century, then, the template for 'Emily Carr' had been created, and it reflected a wartime yearning for highly charged artistic insight. Carr played a major role in shaping her image . . . She drew herself with bold gestures that were echoed by others who added rhetorical depth and reinforced her compelling emotional intensity. Later biographers may lament Carr's inaccuracies and shibboleths, but she put in place a persona they cannot discount. By 1950 Emily Carr was a figure of national interest implicated in areas of concern to other Canadians." Though other passages in *This Woman in Particular* could serve equally well, this one conveys Walker's purpose and analytical view: that Carr's image was initially self-created and -directed, that it was shaped to suit the times, and that it very quickly became a touchstone for nationalist yearnings. Together, these three matters weave throughout the dense and well-documented argument Walker offers here; she concludes by asserting that "As long as Carr is relevant to questions of culture, her biographical image will offer a guide to terrain at the edges of our knowing."

Taking as a given what Peter Nagourney has called "the impossible search for life upon the printed page," Walker interrogates Carr's biographical

image comprehensively—always with an eye to the ways biography happens. Recognizing in it "the condition of the genre as a cultural process," and adopting both a personal and scholarly stance reflecting "the social construction of subjectivity," she traces myriad contexts for Carr's creation. Indeed, the numerous possible meanings of "creation," both here and throughout Walker's book, warrant attention: Carr presented her own version of herself—both through her painting and, later in her life, the published versions of that self, that life, and that painting. The autobiographical cast to all that Carr published (much of which Walker decides is "fiction"), contributed to the template, as did the letters (published and those held in archives), the descriptive biographies which began to appear as Carr's paintings drew attention from the late-1920s on and the publication of *Klee Wyck* (1940) and *The Book of Small* (1942).

A 1994 doctoral thesis very quickly made into a book, *This Woman in Particular* shows its gestation both negatively and positively. The exposition often reads like the thesis the book is still close to being; that is, Walker often seems more concerned with citing sufficient authority than advancing the argument at hand. The numerous intellectual cruxes Walker details lend density and weight to her analysis, even though she often distractingly leaves Carr to one side for several pages while she explains this or that. Even so, the breadth of Walker's contextualization is impressive. In very effective and learned ways, she elaborates cultural, social, and art history, biographical and feminist theory, bringing each to bear on the construction of Carr's biographical image. At times the litany of references, citations, and attributions seems to crowd Carr's image out, intent as Walker is on

participating in the several discourses it involves and, equally, Carr's writing gets short shrift here. At the same time, bent on demonstrating what an informed theorist she is, Walker twice shifts into italics—in her first and final chapters—so as to foreground the indeterminacy of her own knowledge, her own argument, and her own position. Suffice it to say that *The Woman in Particular* is very much the product of its cultural moment.

Such awkwardness to one side, Walker is especially effective in tracing the ways Carr's avowed religiosity—especially seen in her readings and wonderings over Theosophy under the influence of Lawren Harris—becomes a malleable spirituality in the hands of Carr's biographers. For a variety of reasons, the late-1970s were Carr's banner years—1979 saw the publication of both Doris Shadbolt's *The Art of Emily Carr* and Maria Tippett's Governor-General's Award-winning *Emily Carr: A Biography*—though both the years previous and since have seen contributions to the making of Carr's biographical image. That this is part of the overarching process of biography, Walker readily acknowledges, so that “differing perspectives” become facets of the biographical image, participants in elusive postmodern patterns, each written from a particular and *always* legitimate position, an understanding shaped by the life experiences of the biographer. Ruth Humphrey defends Carr against Tippett's manipulation of the record; Tippett, engaged in the agonistic politics of academic scholarship, seems eager to locate complexities and contradictions. Shadbolt, committed to generating cultural insight, envisions Carr as “a creator in the world of art.” It is here that Walker is at her very best, for she traces carefully and very adeptly contextualizes the construction of Emily Carr's image

from its beginnings in the early decades of the century through the appropriation controversies of the mid-1990s. Doing so in such detail, and with such appropriate connection to other discourses, Walker persuasively defines the very contingency of any biographical image, but Emily Carr's in particular.

“Who could not be fascinated with the life of Emily Carr?” William Closson James asks in his quite unnecessary foreword. Who, indeed? Walker makes a compelling case that Carr as a Canadian icon may be quite effectively compared—as she does very briefly—with Louis Riel or William Lyon Mackenzie King. More than them, though, she seems to me to be in a league with Sitting Bull, Billy the Kid, or George Armstrong Custer in that her mystique resided in her person while she was alive and has continued, more alive since her death, to appeal. Mythic in a way very different from such American figures, but yet displaying the same malleability each has shown, like them she is a vessel into which meaning may be poured—Canadian meaning. As the multiple versions of Carr continue to appear, and continue to appeal, she remains a figure sought, “alive,” yet still elusive. As Susan Crean put it in a 1991 article quoted by Walker, the “discomfort” of art experts “with Carr and her genius” comes down to a biographical question: “How could that batty old baglady who lived on the fringes of late Victorian Victoria, who was well past menopause and probably still a virgin, be credited with such a vision [of genius]?” This version of Carr is loaded, of course, with each word in it requiring interrogation on its own. What Walker demonstrates, through her excellent analysis and impeccable scholarship, is that Carr's image, as subject, is much of what we have of the biographical Carr. In so doing, she

has made a significant contribution to Canadian cultural studies with *This Woman In Particular*, a book that needs to be read, and referred to often, by anyone interested in Emily Carr or the writing artist's numerous—and still numinous—cultural moments.

Webb's Into/Inter Space

Phyllis Webb

Nothing But Brush Strokes: Selected Prose

NeWest \$15.95

Reviewed by John F. Hulcoop

Phyllis Webb's last book of poems, *Hanging Fire*, appeared in 1990. Since then, she has written little, if any, poetry. But, in 1993, as she tells us in "Might-Have-Been: The Tedious Shores"—one of the essays in her most recent book—she bought a camera because she had begun "to see in a subtly different way." A friend gave her some water-colours and she started to paint; then she "made [her] first collage." "Night Space," fifth of the eight collages representing what Webb sees with "The Mind's Eye" (a photo-collage essay at the heart of her new "volume") confronts us with the central, self-deconstructing concept "running loose in this book": space, or the self-mocking illusion of space created "with a few light brush strokes of fantasy here and there."

From the Preface, in which we hear of a multiple personality roaming through a quarter-century time-span, to the final essay in which Vancouver Island rearranges geographical space by "weighing anchor, [and] heading for the South Pacific," Webb covers, un-covers, dis-covers space, expanse, duration, volume; explores space, verbal and visual, public and private, literal/littoral and meta-phorical/-physical.

"Hazel and the rotten landscape dominate everything" in "*The Drover's Wife*—Again." The Muse is figured in a "little scene" with an "expanded" cast of characters. An essay on Proust begins, with Dante, "midway" through the life we're bound upon. "On the Line" and "Up the Ladder" pre-position us in inner and outer space, "unfolding" the mystery of the creative process and defining it in space by "Laying it on the line" in written characters and brush-strokes. Webb's "Afterword" on Gabrielle Roy's *Windflower* falters and stops, creating a white space on the page, precisely at the moment she detects something wrong—"the imitation, the inauthentic, seduction, loss of freedom, the cage." Meditating "Unearned Numinosity" or the art of literary allusion, she concludes that the "naming instinct, like the homing instinct, comes with the territory."

And in one of (for me) the two most exciting essays in the book, she insinuates herself with extraordinary agility into "the Crannies of Matter" in order to examine and savour "Texture in Robin Blaser's Later 'Image-Nations.'" The third, fourth and fifth paragraphs of this essay constitute one of the most brilliant, descriptive definitions of poetry I've ever encountered (comparable with paragraph eleven in Chapter Fourteen of the *Biographia Literaria*). Texture in poetry, we learn, is "the land of mixed metaphors . . . the surreal world of synesthesia where sensory perceptions seem to be cross-wired and the sky today is a high C, or the high C sounds like cerulean blue." Sight becomes sound; the visual, verbal; space, time, as in that most Joycean of moments when Stephen strides along the Dublin Strand and "a very short space of time" becomes "very short times of space," *Nacheinander* becomes *Nebeneinander*,

and the “ineluctable modality of the visible” metamorphoses into “the ineluctable modality of the audible.”

The other major verbal excitement in this book (for me) is the essay on “Poetry and Psychobiography.” In it Webb uncovers our “horror of and fascination with the invasion of privacy, that specialty of the secret service, television journalism, and biography”; and she does so after proposing, “in streaker fashion—a short dash naked through a public place—[Freud’s] ‘primal scene’ theory” as a means of coming to terms with “our desire to read those lives of poets and other creative souls.” Private places juxtaposed with public spaces provide tentative answers to the age-old question: should we “import into a poem extra-textual meaning”?

Though I single out my own favourite essays as major verbal ravishments, the book contains many others that will doubtless possess different readers’ minds as forcibly as mine was by Webb’s investigations of Blaser’s “*Holes of intelligence . . . crannies of matter*” and her “sibylline” predictions about the potential destructiveness of psychobiography. When Webb turns on her “message machine,” however, and starts internetting ideas in her own version/vision of cyberspace, she takes not only the mind by force; she ravishes “the mind’s eye.” For at the radiant centre of *Nothing But Brush Strokes*, the photo-collages stimulate the optic and auditory nerves like the silent gong in “Tibetan Desire IV”; like the half-web(b) glimpsed in moonlight through a ship’s railing sailing past Wilson’s Bowl; like the clash of red and blue bicycle frames commemorating Greg Curnoe. “Almost Japanese,” Webb informs me, is printed upside-down and without the black border intended to contain the space of scarlet and white.

The Return of the Subject

Donald J. Winslow, ed.

Life-Writing: A Glossary of Terms in Biography, Autobiography, and Related Forms. 2nd ed. U Hawai’i P \$12.95

Jeanne Perreault

Writing Selves: Contemporary Feminist Autography. U Minnesota P

Annie O. Eysturoy

Daughters of Self-Creation: The Contemporary Chicana Novel. U New Mexico P \$15.95

Reviewed by Bina Toledo Freiwald

Teresa de Lauretis observed a few years ago that “the problem of the *subject* has come to be seen as fundamental for any inquiry, be it humanistic or social scientific, aimed at what may be broadly called a theory of culture.” The books under review here attest to the continuing vitality of such investigations, bringing their different perspectives to bear on the various discourses through which subjectivities are represented, re-visioned, and transformed. Taken together, the three books also chart a certain critical-theoretical trajectory, demonstrating the shift in focus noted by James Olney some fifteen years ago from “*bios to autos*—from the life to the self.” While Winslow’s *Glossary of Terms in Life-Writing* (1995) still favors the more traditional historical approach to autobiography as a genre, Perreault and Eysturoy seek to foreground the discursive acts by which selves are inscribed and re-imagined in works that blur the generic boundaries between autobiography and fiction.

In his new preface to the *Glossary*, Donald Winslow explains the need for a revised second edition by pointing to the rapid expansion of scholarship on life-writing in the fourteen years since the appearance of the first edition. He immediately goes on

to suggest, however, that while some recent studies have introduced terms “which are of real value,” others have merely added “to the jargonizing of the language.” As reviewer’s fate would have it, Winslow seems to have relegated to this latter category the very concepts Perreault and Eysturoy consider crucial to their endeavors. How else to understand the omission from the *Glossary* of terms such as subjectivity and *Bildung*, or the decision to leave out of the bibliography such groundbreaking critical works as Sidonie Smith’s *A Poetics of Women’s Autobiography* (1987), and *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women’s Autobiography* (eds. Brodzki and Schenck 1988)? (I am attributing agency here, but this is another missing term). While conceding that the most active field of scholarly research in life-writing today is on self-writing, Winslow fails to incorporate much of its suggestive vocabulary; the *Glossary* has entries on quest, hagiography, and even hackiography, but none on interpellation, resistance, or autobiographical manifestos.

The *Glossary*’s entries on feminist and lesbian life writing, moreover, barely begin to suggest the rich intellectual context for Perreault’s and Eysturoy’s studies, a context that has recently yielded such important works as Françoise Lionnet’s *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture* (1989); Sidonie Smith’s *Subjectivity, Identity and the Body* (1993); Helen Buss’ *Mapping Our Selves: Canadian Women’s Autobiography in English* (1993); Leigh Gilmore’s *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women’s Self-Representation* (1994); Laura Marcus’ *Auto/biographical discourses: Theory, criticism, practice* (1994); and Jeanne Brahm’s *Crucial Conversations: Interpreting Contemporary American Literary Autobiographies by*

Women (1995). Fortunately, both Eysturoy and Perreault draw on the recent scholarship in their explorations of the intersections of race, class, and gender in the making of selves and of narratives.

Eysturoy’s *Daughters of Self-Creation: The Contemporary Chicana Novel* (1996), a revised doctoral dissertation, presents a clear argument: Chicana women writers have chosen to use and transform the *Bildungsroman* form in order to give expression to a particular socio-cultural experience in which “oppression and resistance play major roles.” The book charts an evolutionary course, following the Chicana protagonist as she resists entrapment, discovers agency, and is finally able to redefine her relationship to the community. In Isabella Ríos’ *Victuum* (1976) and Estela Portillo Trambley’s *Trini* (1986)—examined in the first part of the book—Eysturoy finds protagonists who are defined by a traditional patriarchal context, and whose sole solace lies in an extra-social psychic or natural sphere beyond the Chicano community. In Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street* (1985) and Denise Chávez’s *The Last of the Menu Girls* (1986), to which Eysturoy turns in the second part of the book, the protagonists are better able to oppose patriarchal norms while affirming other aspects of their ethnic identity. Thus Eysturoy’s own interpretive narrative can end on a celebratory note, reading in the protagonists’ eventual return to their Chicano community an affirmation of a successful negotiation between feminist self-creation and communal ties.

Perreault’s *Writing Selves: Contemporary Feminist Autobiography* (1995), like Eysturoy’s *Daughters of Self-Creation*, is concerned with the interrelation of self and community. Through an examination of selected works, *Writing Selves* successfully foregrounds

broader issues relating to the making and re-making of selves in a discursive arena that is shaped by the complexities of race, sexuality, class, and ethnicity. The core of the book consists of nuanced and evocative readings of Audre Lorde's *Cancer Journals*, Adrienne Rich's later essays and poetry, Kate Millett's *The Basement: Meditations on a Human Sacrifice*, and Patricia Williams's *The Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor*. These readings are framed by a discussion that is in dialogue with recent feminist theorists of subjectivity and life-writing (including Riley, Modleski, Butler, Fuss, Spelman, and Flax), allowing Perreault to clarify her particular position and the focus of her study: "In autography, I find a writing whose effect is to bring into being a 'self' that the writer names 'I,' but whose parameters and boundaries resist the monadic. . . . This study addresses who and what is meant by that written 'I' as an element in the 'we' of feminist communities. . . . Autography, then, as I conceive it, invites the reader to reconsider the imbrications of subjectivity, textuality, and community."

The texts that Perreault examines underscore a range of processes through which selves take shape. Audre Lorde's *Cancer Journals* bears testimony to the difficult tasks of coming to terms with a body transformed by breast cancer, and incorporating it into a sense of self already marked by the plurality of being Black, lesbian, feminist, mother, poet. The chapter on Rich investigates a writing in which the passion for history and the body produces a multiple subjectivity that does not evacuate presence, "a poetics of subjectivity [that] claims selfhood and relinquishes identity." Perreault reads Kate Millett's *The Basement*—an account of the actual torture and murder of a sixteen-year-old girl by a woman and a group of teenagers in

Indiana in 1965—as yet another form of self-inscription. In Millett's retelling of this prototypical story of a culture steeped in sexual hatred, both victim and torturer become "metonyms of Millett's interior drama, and projected figures of her own cultural scripts." In Patricia Williams's *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* Perreault finds a textual practice of self-making that encompasses legal discourse and cultural critique, links the social traumas of racism, sexism, poverty, and individual history, and finally moves towards an affirmation of "'self' as a possession, as the possibility of knowledge within the deeply felt and articulated complexity of unstable her meaning."

The self, then, having experienced a temporary setback in certain postmodernist quarters, and now no longer associated with the kind of notions found in the *Glossary of Terms in Life-Writing* under Identity ("Oneness; the sameness of a person at all times and in all circumstances"), has returned with a vengeance. Eysturoy's and Perreault's studies suggest that the growing appeal of modes of self/life writing—for writers and critics alike—owes much to contemporary preoccupations with the complex and shifting character of subjectivity, experience, and representation, and is directly related to attempts to fashion individual and collective discourses of resistance and empowerment.



Dissent in the Audience

James Winter

Democracy's Oxygen: How Corporations Control the News. Black Rose \$23.99

Chris McCormick, ed.

Constructing Danger: The Misrepresentation of Crime in the News. Fernwood \$19.95

Valerie Alia, Barry Hoffmaster and Brian Brennan, eds.

Deadlines and Diversity: Journalism Ethics in a Changing World. Fernwood \$39.95

Reviewed by Sharon Fuller

The same confidence Noam Chomsky displays in his remark in *Manufacturing Consent*, "The general approach I'm taking seems to me to be rather simple-minded and unsophisticated, but nevertheless correct," is evident in James Winter's *Democracy's Oxygen: How Corporations Control the News*. Seemingly ignoring the work done over the past two decades in the field of communication and reader reception theory which indicates that readers and viewers actively engage with the texts they encounter, often contesting, challenging and aberrantly decoding them, Winter asserts that with regard to the news media we are "Simply put, . . . brainwashed."

Those who find unconvincing the argument that most citizens are passive dupes gullibly taking in messages constructed on behalf of corporate masters by a compliant media will have trouble with this book. As might be expected from its title, it is Winter's view that "the news media today legitimize a fundamentally undemocratic system and manufacture public consent for policies which favour their owners: the corporate elite." Embracing the argument that news audiences are docile and credulous, Winter argues that the "vast majority of the public is effectively on drugs,

addicted to Media Think as surely as if we were taking the soma of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*" and goes on, in Orwellian fashion, to lay out a sampling of 54 "Media Think Truisms." In his view, it is these "truisms" that shape the news—news being a management product produced by news organisations which manufacture consent for policies favouring the corporate elite.

In Winter's account, detailed scrutiny of the newsroom practices of journalists is absent, as is any rigorous consideration of the struggles that can take place among and within the various media, or between journalists and editors on newsroom floors. Interpreting his model, a reader could imagine the news meeting at a newspaper, for example, as a daily process resulting in a consensus around what should be done in the interests of the corporate elite.

A text used as a standard, dictionary-style reference work in the field of communication theory, *Key Concepts in Communication and Cultural Studies*, portrays perspectives in the mould of Winter's as follows: ". . . the mass media are conceived as powerful automatic relay mechanisms, directly controlled by certain powerful members of a conspiratorial group, who are able to condition and persuade unsuspecting audiences into passive conformity to their schemes." Such a theory, it concludes, has "little or no credibility."

Many would argue that "democracy's oxygen" is critical thinking, no matter in which forum, which makes it ironic that, because of the style he employs, Winters does little to foster such thought in this particular work. He puts his position in a sensationalist, sound-bite style, a much-disparaged mode associated with the media and conducive more to entertainment than analysis. The chapter titles are obscuringly catchy—for example, "Mediasaurus and

Media Think." His introductions of people he favours are flashy, presented with a show-business flourish. Dallas Smythe is referred to as "the late, great communications scholar" and Maude Barlow is presented as "a charming and delightful person," the latter remark interesting, too, for its perhaps gendered inclination. Those of whom Winter does not approve receive the converse treatment: having just criticised a *Globe and Mail* staffer for being "personal," he then refers to him as a "neocon darling." His comments on Black also refuse an analytical edge. He says Black "has managed to blend the right wing with the Neanderthal."

Winter also tends to comments which tell us little. For example, he says of the media: "Like the rest of us, they have spouses and kids and mortgages, and they want to keep their jobs. Some are well-intentioned and daring, some are excellent journalists, but most are not." Surely these are comments that could be made of most working and professional communities. In his conclusion, Winter worries "about the unidimensional, doctrinaire perspectives on these issues emanating from the allegedly free, open and diverse corporate media." Indeed. This book is especially disappointing coming at a time when a considered critique of the increasing concentration of ownership within the Canadian media is needed.

Constructing Danger: the Misrepresentation of Crime in the News is an edited collection of talks where, again, the perspective of a powerful group having its own way in regard to the media is evident. While this publication is more complex than Winter's by virtue of the fact that it has eleven contributors, the editor, Chris McCormick, an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology at Saint Mary's University in Halifax, takes a similar position in his

introduction when he says news (apparently all media news) "supports the status quo and represents the point of view of the powerful."

Aligning himself with a social constructionist position, he proceeds as if taking such a position enables one to see some things as socially constructed and others not. "Crime waves are social constructions," says McCormick. As was argued 30 years ago in Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's book, it is the social construction of *reality*, all of it, to which this approach makes us sensitive. The book has three sections—Gender and the Media, Distortion in the Media and the Law and the Media—and includes talks on violence against women, the Mount Cashel Orphanage Inquiry and the Westray Mine Explosion.

The authors of *Deadlines & Diversity: Journalism Ethics in a Changing World*, a 1996 Fernwood Publishing text, say that to their knowledge theirs is the first anthology of ethics in journalism that brings the writings of working journalists, philosophers and educators together. The compilation, edited by Valerie Alia, Brian Brennan and Barry Hoffmaster contains 19 articles ranging widely in scope; some examples are "Lies, Damned Lies and Journalism" by Nicholas Russell, a professor in the School of Journalism and Communications at the University of Regina, and "Reviewing the Arts: Better Than Suicide?" by Valerie Alia, a professor at the University of Western Ontario Graduate School of Journalism. This attempt at diversity makes it a welcome addition to the fields of Canadian communication and cultural studies.



Being, Polyphony, Lyric: An Open Letter to Robert Bringhurst

Jan Zwicky

Dear Robert,

Many thanks for this clarifying discussion ("Singing with the Frogs," *CL* 155). As you might expect, I'm in agreement with large chunks of it. "The fuel of polyphony is time, from which it makes the space it needs." Indeed. That observation alone might have given us enough to think about—and as you'll see, I think it's at the core of what we most need to understand—but you've given us plenty more in addition. In particular, I'd like to second the following: a distinction between literal and metaphorical literary polyphony, your four conditions for counting a piece of literature as polyphonic, and your observation that being is (among other things?—more later) polyphonic. The rest, one might well think, is merely details; and disagreements concerning any of them, picayune—but there's one perhaps from which some marrow might still be sucked.

You say in the first paragraph of §2: a polyphonic poem is "[a] poem that . . . enacts and embodies plurality and space as well as (or instead of) timelessness and unity." I don't think the parenthetical "or instead of" should be there. What allows

anything to be genuinely polyphonic, in my view, is—as you say—the conversion of time to space; to the extent that the conversion is successful, the piece *exists* as a synchronic unity, even though it perforce elapses in time as it comes to be. (I'm not entirely happy with the way I've phrased that, but fixing it might take us too far afield.) This amounts, I suspect, to insisting even more strongly than you do on the Western-European-musical sense of "polyphony"—and, though it looks small here, it has onto-taxonomic consequences.

There is, you would agree, a difference between polyphony and cacophony. That is why we have two words, and why polyphony is an *art*. A random sample of simultaneous, distinct, but self-continuous lines of sound, noise, or utterance (the soundscape of a machine-shop, say, or a kindergarten) is not, in the musical sense of the word, polyphonic. To be polyphonic, the lines must also, at a significant number of points (though not constantly), form a *vertical* aural structure pleasing to the ear. Polyphony, in other words, is—contrary to what you say on p. 118—lyric; it is, in fact, quintessentially lyric (—in my sense of the word). The difference between a polyphonic structure and cacophony is, precisely, that a polyphonic structure is informed by the eros of coherence while cacophony is not.

This, by me, leaves open the question of whether or not the dawn chorus is

polyphonic. I find its aural texture vertically pleasing, and Lorenz prompts me to doubt that this is an accident; but it *may* be. (The metaphysical articulation of the hunch that it isn't is going to be complex and tricky, a minefield of standard philosophical blunders.) On the other hand, the claim that polyphony is informed by the eros of coherence seems to me to cast doubt (though—I agree!—not to close the door shut) on the “polyphonic” nature of the simultaneous recitations of the Ifugao. The fact that women and children gathered to listen tells us nothing until we find out what they were listening *to*. The aural whole that was greater than the sum of the parts? That's not yet a litmus, for it describes cacophony, too—the street soundscape, the stampede. To be polyphonic, it must be a particular kind of aural whole: it must create that *space* we've spoken of, and exist as an architecture of that space.

I'm not, then, sure I agree that there is no musical equivalent of geometrical perspective—it depends on how you define “geometrical perspective.” If it is a technique for creating the imaginative impression of three-dimensional space when no such space “actually exists,” then polyphony is indeed a version of it. Aural “space”? Where's that? What's that? We need to be careful here not to blur what may be another crucial distinction: does polyphonic music create three-dimensional aural space, or does it aurally create the impression of three-dimensional space? My sense is it does the latter. “Aural space” is, itself, a metaphor in the polyphonic context; it is, indeed, a metaphor created by polyphony. Three-dimensional space exists, yes (let's just leave questions about the “nature” of that “existence” to one side for now—they don't, I think, affect this particular issue)—and we perceive it

aurally thanks to our having two ears and a swivel mount for them. But as a matter of fact the “polyphonic effect” can be achieved when one listens to a recording of a Machaut motet on the tiniest and tiniest of speakers—a single point source, as it were, where the independent musical lines do not in fact have a different location *in space*. Polyphony's ability to create this impression of three-dimensional space hinges, I'd like to suggest, not on a mere multiplicity of simultaneous horizontal lines, but on *counterpoint*: a concept impossible to explicate without reference, at some level, to pleasing vertical structures arising out of a multiplicity of simultaneous horizontal lines. *Architecture* is frozen music; a ploughed field isn't.

What your account also gets absolutely right, though, is the need some of us feel to make stuff out of words (and/or sound) that affirms our intuition of being's multiplicity, and our sense of the primacy of aural experience for ontological insight. Being is the marriage of music and silence—by which I mean it's an ecology. We *are*, anything *is*, when it listens and sings, not when it looks and says. And it listens and sings when it joins the chorus, not when it yells, wheezes, or melodifies its piece without paying attention to how that expression might pleasingly *fit* with- &-against what it's hearing. Ecologies are elastic, reactive; they are metaphorically spatial; they are coherent. That is: they are lyric structures, as *Lyric Philosophy* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1992) explicates this concept. This is why I think it's important for philosophers to re-learn to think lyrically: they will never recapture the ability to perceive the world if they don't. And to the extent that they misperceive it, and champion techniques that foster misperception, they are complicit in the destruction of beauty that exists here

and now. I think it's a bad thing to be complicit in the destruction of beauty of any sort, and I don't share Heidegger's faith that our complicity is the mark of some Bigger Beauty destined its way to the cosmic supermarket. I also don't share (as you know) your sense that the growth of industrial-digital technologies is irrelevant to such issues. They are techniques that diminish our sensitivities to lyric, and hence foster behaviour that I believe is culpable. (To say it isn't *because* it stems from numbed sensitivities is to offer a version of the "but-I-was-too-drunk-to-know-what-I-was-doing" defence—which makes a travesty of the notion of responsibility.)

Which is further to why I think it is no accident (and this, I admit, does sound Heideggerean—but I got the principle from my grandpa, not Hölderlin) that Western European polyphonic music emerges, in the glory that it does, at roughly that point in Western European history characterized by the spread and acceleration of opposing ideological trends: analysis—a linear mode of thought—and its economic help-meets, capitalism and industrial technology. It is the same phenomenon that puts the most active chapters of *Voice of Women* next to the largest military bases, alternative transportation activists in downtown megalopolises, fanatical woodlot owners in the chemical soup of the Great Lakes region: even the destruction of an ecology *proceeds* ecologically when its source is internal. Western European polyphonic music is one of the elastic reactivities of Western European culture to its own cancer. This, of course, needn't preclude Lévi-Strauss's view, as you report it.

Polyphony is a genus of lyric, but not all lyric structures are polyphonic. This is because some of the resonant, integrated, space-creating wholes in lyric's family are constituted of elements that are fragments,

or abstract ontological axes of some sort (the kind of stuff you list at the beginning of the penultimate paragraph of §1), rather than self-continuous lines or voices: some good non-strictly-polyphonic poetry, for example, or Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, for another, or Herakleitos' thought. Stringed instruments are (for me) good physical analogues of these kinds of non-polyphonic lyric structures. The outstanding question (well, how outstanding?—I vacillate on its importance) is whether *ecologies* are polyphonies, or "merely" lyric structures. And whether being itself, then, is polyphonic or lyric. You and Uexküll argue the former. I *think* the only reason I'm hesitating is that I want to say things like "A lyric mind is one that pursues ecologies of thought"—either that can't be quite right, or ecologies are not (in all instances) polyphonic. Perhaps all I need to do here is realize that I'm talking about a paradigmatic case?—And yet Wittgenstein and Herakleitos are paradigmatically lyric minds.

In any event, we can say this much: a lyric mind is one for which the world lives as a complex, intricately structured, mortal & resonant whole: elapsing through time, that world makes from time the space of what it is. Noise, they taught me in physics class, is not sound: sound is coherent, and noise is incoherent. Lyric—polyphony, in particular—urges us to a politics that identifies cultural ill-health with noise: monotonies of static and shouting, the shallow speed-driven sleep of inattention induced by aural clutter. This politics wants a sharp knife—to distinguish polyphony from cacophony, and perhaps also to distinguish harmful cacophonies from ones we should celebrate. And, of course, it wants the domestic awareness that politics are, of their nature, space-eroding phenomena—

essentially tribal, and therefore anti-lyric, anti-polyphonic, in their momentum. My knife's not yet sharp enough, but I'm very grateful for having been pushed to apply it to the whetstone once again.

Yrs, JZ

Polyphonic Myth: A Reply to Robert Bringhurst

Sean Kane

Polyphony: "each voice, each being, singing its own song or story—each speaking its own poem at its own rate, picking its way through the poem of the whole which it helps to create." This is how I defined natural polyphony in *Wisdom of the Mythtellers*, as an endless and unresolving oral pattern—relationships of relationships in states of change. The hunter, someone used to finding what he cannot see, carries this music in his subconscious, consulting it when he has to. He consults it holistically. A change—a hesitancy—in the overall pitch of the forest means as much to him as a particular theme played within it. It is the state of pattern, the overall relationship among various events, that signifies the creature who cannot be seen. Pattern does the naming.¹

This is natural polyphony. Mythic polyphony, then, refers to the many-voiced compositions that enact this play of oral pattern. I would begin a poetics of polyphony here, in the domain of the oral and in the overheard relationships among living things. In his "Singing with the Frogs" (*CL* 155), Robert Bringhurst begins here too. But concerned to define a type of formal composition for written literature,

he slides into European fugues and motets. Such predetermined forms are a remove away from myth—a civilization's remove away—and yet are seen to be uniform with it. His elided account squeezes some implications from view. It is worth raising them. What are the implications for poetry of modelling polyphony, not on music, but on oral myth? Mythic polyphony has many implications.

First, politics. Polyphony is the sound of a society in which differing peoples occupy the same time and space without dissolving into sameness yet without segregating into opposing difference. Polyphonic myth is about this kind of politics. You see—or rather you overhear—in myth various beings in states of negotiation. That negotiation may involve shapeshifting and trickery as well as explicit oral contract, but what they are negotiating is space and time for each other to be heard in, as frogs arrange it so that each member and each species can be heard, sharing a crowded bandwidth. So polyphonic myth—I mean hunter-gatherer myth, not Bronze-age myth with its stratified and silencing pantheons—is about politics in the open. It is about relationships of power—though power here isn't a strictly human property, but is rather a differentiated eco-mental energy for which there is no adequate modern notion.

Just as social identity is polyphonic, so human identity is polyphonic in myth. The psychological counterpart of this kind of order and beauty that lies outside of harmony is the multiple consciousness of the shaman or mythteller so tuned to the oral patterns of an environment that mind assumes several more-or-less autonomous identities. Tribal identity is polyphonic anyway because of the kinship patterns that converge at the site of the

individual, but it is even more polyphonic because each of the kinships is linked to worlds in the environment. At the Trent Conference on Polyphony, Bringham and Roo Borson and I referred to Saayaacchapis, the Nuuchahnulth elder, describing how The Old One Alone made the first human mind. Here is the excerpt:

Old Man Alone made ten human beings.
Then he wrapped them up.
And then the girl—Breaking Daylight is
her name—
saw the old man—Old Man Alone—
put them into the previous person.

He said to Breaking Daylight,
“This is the mind.
He’ll never go where he’s heading
if some of them are unwilling;
he won’t go.

“When the ten of them consent,
all ten of them, to go there,
then he’s going to go.”²

This is polyphonic personality. And it is never very far from us because the capacity of parallel processing of information is in our nature. Polyphony is what you hear when children play spontaneously with dolls or action figures. The children imitate each other like a fugue or they go separate ways in their imaginations, like a motet, each one taking the lead for awhile. And within each child’s voice there is a shifting multiplicity of voices. The mother, used to overhearing what she cannot see, consults the music subconsciously, listening for that change in the overall pitch which tells her that anarchy has frozen into the paradox of harmony versus chaos. For polyphony is, in the best sense of that word, anarchy.

I say this because in the first half of his essay Bringham cites artistic forms that

are hardly emergent, spontaneous, improvisational—except in their intended effect. Identifying them as “metaphorical” polyphony—“polyphonic thought confined within the bounds of monophonic speaking”—does little to separate spontaneous from artificial polyphony. No matter how various and independently ranging the voices in a fugue or motet, there is a single-minded authority to the piece answering to a Platonism of the One in the many. However, polyphony dissolves transcendent authority as it dethrones the notion of the pre-eminence of the Number One which transcendent authority, a microcosmic echo of its unitary macrocosm, invokes in order to legitimate itself—one God, one race, one class, one empire, one way of doing things. What we really have in these micro-macro framings, as we have in the classical fugue or motet, is a myth of rational control.

Its most poignant critique can be found in Dennis Lee’s poetry and in the thought of George Grant, Lee’s mentor. Its most devastating critique, however, came in 1944 in Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno’s *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, a book that embarrassed even the authors’ Marxist colleagues with statements such as this: “The program of the Enlightenment was the disenchantment of the world; the dissolution of myths and the substitution of knowledge for fancy.” Knowledge in late modernity is essentially the sheer technique of “instrumental reason.” Disinterested, objective, universal, this “instrument of rational administration” must practically as its first operation “condemn the principle of magic enchantment.” The procedure of disenchantment entails “the extirpation of animism . . . [and the] destruction of gods and qualities alike.”³ Merely for the sake of its operational efficiency, a single universal truth, a

Number One, cannot allow the gods and spirits and all the pluralities of animism.

Man the manager must reduce creation to a singleminded structure the more efficiently to execute his singleminded will. Horkheimer and Adorno's critique extends to the Enlightenment when man made reason God. At the Conference on Polyphony, Calvin Martin, returning from two years among the Yupiik peoples of Alaska, spoke from a critique taken back even further. That critique extends beyond Plato and literacy's reduction of plurality to essences—back even to the Agricultural Revolution of the late Neolithic which sponsored the idea that the natural world was something to be managed by man the farmer according to inventories of hoarding, scheduling and control.⁴ For Martin and myself, the intensive agriculturalist centrality of the human administrator of creation underwrites the salience given to historical man in the Bible and rational man in Plato and Aristotle. Man becomes the measurer of all things. I have shown the effect of this anthropocentrism in the Hellenic myths where relationships among the life-cycles of the eastern Mediterranean are ascribed to Zeus, a Number One to whom all the lesser spirits of indigenous animism turn their hot faces.⁵ Before the Agricultural Revolution and its domestication of plants, animals, minerals, and, arguably, the domestication of language through writing, nature was accepted as polyphonic, emergent, the place of the Gift. For hunter-gatherer civilizations, reality is plural and at minimum two. And the relationship between the two, or more, entities involves a wary affectionate awe, as befits others who have their own lives to lead, their own kinds of power.

Polyphonic myth therefore typically involves two domains with a boundary between them. The one is the world of

human ingenuity. The other is the world of spiritual ingenuity. The two ingenious worlds behave differently—they have different thinking styles—but when they meet memorable things happen. Power is passed from one world to the other, to use. The two worlds pursue their own concerns behind their domain walls, keeping an eye on each other. But sometimes they play trick or treat with each other; they borrow or steal or exchange or leave gifts, always with the fortuitous outcome of ensuring the balanced survival of the two worlds—the world of human culture and the world of Earth's nurture.

This is a formulaic sketch. Of course, there are multiple worlds exchanging energy and information with each other both in the spirit world and in the human world. The Sandfly clan of the Wonguri people, travelling to a particular clay-pan in east Arnhem Land, sing a myth interwoven of all the voices of the creatures in this lagoon where the Moon left his reflection.⁶ The diving duck, the water rat, the white cockatoo, the prawn, the catfish, the crocodile, the frog, the leech, the lotus blossom, the evening star—each adds its voice to the human song, in the process making an acoustic map of the relationships of animal and plant life in a place where the Sandfly clan people are just another species among many. That is polyphonic myth. In 1964, the anthropologist Percy Trezise encountered a sacred hunting language spoken by the Lardil tribe of Australia's Cape York Peninsula.⁷ It was spoken by the men as they hunted on the beach of the Gulf of Carpentaria where there is only one low tide in each twenty-four hours. Entirely distinct from the language spoken in the village by the Lardil people—indeed, distinct from any known language on the planet—it was speculated that this speech of clicks, glops, sniffles,

grunts, whistles was a fossil language of some early homo sapiens hunter group. Only some years later was it realized that the language was composed of the sounds of beach life and beach event—the glop of bursting mud puddles, the slap of waves, the clicks of insects, the calling of birds like the pied oyster-catcher—*giri, giri, giri*—on which symbolic values were added (*Giri, giri, giri* meant “Form a circle with fishnets, quickly”). In a place of low tides at night, sign language is no use: it is dark and hands are full of fishnets and spears. Sounds have to imitate the environment so as not to alarm the quarry of fish, turtle or dugong. The example takes us dangerously close to notions of a natural language, yet having posited natural polyphony as a model for literary polyphony I must locate its linguistic ideal where things are allowed to sound in their own indigenous tonalities. Using terms that will come into their own shortly, this is probably as close as the Symbolic and the Real get to each other.

What polyphonic discourse gives to mythtelling people is an emotional and philosophical and scientific language of living on the Earth on the Earth's own terms, not according to some trajectory of recorded human history. That discourse is constituted in stories having levels with each level representing an autonomous awareness. A particular world or level may be voiced in the myth or it may speak through silence. The mythtelling poet plays carefully with these levels, not as subplots in a harmonic whole, but as independent realities that are only the poet's business to explore insofar as they impinge on each other in the map of energy and information that the poet is responsible for. Exchanges across boundaries in the complex ecological middle, not the Aristotelian beginning and ending

of a unified action, are what concerns him. While the boundaries between natural worlds are fixed, the exchanges can be improvised with an artist's skill.

In the myth, for example, there may be symmetrical or imitative actions between worlds. Agnes Haldane, the Nishga mythteller, achieves this fugal polyphony in her telling of “The Woman who Married a Bear.”⁸ Out berry-picking one day, an overproud princess soils her mocassin on some bear scat that is lying on the path. But nothing happens to just happen in polyphonic myth: there is another story starting up here, underneath the first. Who planted that bear's scat there for the princess to step into at just the right moment? Listening now to the myth from the other level's point of view, it seems the stuff has been put there to teach the human girl about the bear's she is so vigorously scolding, and, yes, soon enough she finds herself married to one. But the bears also are in danger of a species-chauvinism, an obliviousness to the whole ecology of life in the region including a feeling of superiority to humans, particularly the girl whom they treat badly. But she has her own symmetrical trick to play on them: she puts pieces of copper in the latrine after she has used it (copper is what the gods wear), and pretty soon the bears are treating her with the respect due to someone from the other side of a boundary. That is imitative patterning of the kind Bringhurst identifies with the fugue, and, hearing it, you begin to feel a counterpoint going on in the two stories, the two levels, brought together in myth. Reality is plural and at minimum two. The bear-wife has sons who will henceforth be balancers of the two worlds. That is an easy myth, compositionally.

There are also polyphonic myths in which the Other's story is hardly sounded

at all. In versions of the seal-bride story so favoured by the Gaelic-speaking coastal peoples, the seal goddess leaves her human husband to return in her seal form to her own world.⁹ The last image in the story is of an abandoned husband and two children crying on the shore. That is the human story, the top story, and it is bitter-sweet. But if you listen to the silence beyond that last image, you realize; they will know where the fish are; they will be balancers between worlds. So in the unexpressed surround of the human story which is the Earth's story to tell, her version of events, you know in the clarity of an afterthought that things will be alright for both worlds. That is another kind of polyphony, the kind where statements go their separate ways while keeping an eye on each other, which Bringham identifies with the motet. All kinds of vocality can occur between the symmetrical moment and the ironically delayed moment in a structure of two (or more) accounts held together polyphonically as one myth. Often without meaning to, the story levels constitute a dialogue.

What gives these polyphonies their poise and integrity is the assumption that the stories do not belong to the poet. The account of the spirit-beings belongs to the realm of those mysterious others. The account of human action belongs to the "they say" of tribal history. The account of the locale belongs to the locale itself and is, in a sense, stored there. And so the whole polyphonic myth is felt to exist in the mountains and the forest and the trees as something that is overheard by the poet, just as the Greek tellers overheard a story belonging to the Muse, daughter of the weather god and the spirit of a mountain. Most of all, the coherence of the polyphonic structure is proven by the process of living it, of inhabiting the myth

successfully. The Real is in place, everybody knows what it is, and the poet can simply pluck at it polyphonically.

Consider this statement attributed to the Crow storyteller Wapaskan: "There are checks for the validity of the story at each level and between levels. The stories have to fit, precisely, at all levels to be coherent. . . . At some levels, there is very explicit and precise spatial and temporal information. At one level, that sequence of the story contained a very precise topographical description of a stretch of the Missouri River and the basin around it, just south of its confluence with the Yellowstone. At another level, that same sequence contains a very precise set of relationships between specific kin. A hearer isn't meant to understand the story at all levels, immediately. It is as if the story unfolds."¹⁰

This seems to be a representative statement about the relation of polyphonic myth and reality. The story unfolds over the course of its tellings, over the course of a lifetime, or several lifetimes, according to its reference points in the Real, the Real being what we might call social history and natural history. The Real might also be thought to contain spiritual history, but that level is not mentioned by the commentator. Its validation would be found not in facts but in certain patterns or regularities in nature. Validated by the consistency of its various environments—social, natural, supernatural—the myth is a polyphonic composition, with each of its reference points in the Real taking the lead for a time, conducting the story on its journey. The multiple levels of the Real compel a myth whose structure does not resolve itself in any single-minded outcome. The storyteller plucks at the multiplicity of the Real.

But what *is* the multiplicity of the Real?

A philosopher in the radically skeptical tradition will say that the Real is undiffer-

entiated difference. Relationships we see there turn out to be projected by the perceiver who constructs the Real, elevating certain differences to the status of distinctions according to a cultural code. Here is where the polyphonists of Being—Dennis Lee, Robert Bringhurst and, I would guess, most of the conference participants—part company with modernism and with attempts by the postmodernist carnivalesque to escape the epistemological trap of modernism. The ontic polyphonists assume with the mythtellers that those relationships already exist in the Real. They may not exist in the form in which we see them, but they exist at least in some analogy that can be rung by a decent metaphor—the kind of metaphor Don McKay spoke of, which does not possess what it knows. But how shall we speak of those relationships already existing in the Real?

We might not speak of them at all. That is the world of the Others.

We might speak of the Real provisionally; its richness and power do register in a few predictabilities that we can be cautiously sure of. But we must never let those predictabilities take the place in our thinking of the unpredictability of the Others.

We might speak of the Real in the generous spiritual abstract, imagining that it consists of a plenitude, an inpouring and outpouring of relationships capable of occupying the same space simultaneously. Such a characterization puts the Real beyond the manipulation of habitually consciously purposeful men and women. It also renders the Real as mental, since it is pre-eminently in conditions of mentality—in conditions, say, of the Dreaming—that things can be said to occupy the same time and space.

These three ways of apprehending the plenum of the Real are the ways of the

mythtellers. Frequently in their poetry they shift positions as they slide across a whole register of apprehensions of the Real, articulating gradations or nuances or stylizations of these three basic positions.

Any further pursuit of the nature of the Real drags the question down to some form of materialist explanation. To take an example, information, the stuff of mentality, seems to co-occupy time and space because information, being immaterial, occupies no time and space at all. The pure (mental) relationships encoded in life molecules (not the material molecules, which are the matter-and-energy processes on which information is etched) carry the qualities of ancestors and descendants, simultaneously present. Thus the tree is the dream of the seed, as the Australian First Peoples say. But even that statement verges on materialist analogy and explanation.

I want to call the plenum of the Real polyphony. It is a playground of voices all singing out their to-whom-it-may-concern messages. Most of the polyphonic Real therefore goes unheard by listeners. Yet its depth and richness can be overheard. Or felt viscerally in body, for the mythtellers summon through dance, or through the dance of words, a temporary formation of Otherness in time and space—they dance the Real into place.

Dennis Lee says that he overhears a poem beginning to singularize itself in cadence; he feels it, he says, as a special fullness in his being, an arousal, an anticipatory tingling in the forearms.¹¹ In the forearms, I suppose, because the skill of listening, for Lee, is inseparable from the skill of writing. And a skill, once it is summoned, wants to exercise itself. The 30,000-year-old cave drawings in the Ardèche that Bringhurst mentions probably weren't the solemn engravings of the religious ritualist; they were the spontaneous expression

in artists of a listening-and-drawing skill.

For the mythtelling poets, realms of animated pattern surround our island of time and space, transecting it with dreaming. Some aspect of the vast polyphonic mentality stabilizes itself as a form. Yet the idea that parented that form endures in the Dreaming—both idea and form exist at their own levels at once—just as a product of consciousness is no less present simultaneously in the unconscious which sponsored it, or the *pattern* of a DNA molecule is no less potent when the visible child of that Dreaming is printed out in time. In myth, a being can be a Raven and a human at the same time—polyphony.

This is the metaphysic of mythtelling humanity. I sketch it out around the term *polyphony* because the modern polyphonic artist has at least an implicit allegiance to this metaphysic even if she or he does not have access to it, philosophically or poetically, through modern thought. To my mind, the metaphysic presents an ethical choice for the poet, as it does for the mythtellers. The poet does work in the realm of the Symbolic. The poet can pluck in the realm of the Symbolic certain chords that echo down into and echo with reverberations of the Real. In this, the poet is guided by the act of listening. That act itself is guided by a personal discipline or by a social tradition of similar past acts which do not violate the Real in its wonder. Yet the artist will be tempted to reconfigure the polyphony of the Real in relation to his or her own alienation from it. Alienation, the state of being individual—the state of being Number One—was felt as a dangerous pride by the mythtellers, who are full of ironic stories about humans viewing the material world as all there is. In our age, alienation is the condition of human life, and so the temptation to possess Reality through the self is

practically irresistible. Long before the theorists used the term, medieval Christian thinkers called this condition the Imaginary.¹² It is a failure to think on more than one level simultaneously. In the flatland of the Imaginary, what are perceived as *differences* in the Real, and what are classified as *distinctions* in the Symbolic, are restated as *oppositions*. Distinctions harden into oppositions because the alienated human being codifies all of his or her thinking in terms of the initial discontinuity between self and other. The terms line up like contestants—Nature versus Art, Body versus Mind, and other reifications of a world of pattern. Every mental act this side of total blitz-out is unconsciously programmed by a self who seeks completion of an always incomplete human meaning which is the untold story of his alienation. That is said to be the paradox that drives writers to write. I suspect it drove the first writers who wrote, since literacy creates the isolated self who writes.

Literacy also creates, as oral culture cannot do, the isolated self who edits. In other words, the self organizes its thoughts and images according to another imaginary self who is the constant companion of the self who writes. The editor insists that anything that is expressed through writing must have an illusion of consistency in order to impress the writer's first and only true listener. Lacking reference points in the Real, the discourse, the poem, the symphony must then be verified according to its consistency with itself. It must become harmonic.

This self-consistency, in which the elements generated by the creative self are organized by the critical self according to their overall effect or end, may be called purposeful consciousness. Aiming to close the alienation between internal writer and

internal critic, its voice is at best harmonic, at worst monovocal. Its voice tends towards oneness because the selfconscious artist eliminates any polyphony that will upset the illusion of consistency. And the critic in the artist exaggerates anything that will reinforce the illusion of consistency. Polyphony may be permitted, but only if it serves an overall intended effect.

This effort for unity puts the polyphonic poet in a continual state of temptation. Each word, each image, each nuance can deliver the poet into the oppositional Imaginary of self-created meaning. Since we live in a human-constructed pseudo-reality, which to my mind and Calvin Martin's is a generalized discourse extending since the late Neolithic of management by man of the Earth's resources, that temptation is always with us. Using a term that Dennis Lee revalues, I call it *Worldliness*.¹³ It is there in everything we do or say or write. Including this.

For a consciously purposeful poet, or even a being living in a consciously purposeful culture, to write in multiple voices is not to write polyphony. It is to create *polyphonic effect*. This is true, I believe, of the western European exemplars Bringhurst cites. It is true of Spenser's interlace where each narrative strand is designed to make the others tremble. It is true of the county fair scene in *Madame Bovary*. Polyphony, like the wondertale, cannot be written.

Polyphonic effect? Is it worth making this distinction? I think it is—if only to remind poets of their distance and proximity to the Real, if only to keep them playful.

The term *literary polyphony* is an oxymoron—but the phrase which served as the title of our conference—“Dennis Lee and Canadian Literary Polyphony”—is not paradoxical to itself. That is because

polyphony can be generated improvisationally, accidentally, in the artistry of a virtuoso in whom levels of skill awake and animate other levels of skill, skill being, as I maintain, a form of play. Then the growing complexity of the poem begins to sing inside itself, so that the poem appears to stabilize as a formation in its own field of vibration, its Dreaming, in the way an animal stands in the vibrating mental energy of its Ancestor in Australian art. In many parts of Lee's long poems and in most of his *Riffs*, and in Bringhurst's *New World Suite*, especially the third and fourth movements, the unintended polyphony overwhelms the intended polyphonic effect. Yet polyphony cannot be more than accidentally present because the act of writing is always armed with a purpose, even if that purpose is to fend off a monovocal outcome.

Worldliness.

Earthliness is not the opposite of Worldliness any more than holiness is the opposite of sin. Worldliness, like sin, is a privation. It is the privation of Earthliness, the acceptance of an inferior good.

Worldliness, our constant companion on our pilgrimage through the land of symbols, wants to betray us and our voices to its oneness.

Yet even in our contrivances we accidentally pluck the music of the Real.

NOTES

- 1 *Wisdom of the Mythtellers* (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview P, 1994) 110, 142.
- 2 Translated by Robert Bringhurst (in “The Origin of Mind,” unpublished typescript), from an oration given at the Nuuchahnulth village of Ttsuuma'as (now Port Alberni) in 1913 before Edward Sapir. See Edward Sapir and Morris Swadesh, *Nootka texts: Tales and ethnological narratives, with grammatical notes and lexical materials*, William Dwight Whitney Linguistic Series (Philadelphia:

- Linguistic Society of America, 1939) 164-66. Saayaacchapis anticipates the account of consciousness popularized by the neurobiologist William H. Calvin in *The Cerebral Symphony* (New York: Bantam, 1990). A "melody" arises stochastically in parallel processing neurons when a scattered group of novel individuals start coalescing into a synchronous "chorus."
- 3 *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (NY: Seabury, 1972) 20, 18, 5, 7.
 - 4 See Calvin Luther Martin, *In the Spirit of the Earth: Rethinking History and Time* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1992) 22-76.
 - 5 *Wisdom of the Mythtellers* 226-30, 243-44.
 - 6 Ronald M. Berndt, "The Wonguri-Manjigae Song Cycle of the Moon-Bone," *Oceania* 19.1 (1948): 16-50.
 - 7 Percy Trezise, *Dream Road* (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1993) 81-82.
 - 8 Told in 1947 at Kincolith on the Nass River by Agnes Haldane of the Wolf clan of Gitkateen, transcribed by William Beynon / Gwisqqaayn of the Wolf clan of Gitlan, in Marius Barbeau, *Haida Myths, illustrated in argillite carvings* (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada Bulletin No. 127, Anthropological series No. 32, 1953) 117-29.
 - 9 See David Thomson, *The People of the Sea: A Journey in Search of the Seal Legends* (1954; London: Paladin, 1980).
 - 10 Walter Lightning, "Compassionate Mind: Implications of a Text by Elder Louis Sunchild," *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 19 (1992): 232.
 - 11 "Cadence, Country, Silence: Writing in Colonial Space," *Open Letter* 2.6 (Fall 1973): 34-53.
 - 12 My use of the terms is derived not from Jacques Lacan but from his translator Anthony Wilden, *System and Structure: Essays in Communication and Exchange* (1972; 2nd rev. ed., London and New York: Tavistock Publications, 1982) 1-30.
 - 13 *Savage Fields: An Essay in Literature and Cosmology* (Toronto: Anansi P, 1977).



Everybody's Laocoon

Christoph Irmscher

In Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano*, Yvonne Firmin, waiting desperately for a letter from her usually intoxicated husband, once laments the "daily crucifixion of the post." For the larger part of his life, Lowry's (or "Malc's") main enemy, like the Consul's, was indeed "alc," as he would cannily refer to it. But the sheer bulk of his correspondence suggests that the excruciating pain of looking at an empty mailbox was not an experience too many of the writer's regular correspondents would have had to share with his fictional character.

The first, extremely busy twenty years of Lowry's letter-writing have now been made comprehensively available by Sherrill Grace, under a somewhat startling, overly dramatic title (*Sursum Corda! The Collected Letters of Malcolm Lowry*, Sherrill E. Grace, ed., Volume I: 1942-1946. Jonathan Cape \$49.95). Her edition is intended to supersede the mercilessly mutilated *Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry*, released in 1965 by Margerie Bonner Lowry and Harvey Breit, as well as to supplement Paul Tiessen's *Letters of Malcolm Lowry and Gerald Noxon* (1988) and Cynthia Sugars's *Letters of Conrad Aiken and Malcolm Lowry, 1929-1954* (1992). And well it should: *Sursum Corda!* is certainly a labor of love, performed with dedication, passion, encyclopedic zeal and, it seems, near-heroic self-effacement on the part of its editor. And a beautifully typeset and handsomely illustrated volume it is, too. The backside of the book's dustjacket, for example, sports a glossy portrait of the author posing for the camera in 1946, at the beach near Dollarton, B.C., his "earthly paradise," as Grace

notes. Lowry's stern, almost imperatorial face (radiating what, according to these letters, he so often felt he lacked in real life: importance, profundity and unwavering determination), the deep furrows on the prominent forehead, the carefully combed hair, the eyes half shut with high concentration, and the firmly folded, quite muscular arms: they all contrast amusingly with the lower, more relaxed—as it were, leisurely—half of the writer's body, clad as it is in a pair of bathing trunks that feature two tiny whales swimming in a sea of crudely curved ripples. Lowry's legs terminate in a pair of elaborately laced tennis shoes, balanced precariously on the edge of a piece of rock. *Sursum corda*, indeed.

This photograph aptly summarizes what is "delightful" (as Sherrill Grace exults in her introduction) but at times also quite irritating in the letters of a writer who was desperately intent on casting a figure in the world and would always, inevitably, warp and thwart his own ambitions in the process. From the first letters addressed to a reluctant boyhood sweetheart ("Why don't you write?") to his hyperbolic self-description in a letter sent to his American editor in July 1946 ("every man his own Laocoon"), and no matter how deep he himself felt he had sunk into, as he liked to quip, the "Slough of Despond," Lowry would never ever cease to think of himself as "sparkling in epigram and epithet" (April 1926). He clearly loved playing roles and would always make sure to memorize and then report on a particularly appropriate pose. This modern Laocoon of the serpentine sentence and the never-ending paragraph willingly wraps words, witty, wild, and sad, around his own fragile sense of self: "So to-day, we sallied forth into the verdant pastureland of Cambridgeshire," writes the seventeen-year old Lowry apropos a tour with "Mac,"

one of his boarding-school buddies, to a potential girlfriend, "armed with our pipes and plenty of navy cut, or in my case Empire grown shag . . . and leaning over a gate, we swore that . . . we would not, could not, whatever extenuating outside interference [,] love anybody else but Mac—Pegs; me—Carol. . . . Lord, how I love you" (1 and 2 May 1926). That some of Lowry's more or less sparkling sentences (not this one, though) had been lifted more or less straight from other writers didn't always seem to matter greatly to him—if he's a plagiarist, he once notes cheerfully (27 July 1940), hey, so was Milton.

Lowry evidently did not often feel compelled to be oversubtle in his literary judgments. *Parsifal*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Ulysses* and *Faust*, all of them are, he writes on 7 June 1944 to a would-be disciple, "fairly lousy, even when great," and he goes on to offer the following nugget of wisdom to him: "Poems need not all go de bump de bump de bump." To say that most of Beethoven's musical themes "could be played by just rolling an orange down the black keys" of the piano (2 January 1946) betrays, apart from Lowry's usual fondness for pat phrases, a surprising naivete and a very real and disturbing lack of knowledge.

Haunted by the demons of hard liquor and his own failed aspirations, Lowry would alternately exalt, exploit and vilify his friends. With perhaps some justification, Conrad Aiken appears in these pages as the epitome of evil ("jealous, unreasoning, bitter"; June 1937) and then again as the necessary angel or, rather, the "dear old bird" (9 April 1940) destined to lift Lowry out of the gutter and, perchance, into the airy pantheon of fully deserved literary greatness. Lowry's wordplay is often infantile, his verbal braggadocio sometimes close to being insufferable: in

his 1937 letter to John Davenport he likens himself to Columbus ("I have torn through one reality & discovered another"), but he also perceives distinct parallels between himself and the French painter of dancers, whores and social outcasts, Henri Toulouse-Lautrec, and talks about his own "Tooloose-Lowry-trek" or "TOOLOOSE-LOUSY-TREK" in Mexico (December 1937). And while I find his early love letters to Margerie Bonner quite moving, they rarely reveal an originality either of sentiment or verbal expression: "Gurr. You have spoiled me for ever for any other relationship & you have spoiled all women forever for me & I am glad of it," and, later: "Lord knows where these feelings come from, it's just love, I guess"; then, on 22 August 1939, perhaps climactically: "darling, mother, wife, child, the thought of you flows full-billowed through my veins." This is, as Lowry himself recognizes, in a spell of sudden lucidity, "portentous rot" and bad writing to boot. Incredibly, he doesn't even shy away from calling Bonner, repeatedly, his "gal."

All this is not to say that happy phrases and memorable moments do not occur in these pages. In 1940, Lowry sends an *apologia pro vita sua* to his father, who financially supported the son he considered a drunken failure, explaining to "dear Dad" that there is "a side of the moon always turned away from the earth, and this is like an attempt to get in touch from that quarter." In a different vein, Lowry offers venomous, but sometimes apt characterizations of fellow writers: Eliot had been creeping to the Church on all fours, he observes, "to keep his inhibitions warm," while a "gibbering" Tolstoy, at age "eighty or thereabouts," took "cold comfort" in the conviction, not shared by Lowry, of course, that Uncle Tom was greater than King Lear (21 September

1940). And there are resonant descriptions of the "fantastically beautiful" Mexican and, later, the Canadian landscape. Among the many casual and not always relevant literary references ("I have been rereading [Aiken's] *Eclogues*: wonderful"), the frequent comparisons with Kafka's work stick out and might actually induce future readers of *Under the Volcano* (or "Volc," in Lowry's diction) to perceive even closer affinities between two of the greatest novels of this century. Consider, for example, the description of K.'s shabby end in *The Trial* (dying "like a dog," K. feels "as if the shame of it would outlive him") and its reverberations in Geoffrey Firmin's "dingy" death at the end of *Under the Volcano*, where it seems "as though" the Consul's last scream "were being tossed from one tree to another" before somebody finally throws a dead dog after him down the ravine. The spirit (and horror) of Kafka to me seems to loom larger here than the shadow of the dog-headed Anubis, or—a rather contrived parallel, anyway—the influence of *The Mexican Book of the Dead*. Lowry's comment in a 1940 letter to Whit Burnett that he would like to think of *Volcano* as having a wider appeal than *The Trial*, because it is not rooted, as Kafka's work was, in the belief that "all human effort, even at his highest, is in the wrong," does capture some of the essential differences between the two writers. We know from Gordon Bowker's recent biography that the misguided anonymous reader for Story Press who rejected *Under the Volcano* (and recommended that Lowry publish his letters rather than a novel . . .) thought that comparing Lowry to Kafka was "outrageous." But then, again, in the letters reprinted here Lowry would indeed rather outrageously, and foolishly, draw a parallel between his modestly gifted wife's

attempts to establish herself as a serious writer and the harrowing experiences of Kafka's protagonists, which are definitely on a scale a little different from that of irritation over a tardy reader's report or delayed and garbled printer's proofs.

Editor Sherrill Grace, who reminds us in her preface that in order to complete this edition she had to embark on innumerable transatlantic "Tooloose Lowrytreks" of her own, deserves our unqualified admiration for her meticulous production of a clean text from what must sometimes have been virtually illegible holographs. A brief comparison of Lowry's 1937 letter to Davenport as it appears, with many silent omissions, in the dry-cleaned version of *Selected Letters* with the text Grace has restored shows the care that has been invested in the making of *Sursum Corda!* In fact, Grace is seldom, if the pun may be permitted, at a loss for a gloss and proves equally adept at discussing English cricket and American baseball, Mexican mythology and Canadian geography, British naval history and the Kabbalah. But while she is usually quite good and informative on the more specialized allusions to biographical facts or the fugitive writings produced by friends or acquaintances of Lowry's, we see her on shakier territory when explaining the more general references: Goethe's *Faust*, for example, is not a "dramatic poem," but definitely a play written in verse or rather, according to the author himself, a "tragedy." Dante's *Vita nuova*, consisting as it does chiefly of sonnets, with interspersed prose commentary, does not contain a single sestina, as Lowry implies in the course of a long letter to Noxon on 29 October 1942, a lapse greeted with silence by Grace.

Anticipating criticisms such as this one, Grace herself theorizes in the introduction that the process of annotating is usually

"serendipitous." In an earlier, wide-ranging essay on "The Lowry Letter" (in John Lennox's and Janet M. Paterson's *Challenges, Projects, Texts: Canadian Editing*), Grace even cited Derrida, musing darkly about "postal différance" and "the epistolary simulacrum" which apparently always has to remain "unstable." Be that as it may, Grace's actual editorial practice, it seems to me, all too often leaves the realm of creative instability and borders on the merely arbitrary. For example, while we are informed—and this is not, by the way, the first time the name appears—that William Faulkner was a "leading American novelist," and that Thomas Hardy would qualify as "a major English novelist," a more arcane, but startling reference such as "Nicean barks of yore" (from Poe's "To Helen") is left unexplained (October–November 1939). If readers of Lowry's work can reasonably be expected to know Dickens, as Grace announces early on in one of her epic notes, would they be likely to have forgotten that "Ludwig Van [sic] Beethoven" was "one of Germany's greatest composers" or that Captain James Cook is "especially famous for his voyages"? And surely one needn't have memorized a Surgeon General's warning or traveled to Central America to be able to identify Mescal, without further prodding, as a "strong Mexican drink," with, possibly, a quite detrimental influence on body and brain. Why, after the editor's initial promise that "[s]ubsequent references will not be annotated," do we still have to be told not once, but twice that Harpo was one of the three Marx Brothers or that Thomas Chatterton killed himself at age seventeen or (three times!) that Lowry, when miserable, had a certain self-indulgent fondness for comparisons with the unhappy Timon of Athens? A more economical system of cross-referencing would

have saved editorial effort as well as space. In annotation 3 to Lowry's letter to Nordahl Grieg (8 September 1931), Grace needs to refer the readers interested in Eliot and Webster to annotation 5 and not 4; among the (admittedly few) typographical errors I noticed is the misspelling of Galilei's name as "Gallilei." The great promoter of American modernist poets is called Harriet Monroe, not "Munroe" (annotation 5; 9 May 1941).

But these are, I concede, a reviewer's pedantic, perhaps neurotic trivia; more important is the general sense one gets from reading in this volume that, quite apart from the obvious need for a careful sifting and editing of its plethoric notes, a more discriminating selection of those letters really worth reprinting would have helped to produce a leaner, more readable, useful and affordable book. Some of these papers are simply *not*, in Henry James's phrase, "too rare to suppress." As it is, the present edition at least serves the purposes of documentation and—never mind how vain and self-aggrandizing, ignorant or pathetic the suffering man Lowry might have been in his weaker moments—leaves us with a renewed feeling of appreciation for the verbal beauty, insight, toughness and compassion contained in *Under the Volcano*, "the first real book I have written" (27 January 1940). Indeed, we turn away from the mail amassed here with an increased respect for the courage and creativity that produced Lowry's masterpiece, wrought from a life racked by helpless self-doubt and debilitating battles against addiction, poverty and a world that was falling apart.

* * *

Not only books, as the proverb says, have their fates. Reviews do, too. The second volume of Lowry's correspondence—a whopping 1,000 pages, including index

and three appendixes (*Sursum Corda!* Sherrill E. Grace, ed.; Kathy K. Y. Chung, assist. ed. Volume II: 1947-1957. U of Toronto P \$60.00)—appeared before my remarks on the first volume had made it into print: testimony to the industry of Grace and her helpers and a healthy reminder that books, especially those that come in several volumes, usually outlive their reviewer's opinions. Ploughing through the mail compiled in this volume, I noticed that, to me, Lowry had become like an old, infinitely interesting, if often annoying, friend. Most of the letters Malcolm Lowry wrote during the last decade of his life tell a familiar story, the outlines of which Lowry himself recognizes when he claims that he "can't keep his wretched Id in order for five minutes" (January 1951). All too often, this is a story of botched opportunities and time badly budgeted ("every night I write 5 novels in imagination, have total recall. . . but am unable to write a word"; 10 August 1948). But however depressed he is, Lowry can at least take heart in the fact that his misery usually is a shared one: "We sink or swim together," he writes about Margerie and himself in January 1950.

During the years covered by this volume, enthusiasm for strange projects—such as a screenplay, never produced, for F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*—alternates with the inevitable drinking binges and periods of depression and verbal self-flagellation. Again, Lowry seems almost perverse in his quest for self-annihilation, soaring as he does to new heights of wretchedness: "I am going steadily & even beautifully downhill," he writes to his editor, Albert Erskine, "my memory misses beats at every moment, & my mornings are on all fours" (10 August 1948). Attempts to break out from the vicious cycle of self-destruction in which both he

and his wife are entangled, usually prove abortive: vacationing in Rome in 1948, Lowry collapses and has to check himself into a sanatorium. It is indeed tempting, as Grace suggests in one of her useful little notes, to imagine Malcolm gaping at and, as he says, "sympathising with" the plastered patriarch in "The Drunkenness of Noah" in the Sistine Chapel (12 June 1948). In a sense, the Laocoon of the earlier letters has now turned into a constantly intoxicated Noah, his mind so befogged and befuddled that he doesn't even realize the full extent of his self-exposure.

Lowry's vulnerability can be quite touching. In May 1947, Jacques Barzun trashed *Under the Volcano* in *Harper's*, calling it an anthology of bits and pieces cribbed from Joyce and Hemingway, held together not by the writer's genius but by misguided "earnestness." Lowry instantly retaliated, in one of the most brilliantly written letters of the volume. "Ah ha, I can hear you saying, well I can tear the heart out of this pretty damned easily, I can smell its derivations from a mile away, In fact I need only open the book at random to find just what I want, just the right food for my article . . ." (6 May 1947). But Lowry can also be quite maddening in his boasting and self-advertising. In a letter to his brother, he describes himself as a writer who "has done more for Canadian literature than any living Canadian" (October 1950). In 1948, he brags to friends about his Italian publisher, Einaudi, the "son of the President of Italy & G'[eneral]issimo" (*Sotto il vulcano*, as Grace explains, was eventually published much later in Milan, by Feltrinelli). And after the *Encyclopedia Britannica* Yearbook for 1948 praises Lowry as the "commanding voice" of a new generation of Canadian writers, he instantly disseminates the compliment in numerous letters to friends.

Finally, Lowry can be quite tiresome in his obsession with trivia. He criticizes Melville and Poe for their ignorance of ornithology—why does Melville call shearwaters "haglets" (7 November 1949)? And, queries Lowry on 16 December 1949, has anyone ever heard a raven produce a sound even remotely reminiscent of the word "Nevermore" (ravens say either "Cr-r-r-ruck" or "kraak")? In a letter to Viking Press, written in 1951, Lowry spends several pages and considerable effort on rectifying an error in Samuel Putnam's translation of Cervantes' *Three Exemplary Novels*, pointing out an obscure reference to the Spanish village of Teba.

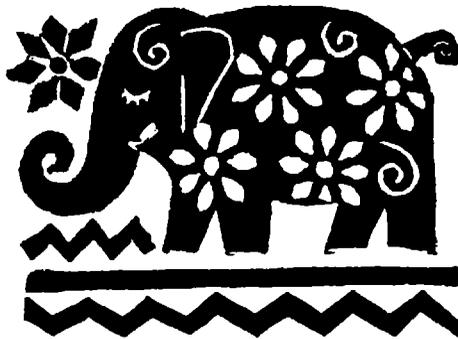
This Noah's ark is not a world in miniature but a badly leaking, freezing and telephoneless shack (in the winter of 1949/50, the Lowrys cannot take their clothes off for six weeks), hardly touched by civilization and, worse, by the mail—even from the United States, the post takes "an awful time . . . to these wildernesses" (22 January 1951). Still, when the Fraser River floods its banks in June 1950, the Lowrys fancy themselves on top of Mount Ararat. Constantly faced with the threat of eviction from their shoddy paradise, the Lowrys remain reluctant to leave until the very end, though Malcolm himself compares their hut to the make-shift, infested dwellings of Southern tenant farmers so memorably described in James Agee's and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. To Lowry, Agee's book (which, incidentally, was published in 1941, not 1939, as Grace suggests) was one of the "most important" texts in "all American Literature": "God damn it, he even tells me how I/we built my/our house in it" (23 March 1947). But since now everyone in Canada is more interested in "autocamps" than in trees (October 1950), the Lowrys can see their own hardships as echoes of a

forgotten past: “We live only here by grace of being pioneers. . . .” (October 1950).

Occasionally, the dark cave of Lowry’s depression was illuminated by bright flashes of sunlight. “*Poppergetsthebot!*” (as Conrad Aiken wittily called *Under the Volcano*) became a Book of the Year in the Club Français du Livre and part of a series that also included William Faulkner and the Abbé Prévost. Dedicated translators in different parts of the world were working on the French, German, and Norwegian versions of *Volcano*, and Lowry’s correspondence with some of them provides fascinating insights into the untidy workshop of his mind, as does “Appendix 3,” in which Grace provides examples of how Lowry recycled his own correspondence for inclusion in *October Ferry to Gabriola*, merely replacing Malcolm with “Ethan” and Margerie with “Jacqueline.”

In 1954, Albert Erskine of Random House, tired of Lowry’s tardiness, suspended his payments, precipitating a crisis which tormented Malcolm Lowry until his death in England in 1957. In his last letter, written to Harvey Burt in late June 1957,

Lowry, having just returned from Wordsworth’s Grasmere (“wonderful beyond belief”), quotes from *The Prelude* and evokes what had always, for whatever reason, been denied him, “quiet independence of the heart.” To this reviewer, however, the most moving and chilling moment in the correspondence comes much earlier, in a letter in which a shocked Lowry comments on the printed version of a drunken interview he granted a French journalist and beholds himself in a caricature published in a French magazine. “I shall probably take it out again one of these days, when I need some suggestion for a character sufficiently monstrous. . . . What is hard to take is that I started the bloody book as a young man, almost a boy. Now it looks as though that toothy and repellent old sage wrote it” (23 June 1950). Nowhere in his correspondence has Lowry seemed less “monstrous” or more appealing to me than here, when he realizes that, while the “bloody books” don’t suffer, those who write them mostly do—very often, as in the case of Malcolm Lowry, to a truly extraordinary degree.



Far-Fetched Facts

Eva-Marie Kröller

Far-Fetched Facts: The Literature of Travel and the Idea of the South Seas (Oxford \$94.50), although shockingly priced, is one of the most erudite and perceptive studies so far of the linkages between travel and literature. Drawing on a broad selection of texts in English and French, the book is careful to situate travelogues from the Renaissance to the present in the literacies and belief systems of their times, and to trace the complex layering of textualities in accounts posturing as unmediated first-person accounts. Rennie's chapter on the contemporary reception of John Hawkesworth's 1773 account of the travels of Byron, Wallis, Carteret, and Cook "drawn up from the Journals which were kept by the several Commanders. And from the Paper of Joseph Banks" is a virtuoso piece of textual archeology, as is his analysis of Melville's *Typee*. Of Melville's and others' accounts of cannibalism, Rennie writes that they reflect "ambivalence and alternating 'frames of mind' in which the savage state appears, by contrast with civilization, now as a refuge, now as a prison." One regrets that *Far-Fetched Facts* includes only a cursory look at the more recent writings by Robert Louis Stevenson, Loti, and Rupert Brooke and none at the orientalist fantasies also engendered by Pacific Rim studies. Rennie's ruth-

less analysis of imperialist rhetoric posing as plain speak would have produced illuminating results. *Far-Fetched Facts* makes an excellent companion piece to Marshall Sahlins's polemic (and petulant) *How 'Natives' Think: about Captain Cook, For Example* (U of Chicago P us \$24.95) a response to Gananath Obeyesekere's award-winning *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific* (Princeton n.p.). Like Rennie, Sahlins and Obeyesekere are concerned with identifying the textualities that create truth, but their debate is enlivened by the question which dominates much post-colonial criticism, namely who may speak for whom? As a Sri Lankan, Obeyesekere claims greater authority to speak to Pacific customs than Sahlins. He also rejects, as European mythmaking, the proposition that Hawaiians welcomed James Cook as a god and repeatedly insists that Hawaiians' common sense would have provided them with a more pragmatic interpretation of Cook's arrival. Sahlins dismisses all of Obeyesekere's arguments as based on reverse discrimination, circular argumentation, and sloppy scholarship. Unfortunately, his repetitiousness lessens his persuasiveness, and one comes away from the book feeling that *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook* may have struck a nerve after all. *David Livingstone and the Victorian Encounter with Africa* is a catalogue published by the British National Portrait Gallery (£22.00/£16.95). Richly

illustrated, the book investigates the making of the myth surrounding Livingstone, focusing on aspects of contemporary ideology such as self-help and the "Culture of Exploration in Mid-Victorian Britain." Given the impact of newspaper images disseminated in the wake of the Stanley-Livingstone encounter and Livingstone's death (seen as similar, like Captain Cook's, to that of Christ), the chapter by Tim Barringer on "Fabricating Africa: Livingstone and the Visual Image 1850-1874" is particularly apropos. The book comes with excellent notes and a bibliography.

By contrast to this catalogue, Dave Kennedy's *The British Raj* (U of California Press n.p.) contains few illustrations, most of them rather dingy photographs, as if to underline Kennedy's intention—repeated with some urgency throughout—to avoid the nostalgia that appears to have infected most other accounts of the Raj. Its occasional self-consciousness notwithstanding, this is a superb book, its research wide-ranging, its narrative graceful, and its argument cogent as well as inspired by a fine rage at the social and racial injustices depicted. Kennedy has carved up the enormous mass of this data into chapters on the underlying esthetic, urban, racial, and political traditions, without ever allowing his observations to disintegrate into a mere catalogue. His book should be useful to a wide range of readers, because it makes a significant contribution to the history of disease (in documenting the sanatorium culture), of education (on writing about the local cloning of British public schools and the racial segregation enforced), of travel writing (in chronicling developments in transport and the quasi-mythic plot-structures tracing a traveller's approach to "the hills"), of feminine colonial culture in environments disproportionately populated by women and children, and many

other topics besides. This is a vigorous, lucidly written book which cannot be recommended enough.

Inderpal Grewal's *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire, and the Cultures of Travel* (Duke \$22.95) fills an important gap. In juxtaposing European travellers in India and elsewhere with Indians, particularly women, travelling in the West, Grewal investigates "the deployment of the term *travel* as a universal form of mobility," concluding that "[s]uch a use erases and conflates those mobilities that are not part of this Eurocentric, Imperialist formation." Pandita Ramabai, a nineteenth-century champion of women's rights, and Parvati Athavale, who devoted herself to the plight of widows in her home country, were steeped in western ideas of education and philanthropy, but Grewal insists that their experience, as highlighted by their travels, did not merely duplicate that of their western counterparts. They were motivated by different socio-cultural origins and ideological goals, limited by scant resources and alienated by environments, that imposed unacceptable norms of diet, clothing and feminine demeanour on them. Under such circumstances, travel rarely became a vehicle of individual liberation and "formation of a unified self." Grewal resists a simple division between colonizer and colonized, however, pointing out the divisions and strains *within* each group.

Imperial Leather

Eva-Marie Kröller

Arguing that private relationships mirror the power dynamics of political ones and vice versa, Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (Routledge US\$18.95) dis-

cusses the unusual marriage of Arthur J. Munby, "well-known Victorian barrister and man of letters," and servant Hannah Chadwick. The book also talks about the exploitation of colonial elements in advertising; the imperialism of Rider Haggard's romance; the limits of colonial feminism in Olive Schreiner's work, and the invention of Boer cultural symbolism. In other words, this book brings together somewhat disparate material, much of which has previously been published elsewhere. The argument that joins these case studies is a worthy one: McClintock insists that much postcolonial criticism has not paid sufficient attention to *specific* cultural and historical circumstances and has therefore paradoxically produced judgements which are often as totalizing as those of the traditional criticism it attempts to displace. McClintock's approach is loosely psychoanalytical, but she takes care to point out inconsistencies in Freud and Lacan's doctrines; although, surprisingly, she does not mention him, her method resembles Peter Gay's in *The Bourgeois Experience*. Enjoyable and rich as *Imperial Leather* is, however, it is not without its faults. Particularly annoying is its tendency to schmooze: every two pages or so, a currently fashionable critic makes a "brilliant" remark, although a particularly emphatic outburst of praise sometimes strategically introduces an equally emphatic disagreement. Enacting its own subtext of academic imperialism, the book is finally not as persuasive as it could have been.

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* continues to attract attention among post-colonial critics. Jenny Sharpe's *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text* (U of Minnesota P US\$14.95) discusses the "discursive relationship between the domestic virtue of self-renunciation and Hindu widow-immolating" in Brontë's

book, as well as commenting on *The Raj Quartet*, *A Passage to India*, and other works. Sharpe's writing is unfortunately not as eloquent as Joyce Zonana's in "The Sultan and the Slave: Feminist Orientalism and the Structure of *Jane Eyre*," an essay originally published in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* and now collected with other *Signs* criticism and interviews in *Revising the Word and the World*, edited by V. Clark, R.-E.B. Joeres, and M. Sprengnether (U of Chicago P \$14.95). Readers of Alice Munro's work will be interested in Sandra Zagarell's "Narrative of Community: The Identification of a Genre," which discusses *Lives of Girls and Women* along with Afro-American works by Morrison, Walker, and Naylor. Women's spaces also feature in Marilyn R. Chandler's *Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American Fiction* (U of California P \$33.00). Movie buffs will particularly enjoy Chandler's comments on *The Age of Innocence*, the connections she draws between James and Wharton's uses of architecture, and her discussion of *Housekeeping*. Essays in Thais E. Morgan, ed., *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse: Renegotiating Gender and Power* (Rutgers n.p.) include Susan Morgan's "Victorian Women, Wisdom, and Southeast Asia," a somewhat rambling overview with an annoying tendency toward circular argument (e.g. "the initial reason, then, why her writings are so significant must simply be that they were so significant") and a not terribly firm grasp on available criticism. However, as a first introduction to the subject this piece is probably as good as any.

If Morgan's essay seems somewhat inauspicious, her recent book *Place Matters: Gendered Geography in Victorian Women's Travel Books About Southeast Asia* (Rutgers n.p.) goes a long way toward

correcting the impression. Discussing the work of naturalists, missionaries, governesses and administrators' wives, Morgan presents a richly documented and densely argued study which negotiates the thorny question of women's collusion in the imperial enterprise with considerable critical sophistication. At times the complicated historical detail informing the colonial presence in Southeast Asia seems to overwhelm the analysis of the books themselves, but even if a better balance of background and text would have been welcome, the effect is still appropriate because mimetic: the private and specific is shown to be positively crushed by the elaborate and absurd machinations of the imperial superstructure. Excellent complementary reading to Morgan's book is *Adventurous Women in Southeast Asia: Six Lives*, ed. John Gullick (Oxford £13.99), which covers some of the same ground. Nothing could illustrate the waste of energy and talent in the service of an arrogant political, economic and religious enterprise better than the condensed accounts of the lives of Lady Raffles or Harriette McDougall, both of whom gave birth to numerous children under appalling conditions, lost most of them to tropical disease, survived mutiny and shipwreck, and quite superfluously wasted away in a climate that did not suit them.

Correction

In Norm Ravvin's "Stopping in at the Coach House: An Open Letter" (*CL* 155, p. 202), the address of Coach House Press should read 401 Huron Street, not 503.

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The Fiddlehead 1997 Writing Contest

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 sex dessert sex rare s **\$500 best Poem** sex fizzle sex raw sex
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office sex pasture sex literate sex bookish sex TV sex pop sex
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Essays

Valerie **Raoul** teaches at the University of British Columbia, David **Williams** at the University of Manitoba, Gordon **Slethaug** at the University of Hong Kong, and Linda **Warley** at the University of Waterloo.

Reviews

Tineke **Hellwig**, Kevin **McNeilly**, Rebecca **Raglon**, Sharon **Fuller** and Warren **Stevenson** teach at the University of British Columbia, Peter **Buitenhuis** and Carole **Gerson** at Simon Fraser University, Julie **Beddoes** at the University of Saskatchewan, Misao **Dean**, Mary Ellen **Ross**, Matthew **Manera** and Marie **Vautier** at the University of Victoria, Lynn (J.R.) **Wytenbroek** at Malaspina University College, Dee **Horne** at the University of Northern British Columbia, Aritha **van Herk** and Jon **Kertzer** at the University of Calgary, Catherine **Rainwater** at St. Edwards University, Linda **Lamont-Stewart** at York University, Michael **Keefer** at the University of Guelph, Jim **Ellis** at the University of Calgary, Laurie **Kruk** at Nipissing University, Sherry **Simon**, David **Leahy**, and Bina Toledo **Freiwald** at Concordia University, Norm **Ravvin** at the University of New Brunswick, Joseph **Pivato** at Athabasca University, Ronald **Rompkey** at Memorial University, and Robert **Thacker** at St. Lawrence University, N.Y. Guy **Beauregard** is a student at the University of Alberta. Corey **Coates** recently completed his PhD at the University of Toronto. Robert **Bringhurst** and John F. **Hulcoop** live in Vancouver.

Poems

Paddy **McCallum** lives in Gibsons Landing, David **Zieroth** in North Vancouver, Jay **Ruzesky** in Victoria, Monika **Lee** in London, Ont., Rüdiger **Krause** in Winfield, B.C., and Harold **Rhenisch** at 108 Mile Ranch, B.C.

Opinions & Notes

Jan **Zwicky** teaches at the University of Victoria, Sean **Kane** at Trent University, and Christoph **Irmischer** at Harvard University.

—*I can't think of a single poet who, groin-tickled and happy,
can achieve such delirium on paper.* IRVING LAYTON



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