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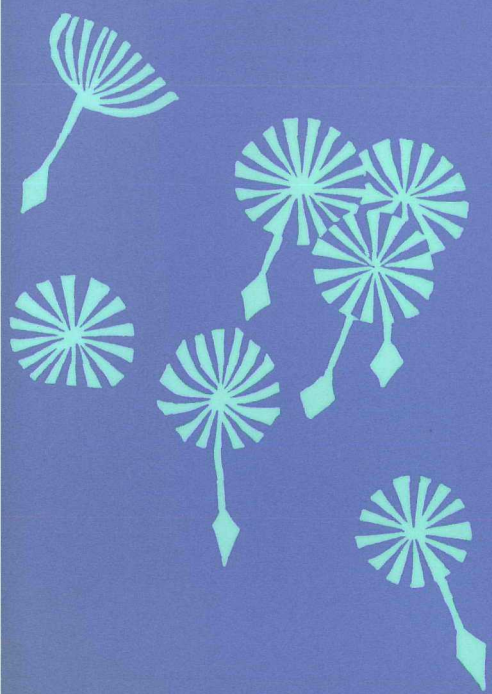

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Canadian Literature reçoit des soumissions d'articles, d'entrevues et autres portant sur les écrivains du Canada et sur leurs oeuvres, de même que des poèmes inédits d'auteurs canadiens. La revue ne publie aucune fiction narrative.

Les manuscrits doivent être soumis en trois exemplaires (dont deux articles anonymisés), adressés à l'Éditeur de *Canadian Literature*, 1855 West Mall, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, C.-B., Canada V6T 1Z2, et accompagnés d'une enveloppe de retour pré-adressée et pré-affranchie (timbrée ou munie de coupons-réponse internationaux), sans quoi ils ne pourront être retournés à leurs auteurs.

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The deadline for submissions is October 1999.

Editorial

On Some Uses and Drawbacks of Poetry for Living

Untimely Meditations

Iain Higgins

Estragon: You and your landscapes! Tell me about the worms!
—SAMUEL BECKETT, *Waiting for Godot* (1954)

The worm has grown no teeth, no jaws, no spiked claws, no poison fang, no armoured back, no speedy feet: nothing. Yet how it has endured! Soft, slow, blind, brainless, defenceless, it crawls stupidly through the earth, through time, through life; persisting over change and race, from the far past to the far future.
—THO. B. ROBERTON, *Newspaper Pieces* (1936)

Natur' is natur' wherever you find it.
—THO. CH. HALIBURTON, *The Clockmaker* (1836)

There's an old joke about a winter so cold spoken words hung frozen and unheard in the air till spring thaw—a joke that clearly evokes a sense of nature's breath-taking power, even over such a formidable human invention as a system of sounded signs. Like any enduring wordthing, though, the joke no sooner has its say than it unsays it, then unsays the unsaying, and so on, ceaselessly folding back on itself in its semantic unfolding (neither the saying nor the unsaying is prior or necessarily more significant; each unsays the other as it says itself—but since we grasp meanings in time, we typically experience and analyze the simultaneous process as sequential). In this particular case, the joke about spoken language's natural limitations unsays itself by telling as well of talk's elastic tenacity, its remarkable cryonic capacity to cross time and space in the folds of a portable encrypting medium (the whorled inner ear of the cerebral cortex, the bound pages of a codex), and then to revive itself phoenix-like not just in the tongue's moist flame, but also in the re-embodying heat of

the retinal or the cochlear nest: in short, the joke tells of language's transcendent as-if-it-were aliveness.

For it is as-if-alive, this *techné* we call language—the term a conceptual canopy stretched over a forest of tongues whose varieties are as many as the kinds of trees, or more. As if alive, not as generalizing cover-term but in each of its singular instantiations: a thing capable of virus-like dormancy outside speakers and possibly even speech-communities and of virus-like dominance over them, capable too of lichen-like symbiosis with them, of animal- or god-like domestic service under them as well as alien force within and through them. This is maybe a way of saying that language is also the rarest sort of tool: one that makes partial (in both senses of the word) use of its user and so blurs the line between tool and toolmaker or tooluser, between using and being used—a stronger claim than Coleridge's recognition in the *Biographia Literaria* that as linguistic distinctions become naturalized 'the language itself does as it were *think* for us', yet not so totalizing as the claim that language speaks us (Heidegger's 'die Sprache spricht, nicht der Mensch'). For even while they are tied to bodies, cultures, and histories, human tongues remain loose, on parole, potentially ungoverned, only partly governable. Mysterious, then—if that word can still name what we cannot wholly grasp, though we handle the thing every day—because potentially wild, though tamed in many territories, its wolves made dogs, the dogs, dim simulacra.

The same is true for human thought, for human poetry, both of which typically house themselves in language so that others besides the thinker or the poet may enter into them (I abstain here from pretending to know whether thought and poetry inhabit extra-human forms or are other than after words, either pre-existing language or enjoying a parallel existence with it, their several tracks sometimes fortuitously crossing, but the prospect at least of paralife seems intriguing). If not quite life-forms, thought and poetry, along with the verbal hides in which they often abide when we encounter them, are at their best effectively energy-giving, self-undoing, life-expanding forms, media, agents: wild, moving, unknowable except in part; capable of play, depth, exquisite precision; inherited as well as invented; and variously groomed, dishevelled, diminished, or augmented by our interactions with them.

Their untamed almost-aliveness, though—language's, thought's, poetry's, like the actual aliveness of earth where they take place—too often escapes

notice, our deepest awarenesses dulled by the anaesthetic rub of getting on in the 'Western' world (which has for centuries increasingly been baffling itself against the unworldly, the earthly, the natural),[1] by a somnolent investment in habits hung on us from birth. It is no simple task reawakening or reinventing these awarenesses, which we disremember when we are schooled, as most of us in Euroamerica have been and are still being schooled, to put down the animals and the children in ourselves—the official religions of our inherited or 'Western' culture refusing to share their single soul, converting all else to livestock, the more recently sanctioned Econotechnocults carving all common ground into disposable shares, converting all that is, not excluding persons, to liquidatible resources. The gods, too, insofar as they are given standing in some quarters, have been put down. It is likewise no simple task finding out alternative modes of feeling, thinking, being.

Intermezzo: The Dead Await Your Reply
(Rejects from the Fortune Cookie Factory)

- Silence too can be a glib and oily art.
- What if instead you made a habit of a dog's nose?
- The heart stands aside, yet its impressions fill the whole.
- Cash flows—some drown in the spillways.
- No need to respond if you already forgave at the office.
- Spending was once a sexual term.
- Women and children thirst, the men aboard the sinking ship.
- What better gift than water from a dry well?
- The trick is to be an ex-patriot without leaving.
- Of course, the margin of error may be your only refuge.
- All times spring from bent words, grammatical swerves.
- Airy layers are crucial to good compost.
- This too is a discipline of excrements.

- If memory serves, is the labour any lighter?
- If only we were old hands at monkey business.
- Trouble is, the future has happened so often already.
- Of course, increasing your profit margin does mean shrinking the text.
- Fat chance, slim pickins.
- One fact about the back of your hand, please—no peeking.
- Happy are those who really can name their poison.
- Twitter twitter little bird as you drop your toxic turd.
- All roads lead to Rome, so why not get out of the car?
- Green grow the rashes, oh.
- Strike while the iron's hot; replacement workers also need jobs.
- The shoe fits, but where does it come from?
- You've got to hand it to machines, yes sir!
- Maybe you need the syntactics of a devil's advocate.
- The road to Hell is paved with a fixed percentage of recycled material.
- Self-service today on the altar ego.
- If it ain't broke, more credit to it, and try again.
- At today's rate it's one glass slipper to a glass ceiling.
- You take the high road; I'll just wander in the clearcut.
- Time is money: an equation there's no going back on.
- What else can we be but our instruments' instruments?
- . . . and it's the unicorn by a nose!
- If wishes were horses, we could harness them too.
- How much we owe to the errancy of portable thought.

- The heron stands for hours on one leg.
- Words are all you really have for wings, no?
- A rod, a cod, and he thinks he's God.
- Hellfires first sizzled in the human brainpan.
- Keep your hose clean, and beware of Freudian slits.
- The first symptom is corky fruit.
- Death was seeded in you from the start: why not be a late bloomer?
- The right touch and the salmon of lust rises to spawn in your brain.
- First as sperm castings, at length as worm castings.
- If you were the odd man out, would you have it any other way?
- Sometimes eagles will sit in a fallow field.
- Savour that stitch in time: there's no place like ecstasy.
- The death of one dog is the death of all?
- Be froglike, tongue at the tip of your mouth.
- Make every sense a port of call, safe haven for the radiance of things.
- Ash, acids, and radiowaves—the airs we put on.
- The mushroom cloud was not the brainstem's bloom, but the cortex's uncorking.
- The wind still gets tangled in trees.
- Night's delights we owe to the suns of darkness.
- Glued to the set, you can listen safely to the sirens outside.
- The new Kingdom Come: virtual smorgasmopolitanism.
- No, you're not just a number—you're also a codeword.
- Thank you for obviating the need for a simple injunction.

- Fortunately, we are all within the thing in itself.
- A self-made man, you say? Your own effigy, your own fugue.
- By night, by day, from null to full and back again: what moon would be another sun?
- Some bright ideas launch highbeams in the fog.
- The tongue flags, overstretched by breezy underuse.
- Shall irony, or will urinary?
- End it or mend it, the proverb says; we're for both at once.
- Redeem the time before the coupons expire.
- Many happy returns—so you needn't change your buying habits.
- Earth's plates are slowly reset in time: a family's too.
- But then you prefer a proper story, don't you?
- Just try seeing eye-to-eye with a sitting duck.
- The dead await your reply.

Attempting such anti-anaesthetic tasks is one of poetry's callings, and one of its finest; for powerful poems—those singular yet repeatable ceremonies wherein language, thinking, and feeling gather to dance as one and wrestle as several—can help rub some of us right again, ready us: not for salvation or somesuch other-earthly goal, since poetry is no ersatz religion, however much priestly poets or critics might want to tempt one round that slough-strewn detour; rather, like its supposed antagonist literary criticism—which I would want to be earthly in its aims as well as worldly and which with Edward Said I take to be ideally secular and oppositional (self-oppositional, if need be)—poetry is one crafty art amongst others, some of whose self-altering, self-expanding, and communion-offering functions can be in effect religious (bonding/binding)—or just the opposite, and sometimes both at once. Not for salvation, then, but for continual myriad-minded salvage—since every human being like every human culture is partly a social Crusoe lost in its moment with a scattered shipload of tools and materials not

entirely of its own choosing, but increasingly over recent centuries with access as well to the treasures and the detritus of other likewise foundered ships—and through salvage for selvage, joinery, and self-undoing (individual and collective), for being here, earthly, wordworldly, for homing in, looking round, reaching out, rising up, getting down.

Powerful poems can do this sort of anti-anaesthetic work because they are shareable forms of attention—hand to mouth, mouth to mouth, lip to ear, page or pixel to pupil—drawing us as lovemaking, birdwatching, conversation, politics or prayer ideally can out of ourselves, sometimes by turning us inside out on ourselves, purifying, pollenating, polluting, and hybridizing at once; moving poems, in other words, are portable vessels and vehicles of longing, of knowing, of localized enlarging and confounding; makeshift spans across the gaps that stop a shifting self's flow into otherness (inner as well as outer), its flow into a self.

Breakers of adulterating human habit, such forms can call from us an animal alertness to the various domains in which we dwell, a childlike delight in sheer being, new ways of seeing (where seeing is understood to stand for all engaged sensory attention)—as even in something as unrealized yet prophetic as Pound's early attempt to re-imagine himself: 'I have been a tree amid the wood / And many a new thing understood / That was rank folly to my head before' ('The Tree'). As if for the first time—or indeed for the very first, as anyone who continues to visit poems remembers—powerful poems can variously attune the ears, point the tongue, unsettle the mind, sharpen the eyes, rattle the heart, open every feeling fibre and unused sense to uncaught, forgotten, or unforeseen qualities of our constitutive elements, from lone words to the manifold cosmos.

The point here is not poetolatry, of course, but rather something easily overlooked in a social and critical climate where culture and language are understood anthropologically as almost inescapably deterministic (the overreactive counterpart to a prior idea of complete individual mastery): all of us handle language; not all of us handle it in word- or world-altering ways. 'All writing', Charles Bernstein asserts, 'is a demonstration of method; it can assume a method or investigate it'—or, in the case of consequential poetry, both at once. 'In this sense, style and mode are always at issue, for all styles are socially mediated conventions open to reconvening at any time'.[2]

that nature was never book or word—
god's inaugural utterance obscuring a perpetual advent
everywhere

that every thing that is is an unfolding ingathering
both pupa and pupil

the whorling cosmos too

that the scent or breath or speech of each is also its spiring iris
and light broken is light seen

that the lustrous rustle of leaves is lust lutestrung

and each body is thus a pianoforte string, taut or slack
as it is keyed to radiance

that the human head too is a sonorous marrowbone
home to scores of the whole

that the eating of creature by creature is a clash
and transposition of live notes

mimed and defied in every coupling
fire fruiting

that there is said Blake a place where Contrarieties are equally True

and this, this is it

NOTES

1 This triple contrast ('unworldly, earthly, natural') is an attempt to escape the binding binary of Heidegger's nevertheless complex distinction between world and earth ('The Origin of the Work of Art', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter [New York: Harper and Row, 1971], 17-81). Perhaps more useful is Dennis Lee's synthesis of the antithesis through the admittedly arbitrary term 'planet', which subsumes both world and earth in a dynamic agon defined by the metaphor of 'savage fields' of force (*Savage Fields: An Essay in Literature and Cosmology* [Toronto: Anansi, 1977], 3-12). Still more useful to my mind is Gary Snyder's zen-derived 'nature no nature', which, encompassing even 'the urban, industrial and toxic', is elusive, virtually unknowable (Preface to his *No Nature: New and Selected Poems* [New York: Pantheon, 1992], v).

2 Bernstein, 'Writing and Method', in his *Content's Dream: Essays 1975-1984* (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon, 1986), 226.

Crystal Hurdle

Doxology

"Words, words, words."
"What is the matter . . . ?"
Shakespeare's *Hamlet* II.ii. 194-95.

The sensors itch his temples,
but he cannot scratch.
His fingertips are filamented to the screen.
The digital words unleash around him.

cup plate oak dog rape book

When can he eat?
It is hard to concentrate.
A stupid test
but time off for good behaviour.

100 17 83 69 55 21

The brain scan looks like liver and onions,
the entwining meat.
His amygdala pulses steadily,
measuredly, no shooting stars,
no hot rush.

bible altar pew font hymnal cross
host chalice wine organ pyx advent

Judy never visits him here in the clinic.
She smiles in his dreams in the cell.
All crimson lips, brows and lashes
lighter than her shining ringlets, unusual.

She likes his swooping robes,
as good as a tent.
A pretty, little girl,
whose hand is still within his
as they light the candle.
Her lips become O's with benediction,
in praise for the bloodied crucifix,
in praise for the organ.

But for the seepage,
Judy, seraphic as a Madonna,
so pure, so pale.

percolate multiply photograph sodomize duplicate hesitate

Oh Father, Oh Father.
You are saved. You are healed.
(That hot rush.)

holey wholly holy

drink play hop brush chew kill

At lunch, he will save his candy treat for Judy
or her little sister.

Chad Norman

The Birth of Domicide

Homage for Donald Hall's poem "The Prophecy"

Down with the keepers of the Data Cult!
Taught by the Screen to apply stardom

Where? Throughout excuses called a Life
In days when worry has replaced wonder

Rave! Why not? What's left?
Living for gossip in Fame's tinsel traps

Our sun pins medals on the new highrise
Strips them when dark brings real stars

Each ill floor succeeds in being taken over
Commercials like clouds adjust the Senses

All the plush chairs face the optical charity
Bought to support the annual wink from Bunkwood

Fearing the window's role played by a mirror
Tenants kneel on Oscar Night to pray for blinds

Their leashed minds hover like poodles on helium
Lost to madness today's Goya paints with tabloids

The extinction of family dresses up like dust
Found on the keyboard of this ceremony's motion

Parents dally in the idolization of other parents
Children adopt the polite nil of worship

Gold & glamour host the stung parade of predictions
Flash & fame read the beeping cartel of categories

Nominees select identities they intend to rent
Viewers prefer to buy spending their identities

On the aquarium's floor therapy waits for a bubble
Above the lamps four shadows scratch for escape

And below somewhere in the city forms walk a wish
Too many hellos will cause the Lunatic to holler

Ruth Panofsky

Ambiguity and Paradox
A Conversation with Helen Weinzweig

Helen Weinzweig is the author of two novels, *Passing Ceremony* (Anansi 1973), *Basic Black with Pearls* (Anansi 1980), and a collection of short stories, *A View from the Roof* (Goose Lane 1989). At the age of nine, she emigrated from Poland to Canada, where her formal education began. An only child, Weinzweig was raised by her divorced mother. She did not know her father until she was an adult. Weinzweig's career as a writer began when she was 45. The wife of composer, John Weinzweig, Helen immersed herself in her husband's work and learned about structure and technique from his development of twelve-tone music. Her narratives are dark, spare, and her characters are set adrift by the circumstances of their lives. Weinzweig's fragmented, discontinuous texts propel her readers toward a heightened awareness of the chaos of contemporary life. Currently, she is working on a third novel, which she describes as "statement, without adjectives and adverbs." In May 1998, I met with Helen Weinzweig—who is 83—at her Toronto home where we spoke for three hours.

RP: Helen, how did you come to write at the age of 45?
HW: I had 20 different jobs from the time I went to work at 17. I was trying to improve myself by going from job to job, working part-time and full-time. Well, I was 45, my two sons were on their own, my husband got a job at the University of Toronto, and suddenly I didn't need to work anymore. I fell apart because the struggle for economic survival was over.

I went to a woman psychiatrist because I didn't know what to do with my life. In the 30s and 40s women were expected to play out their roles as wives

and mothers. But on my first visit—out of arrogance, despair, and fear—I said, ". . . and I don't want to adjust!" She responded, "Yours is a simple problem of integration." I was a little miffed because I didn't think there was anything simple about my existence. Fortunately, she wasn't interested in prolonged analysis. One of my problems was that, despite a passion for books, I could no longer read: the printed word did not impinge. She suggested I find my own words. But *I* couldn't write. Then, on an empty white sheet in the typewriter, I started to free associate and the first line I wrote was, "Your body cares not a whit for your mind." I almost started to cry.

I then spent two years writing a short story which I sent out and it got published. Two years later I sent out another story and it got published. I panicked. Did publication mean I could write? Could I be a writer? I continued with another story. . . .

RP: What did you read as a young woman?
HW: I was the only one I knew who hadn't read *Little Women.* I read the *Boys' Own Annual.* I did not like women's fiction. I didn't like the women I knew. That wasn't their fault, but I didn't want their lives. I did not see myself as a woman until I started writing.

There is a picture of me aboard ship to Europe in 1932. For the Captain's Ball, a costumed event, I borrowed a pair of trousers from a young chap I knew. As half man-half woman, I dressed in one trouser leg and half a skirt. I drew a moustache above half my lips and applied lipstick to the other half. It kills me to look at this picture of me at 17. What is that? My husband claims that I confuse people. He says people don't know what to expect from me. What does he mean? But a funny thing happened on my way to becoming a writer. I "integrated" to such an extent that I developed hips and breasts. I'm not kidding; in places, I am twice the size I used to be.

RP: Who directed your reading?
HW: I arrived here when I was nine and I had never been to school. I didn't know how to read and write. In Poland, when I was six, I went to school for one day, a policeman brought me home, and then I wouldn't go back. When I was in my thirties, my mother explained that she had to obtain shoes and clothes for me to go to school; that she sent me to school when it had been underway for weeks. In class, the kids sat down and immediately opened their books. But I didn't have a book, so I took one from someone's desk. When I

was leaving school with the book, someone called the police to say I had stolen a book. I never returned because I felt so ashamed to have been arrested.

When we came to Canada, we lived with my aunt and uncle who ran a restaurant at Spadina and Dundas [in Toronto]. My two cousins made fun of me because I couldn't speak English. At 10, I had to learn how to read, write, and speak English quickly. At 15, I was first in my class in high school.

My mother worked and she didn't get along with anybody. My mother and my aunt quarrelled, my uncle was busy womanizing and running a restaurant, so I had nowhere to go after school. Then I discovered Boys and Girls House [now Lillian H. Smith branch, Toronto Public Library] where I was adopted by a librarian, Miss Bush. She gave me hot chocolate and read to me. She was the first and only person who cared about me and we communicated through books.

The first book I ever read was *Peter Pan.* I lived at Spadina and Dundas and I used to look for the statue of Peter Pan on Kensington Avenue. I thought I was in England.

RP: Do you think your work reflects your experience as a woman?
HW: I have a lot of trouble with that. Everything I had read had been written by men and from the male point of view. I was terrified when I tried to put words on paper. "What can I say that is mine? Who needs another book? What is mine that is different from the things I have read? Nothing, nothing is mine. Everything I know has come from books or necessity. What have I got to say?" It took about 10 years for me to learn to use first person. I wrote everything in third person. Third person was easy because "I" didn't exist. The first person had to be found: who was the first person, who was the "I"?

I have modified a lot of my vocabulary. For example, a phrase I no longer use is "playing a role." It's in the language, it's acceptable, yet I resent it. I have never played a role in my life, but I was using "my role as mother," "my role as teacher," etc. Suddenly I realized that the phrase is acceptable for women *only* because it adds to their sense of fragmentation. So I've begun to watch my vocabulary and to question the idea that I am a different woman as a mother and as a writer. I decided that what may be considered "normal" was not normal for me.

RP: I am struck by your faceless female characters. Do you see them as faceless?
HW: Someone once said that all my women are victims. My response was, "Yes, but they prevail." Because of my own limited background, I cannot

seem to enter into the life of the well-adjusted and apparently successful woman who has an ability to handle her crises directly. This may be because I wish to talk about events in my personal life. In fiction I seem to regress to a period in my own life when I had no sense of identity.

RP: Your work has been described as unsettling, Helen.
HW: I'm always surprised by that because in the process of writing this unsettling material, I settled something in myself. I guess what was a catharsis for me becomes a difficulty for the reader.

Everything I have written has been a discovery for me. Unwittingly, I found a source in myself that I wanted to tap. It was the not-knowing that propelled my writing, not knowing what was going on, not having any judgement. For me, fiction is the truth of the unconscious, if it's done properly.

RP: Do you see a connection between your fiction and your husband's music?
HW: Two scholars at Lakehead University [S. R. MacGillivray and Noreen Ivancic] say that my husband's twelve-tone technique has shaped my writing.

RP: What do you think? You have said yourself that you lived John's career.
HW: Yes, I did. Vicariously I lived out the trials and agonies of John's career. My energy, creativity, and thought went into John. There wasn't a thought in the world that I could do anything on my own, not a thought. I flattered John into marrying me. I was his muse; I provided titles for his work; I stayed up with him until all hours to talk about his music. But when I got pregnant with Paul the emphasis shifted away from John and I don't think he ever got over it.

I went to night school when Paul was a baby to get my senior matriculation and thought maybe I'd go to school again. The history teacher met me at the door one evening and said, "Please, Mrs. Weinzweig, not tonight." I said, "I'm sorry." I would disrupt the class by asking questions on history, ". . . but, but sir." And so I realized I couldn't go back. I could no longer just sit there and "repeat after me." So, I didn't go back to school, I didn't get my senior matriculation, and I didn't go to university.

When my sons were babies, I trained in nursery school work. I organized the first co-operative nursery school on our street, which began in the basement of my house. And I started to think, well, I can learn child psychology and do nursery school work. But I couldn't continue because it was very hard for my sons to have other children come into their house and claim their mother's attention.

RP: So, Helen, are you saying that there is a connection between your own and John's work?
HW: Yes. For 12 years we lived in a small house and the piano was alongside the kitchen wall. I was in the kitchen a good deal of the time when I wasn't doing nursery school work or whatever. My place was preparing meals, cleaning up, and all the rest of it. John was at the piano most of the time because he always worked at home.

Due to circumstances beyond my control, I have always been alert to my environment, and unconsciously I was alert to the environment of competent musical composition. So when I heard John working out an idea, often I would go in and say, "Not yet, not yet. A little more, a little more." I can't read music but something in me began to feel the process. I could sense the structure of a composition, even when it wasn't in the traditional three parts. I could sense where it was going and feel the inevitability of a piece.

I will work on a paragraph for as long as a month or rewrite one page 20 times until it has that same inevitability. So that is where possibly I absorbed structure. I hate to admit it because part of me is still a little bit uneasy with 30 years of the vicarious life that women of my generation lived. The careers of men were often the work of their wives. I can't blame myself but there is a vestige of regret.

RP: How did you react to your first publication?
HW: I didn't know that the *Canadian Forum* had accepted my first story, "Surprise!" [in 1968]. Everybody sent their first story to the *Canadian Forum.* I was walking along the street, the *Forum* was displayed in a wire rack outside a bookstore, and my name leapt out at me from the cover. Seeing my name in print on the cover of the *Canadian Forum* was a thrilling moment.

I then went to New York to take a writing course. I took with me an unpublished short story and I discovered—I was 48 years old at the time—that the young students were indignant that there were old people in the course with them. They were graduate students in their early to mid-twenties and they didn't like the presence of oldies.

RP: What inspired your first novel, Passing Ceremony*?*
HW: My husband had a performance in Saskatoon, I think it was, where we visited our host's friend, Eli Bornstein, a painter. He had a painting on his wall. Within the frame were blocks of wood painted white, in various geometric

shapes and sizes. While the men were talking I was staring and it hit me that if I had material that was geometrical and enclosed it in a frame, I could do in a novel what he had done on canvas. The random shapes and their random placement were unified by the frame. And the other unity was geometry.

In *Passing Ceremony*, I found the frame in an experience I had at a friend's wedding and everything took place within that frame. But I couldn't maintain the unity entirely; I was not experienced enough. Everything should have occurred within the frame of the wedding but I had the characters driving around Toronto, going to High Park. I gave up. I couldn't find any more material within the frame. I can now, but I gave up then. I saw unity on Eli Bornstein's wall and I repeated it in *Passing Ceremony*. It took six years to write.

I knew I had done a modern thing. No continuity, explanations, or flashbacks, and some of the characters aren't named. There was only one publisher in Canada I knew about that might be interested and that was Anansi Press. I took it down by streetcar—at that time they were on George Street [Toronto]—and left the manuscript on the receptionist's desk. I got a call that they were interested if I would make some changes. Their editor was—memory, there we go again, senility—Jim Polk. At the time, I wondered why Anansi grabbed it. But I soon realized that everyone's marriage at the Press was breaking up and I bring in *Passing Ceremony* [loud laughter]. Later, when *Basic Black with Pearls* was published, the *New Yorker* commented that my timing was perfect.

Jim Polk said that I had to rewrite, that some things in the novel didn't fit. I picked up the manuscript and the whole thing fell out of my hands onto the floor. As the two of us were gathering the typewritten pages, I said, "This is my first book and I don't know about rewriting. I don't know about what fits and what doesn't fit." So he took a red pen and went through the pages.

When I got home, I read his comments about my inconsistent style and I finally understood. It's *style*! I had absorbed so many literary styles and I had put them all into the book. That's how I learned to edit my work and when I handed the novel back to Jim, he said "It's perfect, but you may be interested to know that Peggy [Atwood] read both versions and she thinks that I was too hard on you, that it's now too spare." There is no word in there that doesn't fit.

RP: Tell me about the writing of Basic Black with Pearls.
HW: *Basic Black* reflects my desire to belong to the bourgeois, nuclear family.

The inherent conflict was to want it and to despise it. I did not write the novel to satisfy readers' expectations.

For public readings, I often used the "cash register" scene in *Basic Black* because I liked it and thought I did well with it. In one of those readings, I froze. I looked out at the audience who were waiting for the next sentence and finally I said, "I can't read this." I had been reading it for about three years. I looked down at one of my friends sitting in the front row and asked her to finish reading for me. She came up to the podium and I took her place in the audience.

When I got home that night, I realized that what I thought I had invented had actually taken place. Unbeknownst to me, I was using unconscious material which did not surface until I had read it—I don't know how many times—as if it were an invention. That evening, in the middle of the reading, my conscious and unconscious merged. When my unconscious entered my memory the whole scene exploded for me. I just about broke down because that was one of my early traumas. Each noon, my aunt would give my two cousins money for candy. But she would slam the cash register shut in my face because I was not entitled to candy. Fortunately, many human traumas remain buried.

Due to circumstances beyond my control, I could not participate in life around me until I was an adult. But I absorbed a lot of what I saw, so many of my characters are voyeurs, like Shirley in *Basic Black.*

RP: How do you know whether material is appropriate for a short story or a novel?

HW: I didn't attempt a novel until I had some skill at putting words on paper. There are writers who reserve good material for a novel, but I let the punch line of a story determine its form.

RP: You've also written drama, Helen.

HW: The short story, "My Mother's Luck," was adapted for the stage. I also wrote a play about my father, "A Classical Education," which was produced when I was playwright-in-residence at Tarragon Theatre [Toronto].

In "My Mother's Luck," I struggled to write about my mother's experiences and to give her the voice of a Jewish immigrant. I was proud that the English in the monologue was a transliteration of Yiddish. I was not going to have her speak a "proper" English since she would have spoken in Yiddish if she were actually telling me the story.

I was pleased that I could create a dramatic effect without using dramatic language. The dramatic effect is that the daughter never speaks. The story succeeds entirely because of its *style* and the *two* characters, only one of whom speaks. When it was produced, I walked out of the theatre in tears—my identification with the silent girl was so complete—and my two sons were visibly shaken.

I then got a scholarship to take a playwright's course at Banff. I wanted to work on the play about my father, a companion piece to "My Mother's Luck." But I couldn't write about my father. At 17, I spent three months in an apartment in Italy with my father but now I can't remember his face. He refused to be written about and I put the play away. Some stories can't be written because they're true.

RP: Would you describe the novel you are working on now?
HW: The novel that I have been working on for more than 10 years presents a problem. I am trying to make simple "reality" fresh and interesting. Instead of starting with what I don't know and working toward discovery, I'm doing the opposite. Now discovery is in the ordinary, everyday world. The challenge is to write about the ordinary and move the reader at the same time.

The more experimental I am, the more control I need. The most important element in experiment is style and in this novel I control style as statement, without adjectives and adverbs. I eschew interior monologue which I use in my earlier work. I want to express thought so the reader responds emotionally, not the character.

Recently, I realized what I set out to do 10 years ago. I am really into chaos theory. Physics has shown that there is no order in nature, the universe, or life itself. But strangely, strangely there is a pattern if you can find it. About a year or so ago, I discovered a pattern in the novel's chaotic structure. In my chaotic way of writing, connections are made in the reader's head. In my view, linear thought and therefore linear writing are unnatural to humans.

Having been brought up under traumatic conditions in a *shtetl*, I write the way I heard speech used. No two sentences were consecutive: "*Oy.* What's happening? What should I do? Listen, did you know the woman who lives downstairs, her husband has left her? So, what's going to happen to the children? Oh, my son is learning the Talmud. What's your son

doing?" And so it went. I grew up perfectly comfortable with such melodrama, but I want to write melodrama in a postmodern way.

The protagonist in this novel can't remember his childhood and into the text I throw a story, "The Sea at Bar." This story has a linear plot that has nothing to do with the novel but I include it as a likely reason for his amnesia.

I want to write in a manner that avoids what Gertrude Stein called "mere statement." Since I appreciate ambiguity and paradox, I say things on paper that may startle the reader but do not startle me. Now I discard material that does not startle me. I am aiming for sincerity, without props, *shtick*, or nonsense.

For me, process is all. And I've been lucky; I've never had a rejection slip. But I've had to choose between being a writer and, as I say, a "liver." Dostoevsky once said, "Everyday I have to choose whether to live or write." It took me a long time to become a contented writer and I'm not giving that up.

Elana Wolff

Hogheads

One thing we've never done
is run till we're choke-hold
red just for the sake of it.

We've talked about it—once
we almost did it.
But both of us came ill-equipped

for the occasion. I brought two tops,
no pants. You brought pants
for someone half your size.

We laughed at the collaborative
gaffe.
It was raining hard as hogheads anyhow.

So we stayed inside instead and talked —
among other things
about the seagull

with the gammy leg, dragging it
on landing,
unaddled by the handicap completely.

Catherine Owen

Severence Package

"seeing neither the logic nor order inherent in nature, he has selfishly appropriated it to his own ends and destroyed it."
—M. FUKUOKA

Others likely went missing in the one loss
: inchworms, perhaps, or ticks, beetles with glabrous
backs, a certain kind of burrowing rat, a type of moss,
a tint of blood, feather's sheen or bitter taste;

none accounted for, of course, only the large
absences were stuffed, grieved or sketched
—some in decaying texts, their backdrops hued & rigged
to look elysian, not a once-paradise, plundered for wretched

appetites. Take the Calvaria tree, for instance, which
vanished not long after the Dodo, to little notice.
Its seeds were germinated, not by chance, but
in the Dodo's gizzard, erupting like a poultice

on the earth from a bolus of digested fruit. With
the last Dodo shot, the tree became scarce, then
ceased to show its gnarled pate, bark and roots
on any of the fertile islands that the sailors had rampaged.

Gone the Dodo, famed bird, the Calvaria tree, its mate,
and how many others unnamed?

Annick Hillger

"Afterbirth of Earth"
Messianic Materialism in Anne Michaels' *Fugitive Pieces*

Introduction

In *Specters of Marx*, Jacques Derrida speaks of the importance of learning how to live with the dead (xviii). In describing the impossibility of deconstructing justice, he urges us to take responsibility for the past as present and to relate to the dead as living. As he points out, the return to the past itself is an impossible undertaking—elsewhere he speaks of its "infinite remove"(*Mémoires* 6)—but it has to be attempted nevertheless in order not only to do justice to those who have been silenced but also to redeem those who are still speaking. This moral imperative is espoused by Anne Michaels in her novel *Fugitive Pieces*, which articulates the need perpetually to address the genocide of the Jews during World War II: "It is your future you are remembering" (21), Jakob Beer, the novel's protagonist, is told.

As a young boy, Jakob witnesses the murder of his family by German soldiers and is thereafter haunted by the ghosts of his parents and his sister, Bella. Hiding in the swamps immediately following the murder, he sees the sky "milky with new spirits" and realizes that "the dead are everywhere but the ground" (8). Even after he has been rescued and taken away from Poland, first to Greece and then to Canada, Jakob is tormented by nightmares. Sensing the presence of his "sister's ghost" (125) everywhere, Jakob learns that "every moment is two moments" (140), that the past inhabits the present. Through the teachings of his mentor Athos, the Greek archeologist who has found and saved the boy during a dig, Jakob comes to realize that

he "is being offered a second history" (20). This paper examines the moral implications of this reconfiguration of time and, in particular, explores the notion of "a second history," a history which keeps the past open in memory of the future, that is, a history which remains fugitive.

I.

"Every moment is two moments" (140); "it is your future you are remembering" (21). These invocations immediately call to mind Walter Benjamin's conception of *Jetztzeit*, "the time of the now," put forth in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (261-63): "[T]he present . . . , as a model of Messianic time, comprises the entire history of mankind in an enormous abridgment" (263).[1] Like his friend and contemporary, the marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch, Benjamin writes within a specifically Jewish tradition of remembrance. Like Bloch, he revises the marxist dialectical conception of history by departing from a linear, continuous concept of time and introducing a notion of the present which brings the dialectics of historical materialism to a standstill.[2] While Marx's emancipatory project is concerned with looking towards the future as delivering the fullness of liberation, Bloch insists that the present contains moments of *utopia*, and if it is blind to these moments it turns into a past containing our present as already lost. Hence the need to look backward, the need to examine those moments of having missed the *spirit of utopia* and to retrace "a possible future in the past"("Zukunft" 294; my translation). In a similar fashion, Benjamin urges us to "fan . . . the spark of hope in the past"("Theses" 257). He assigns this task to the historian who should be compelled by a responsibility to the dead, for "*even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins" (257). Rather than conceiving of the historian as someone who merely gathers the facts about the past—as certain versions of historicism would have it—Benjamin envisages the historian as someone who finds traces of hope in the past in order to achieve a redemption of the present. Peter Szondi formulates the result beautifully when he speaks of "Benjamin's search for a lost time, which is a search for a lost future" (90-91; my translation).[3]

II.

Using Benjamin's concept of history, let us now take a closer look at *Fugitive Pieces*. I want to begin with a passage that contains in a nutshell the moral imperative of the novel:

> It's Hebrew tradition that forefathers are referred to as "we,"not "they." "When we were delivered from Egypt . . . " This encourages empathy and a responsibility to the past but, more important, it collapses time. The Jew is forever leaving Egypt. A good way to teach ethics. If moral choices are eternal, individual actions take on immense significance no matter how small: not for this life only. (159-160)

The passage evokes the Jewish tradition of remembrance and relates it to an ethics of living and communing with the dead and the lost. Rather than distancing themselves from the past by referring to the dead as "they," those who speak in the present are called upon to "collapse time" by using the communal pronoun "we," thus including what a linear conception of time would by definition exclude from the present. Like Benjamin, Michaels formulates an ethics that transgresses the mere *now* and she speaks of the "responsibility to the past" as a legacy handed down to the living by the dead. In practical terms, this ethics consists in telling and retelling the story of those who can no longer speak for themselves, for the past and the present are parts of an ongoing communal story and cannot be told once and for all. In his "Theses" Benjamin tells us that the nature of history and historiography is constantly threatened by the homogenizing forces of "conformism," and he reminds us: "In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to empower it" (255). It is thus the historian's task continuously to re-examine the past, for otherwise it turns into a monument celebrating the negation of difference. As Michaels puts it elsewhere, echoing Benjamin:

> It's not the unknown past we're doomed to repeat, but the past we know. Every recorded event is a brick of potential, of precedent, thrown into the future. Eventually the idea will hit someone in the back of the head. This is the duplicity of history: an idea recorded will become an idea resurrected. (161)

As I have already indicated, it is Athos, Jakob's saviour and foster-parent, who figures as the teacher of history. It is certainly no coincidence that Athos is a geologist and archeologist, someone who digs the earth in order to find traces of the past. As a geologist, Athos investigates the "rock strata"(95) that have solidified over the course of time. In fact, the geological process of sedimentation serves as an image for the consolidation of history: "Human memory is encoded . . . in river sediment" (53)—an idea captured in the chapter heading "Vertical Time."

The novel begins by showing us how Athos participates in the excavation of Biskupin, the "Polish Pompeii" (104), a prehistoric dwelling found in the

late 1930s, which is Jakob's hiding-place. As a site of historical silencing and recuperation, Biskupin provides an adequate setting for Michaels' historiographic revisions, and it is only too appropriate that the novel should begin with a depiction of an archeologist digging in Biskupin and eventually finding a survivor of the genocide of the Jews. As we learn in the course of the novel, Biskupin was one of the sites where archeological findings had been deliberately misread by German archeologists for ideological reasons, namely in order to prove the supposed superiority of the German people. In fact, the Third Reich founded an institution called *Ahnenerbe* whose task it was to provide—by whatever means—scientific proof for the National Socialists' racial theories. In the acknowledgments Michaels refers to Gathercole's and Lowenthal's *The Politics of the Past*, a collection of essays dealing with deliberate distortions of the past, and it is here that we can read more about the *Ahnenerbe's* dubious methodology:

> Himmler had no time for the pedantic precision of traditional science: he began not with hypotheses based on the evolution of evidence but rather with axioms for which the evidence had to be found; awkward or contradictory facts were ignored or altered. (79)

Clearly, the *Ahnenerbe's* aim was to impose one reading onto the past and silence other possible interpretations. In Michaels' words, "The job of Himmler's SS-Ahnenerbe—the Bureau of Ancestral Inheritance—was to conquer history" (104). Indeed, this is a perfect illustration of what Benjamin means when he writes that "*even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins"("Theses" 257). Throughout his life Athos makes a point of setting right the distortions of historiography through the likes of Himmler's *Ahnenerbe*. He starts writing a book called *Bearing False Witness*, for to bear witness is a moral responsibility he feels towards those who either have not had the opportunity to speak or whose testimony has been erased. Be it the "inhabitants of Biskupin" or "the Laurentian People"(102) whose settlements he tries to find in Toronto, it is the silenced peoples of the past whom Athos commemorates in his book.

Interestingly, it is before he starts writing and bearing witness as a historiographer that Athos literally bears a witness to the past. On the archeological site of Biskupin he finds Jakob, and the way Michaels portrays Jakob's emergence from the bog calls to mind the birth of a child: in fact, the boy is described as the "afterbirth of earth" (5), which Athos rescues and preserves. The expression "*after*birth of earth" suggests that Jakob's history will come

to embody the "*second* history"(20) that Athos has set out to record (my emphasis). This history is the "history of matter"(119), a history about which little has been written. As Jakob tells us: "I was born into absence" (233).

Again, it is no coincidence that Athos is a Greek archeologist whose area of specialization is the preservation of wood. We recall that Athos has been called to Biskupin in order to help restore the prehistoric wooden structures of the dwelling. In an essay on the utopian element in materialism, Ernst Bloch tells us that the Greek word for "matter," *hyle*, originally designated "wood," and that for this reason one must speak of early Greek materialism as "hylozoist materialism" ("Utopische Funktion" 266; my translation). By presenting Athos as a Greek scientist who specializes in the preservation of wood, Michaels places him at the origins of materialist philosophy. By depicting him as a midwife to Jakob's birth she relates him to the thought of Ernst Bloch for whom *utopia* is a child of matter, which may or may not be born: "Utopia is a function of matter. It is indeed a necessary part of matter, for matter is like a pregnant mother"("Tagträume" 143; my translation).

While tracing the Greek lineage of Athos' philosophy, Michaels at the same time evokes the Judaic tradition upon which her novel draws. The encounter between Jakob and Athos and their subsequent affiliation reflect the merging of two traditions of thought. In the very beginning of the text, Jakob, who is covered in mud and in clay, is referred to as "a golem" (12). The golem is a man-like creature made out of clay which has found its first formulation in Jewish mysticism, the teachings of which are known as the Kabbalah. Incidentally, both Jakob and Athos are familiar with the work of the Jewish mystics. Athos at one point speaks of the "linguistic investigations of the kabbalists" (100) and Jakob, the poet, refers to himself as "a kabbalist" (162) in his conception of language. Also, Walter Benjamin, whose ideas resonate throughout *Fugitive Pieces*, was familiar with the Kabbalah through his close friend Gershom Scholem, the renowned scholar of kabbalistic thought. As Scholem tells us, the figure of the golem spread into popular legends of the Middle Ages and eventually into works of modern literature. In the latter, the golem has come to symbolize "the unredeemed, unformed man; the Jewish people; the working class aspiring for its liberation" (*Kabbalah* 354). Although Michaels does not share with these earlier writers an immediate concern with the liberation of the working classes, these other meanings of the golem are of paramount importance in *Fugitive*

Pieces and Michaels is certainly making use of a shared symbol of modern writing in her depiction of Jakob. What is more revealing, though, is the way she delves into the golem's history when using the figure. Scholem points out that medieval philosophy used the word *golem* as a Hebrew term for "matter," for unformed *hyle* (*Kabbalah and Symbolism* 212). Thus it becomes obvious just how much Athos embodies the historical materialist: in Biskupin he retrieves the history of Jakob whose family and people have suffered from the "Nazi policy" of "anti-matter" (165).

Jakob himself tells us that it is in Athos' hands that he turns into an object of preservation: "Athos replaced parts of me slowly, as if he were preserving wood" (144). This is one instance of how Athos, the historical materialist, applies the methods of the natural sciences to the human sphere. Jakob states:

> He often applied the geologic to the human, analyzing social change as he would a landscape; slow persuasion and catastrophe. Explosions, seizures, floods, glaciation. (119)

The analogy is explicit; images of geological rupture echo notions of social rupture. Moments of radical social change are like events that have radically altered the course of natural history. These events also take on an apocalyptic quality, and can be read in terms of *Heilsgeschichte*,[4] an idea that Jakob expresses in the following observation: "Athos' backward glance gave me a backward hope. Redemption through cataclysm" (101).

It is probably here that Benjamin's messianic materialism is most explicitly voiced in the novel. Longing for redemption, Jakob's "backward hope" breathes the *spirit of utopia.* But looking backwards he sees a cataclysmic scene. Like Benjamin's "angel of history," Jakob sees a huge pile of debris and rubble giving testimony to the past as one large catastrophe:

> [The angel of history] sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead and make whole what has been smashed. ("Theses" 259)

This passage from Benjamin resonates with ideas from Isaac Luria's creation myth. As Scholem tells us, in Luria's myth of redemption, history always embodies a state of brokenness, a state of non-redemption.[5]

Similarly, Lurianic ideas are reflected in *Fugitive Pieces.* The Lurian notion of the broken vessel is most obvious in the novel's title. *Fugitive Pieces* can be read as referring to the shattering of the vessel which has to be restored in the *Tikkun.* According to Luria who wrote in the sixteenth century, the

time after the Jews had been expelled from Spain, the exile of the Jews is connected with Adam's fall which induced "the scattering of the holy sparks . . . of the *Shekhinah*"(Scholem, *Kabbalah* 167). As God's chosen people the Jews are called upon to go into the world and gather the sparks which become more and more dispersed as time progresses. The exile of the Jews thus reflects the exile of the *Shekhinah*, and since the latter has to be restored from all its fragments, the condition of exile is a necessary step on the path to redemption. "In the course of its exile Israel must go everywhere, to every corner of the world, for everywhere a spark of the *Shekhinah* is waiting to be found, gathered, and restored by a religious act"(Scholem, *Kabbalah and Symbolism* 116). Throughout the novel, Michaels alludes to various stages in the long history of Jewish exile: Egypt, Spain, Eastern Europe, North America. But it is in depicting the persecution of the Jews during the Third Reich, which induced an expulsion of unprecedented scale, that Michaels explicitly echoes the Lurianic idea of the broken vessel:

> Jews were filling the corners and cracks of Europe, every available space. They buried themselves in strange graves, any space that would fit their bodies, absorbing more room than was allotted them in the world. (45)

Furthermore, we recall that Jakob, who through his name comes to embody Israel, had hidden in a crack in the wall while his family was being killed. At one point he also refers to his own "brokenness" and "the sorrow of those whose messiahs have made them leave so much behind" (169). As we shall see, Jakob himself will eventually salvage his people from the corruptions of history by assisting Athos as a chronicler of a "history of earth" (32).

If we take a closer look at Jakob's full name—Jakob Beer, we realize just how much he embodies the people of Israel. In fact, it is around his very name that the imagery of the novel revolves. Through his name Jakob's affiliation with a tradition of Jewish mysticism becomes obvious. In his book on symbolism in the Kabbalah, Scholem refers to Maimonides who had distinguished between several ways of reading the torah. *Be'ur* designates the torah's mystical sense. Through word play, the mystics associate *be'ur* with the Hebrew word for "well," *be'er*, for, to the mystics, the torah is like "a well of fresh water, whence spring ever new levels of hidden meaning" (60). While Jakob's last name thus expresses the fluidity and richness of the well and the mystics' reading of the torah, we immediately notice how contrary this idea of fluidity is to the condition in which we find him at the beginning of the novel: Jakob is hiding in the swamps of Biskupin, an area

that is bogging up, slowly sedimenting. It is an area that is anything but a well of fresh water. And considering what Himmler's *Ahnenerbe* is doing in Biskupin, it is anything but a place with endless meanings. Rather, the bog is a site where attempts are being made to solidify the past, to impose one reading on it: that of the victors of history, who are erecting monuments to themselves. The bog is silting up and turning into the "poisoned well" of history. The narrator notes: "History is the poisoned well, seeping into the groundwater" (161). The image of the well that is poisoned through of time parallels history as a process of decay. The image also reverberates with the accusation that Jews faced in the Middle Ages: Jews were said to poison wells and thus cause the Plague. The following centuries of branding the Jews as those who bring decay and disease to existing societies—a development that culminated in the pseudo-scientific racial theories of the Third Reich—bear testimony to the ways in which ideas perpetuate themselves over the course of time and are indeed, to use Benjamin's words, "empower[ed]" by "conformism"("Theses" 255).

Just how paralyzing the idea of a monolithic monumental past can be to those who come later is best expressed by Ben, the young scientist whom we can in many ways read as Jakob's son, the son of Israel. A generation later, finding himself at an even greater remove from the past, Ben expresses what Anne Michaels herself must have felt as a young Jew looking back at the genocide 50 years ago: " . . . history only goes into remission, while it continues to grow until you're silted up and can't move" (242). Does justice forever belong to the realm of *utopia*?

III.

The fundamental paradox within which Athos, Jakob, Ben and, not least, Anne Michaels are caught in their dealings with history is only too obvious. It is the very paradox that Benjamin describes in his "Theses": How to progress while the weight of the past is holding you back; how to affirm what has been negated long ago. And yet, there seems to be a determination in the novel not to surrender to the paralysis, but to undo processes of sedimentation, to "stir up historia" (107).

Jakob displays this determination most strongly when he writes a book of poetry called *Groundwork*, a collection of poems dedicated to his family. Years after his traumatic childhood experience, Jakob attempts to come to terms with the haunting presence of the dead. *Groundwork*, the title of

Jakob's poetry collection, not only denotes Jakob's engaging in the past as a geological and archeological enterprise. It also signals the need to address the injustices of the past, rather than dismissing them as casualties of mankind gone beserk, so that the ground for a better future may be provided. This ground is only provisional but it is open to the possibilities of a future that is not bogged down by the weight of the past. As Ben observes, the poems that Jakob writes are "the poems of a man who feels, for the first time, a future" (267).

We recall that as a "bog-boy" (5) with his "boots locked in mud" (139), Jakob cannot live the flow of life. His marriage to Alex is overshadowed by the presence of his dead sister, Bella, who haunts Jakob "in her white dress" (125) and figures as his shadow-bride. Bella is the remnant of a past so crippling to Jakob that it is only in mourning, in acknowledging her loss, that he can eventually escape the "melancholia of bog" (233) and restore the fluidity and free flow of water that are inherent to his name. Jakob only realizes how liberating the experience of *Jetztzeit* is in his relationship with Michaela, his second wife: "This is where I become irrevocably unmoored. The river floods. I slip free the knot and float, suspended in the present" (188).

When reflecting on Jakob's writing, Ben voices most clearly what his namesake Walter Benjamin declares in his "Theses." Addressing Jakob Ben writes:

> You were fortunate to be trained by a master. When you turned your attention to your own poems, in your Groundwork, and you recount the geology of the mass graves, it's as if we hear the earth speak. (209)

Like Walter Benjamin, whose "angel of history" is paramount witness to the injustices of "an oppressed past"("Theses" 263), Ben expresses the need to enter the graves and listen to the unheard voices in order to foreclose the consolidation of a past told only by the victors of history.

In portraying Jakob as the author of *Groundwork* Michaels, in fact, envisions a historian who does not merely fathom the depths of historical knowledge, but who retrieves a "history of matter" (119) which has been obscured by idealist thought in the history of philosophy. She does so by using the powerful image of uprooting and freeing what has grown in the dark. We recall that at the very beginning of the novel Jakob had planted himself "like a turnip" (8) when he was hiding in the swamps of Biskupin.[6] Here, Michaels alludes to "those Jews who ran off into the woods to hide in

ditches they dug for themselves and covered only with leaves and branches" (101), the account of which she read in Shoshana Kalisch's collection of songs sung in the ghettos and concentration camps. The following stanza from a song called *In Kriuvka*, "In a Hideout," expresses the speaker's yearning to be free and to emerge into light from the dark, and we can well imagine it to have been sung by Jakob not only while he was hiding in the swamps of Biskupin but also at those moments of despair when he felt caught within "the melancholia of bog" (233), when he felt one with the living dead:

> In a forest hide-out dark and deep,
> My weary eyes close but I cannot sleep.
> I sit and wait and brood, I cry bitterly.
> Will we ever escape, again be free? (103-104)

Notably, the image that Michaels uses in her depiction of Jakob as a *kriuvka*, "a dugout," is subsequently used by the poet Jakob himself. Years later, in describing his relationship to his family, Jakob writes:

> *My love for my family has grown for years in decay-fed soil, an unwashed root pulled suddenly from the ground. Bulbous as a beet, a huge eye under a lid of earth. Scoop out the eye, blind the earth.* (206)

Not only does the passage evoke ideas of decay and contamination in relation to the passing of time. It also resonates with echoes from the Kabbalah. As Gershom Scholem tells us, *Ein-Sof*, the "Infinite," which denotes the Absolute Essence before its manifestation in the different emanations (*Sefiroth*), is often "identified . . . through the kabbalistic use of neoplatonic idiom, with the 'root of all roots'"(*Kabbalah* 89). In Lurianic doctrine primordial man (*Adam Kadmon*) is created as a recipient for the Divine light (*kad* is the Hebrew term for "vessel"), and it is from *Adam Kadmon* as the primordial being that all further creations emanate. Under the impact of the Divine light, however, Adam's eyes burst and they refract and disperse the *Shekhinah*. When speaking of "a huge eye under a lid of earth" (206), Jakob thus takes up an image that is central in the Lurianic myth of creation: he renders the birth of self as an emanation from the ground of being. In line with Jakob's project of exhuming a "second history" (20), "the history of matter" (119), the ground of being has turned literal.

At the same time, Jakob's choice of words and images brings to mind a passage which describes history as a process of siltation and sedimentation: "Human memory is encoded in . . . river sediment. Eskers of ash wait to be scooped up, lives reconstituted" (53). Read alongside each other the two passages

illustrate how life cannot be conceived of without commemorating the dead, without "scoop[ing]" up the "ashes" that are contaminating the ground of being. Again, Lurianic thought is reflected: the scattering of the ashes, hitherto contained within the giant urn of earth, becomes the necessary precondition for the *Tikkun,* for "lives reconstituted" in fertile ground.

Jakob's invocations of the *Adam Kadmon* of kabbalistic thought recall the description of him as a *golem* covered in mud and in clay. We already know that *golem* has come to stand for an imperfect being, for unformed matter, but in this context we note that the word at one point appears in the Bible as denoting Adam, the man made of clay (*adama* is Hebrew for "earth") who does not yet breathe the spirit induced by God (Scholem, *Kabbalah and Symbolism* 213). Moreover, ideas of the golem can be traced back to an old Jewish tradition according to which Adam is moved not by a "pneumatic spirit" induced from above but by the "telluric spirit of the earth" (216). As we read in Genesis 1,24: "Let the land produce living creatures. . . ." Just how much Michaels harks back to this tradition becomes obvious when she speaks of "the *new* Adam" (167) who must emerge from the earth after the genocide of the Jews (my emphasis).

In recurring to the figure of the new Adam, Michaels evokes the ideas of Terrence Des Pres whose influence she acknowledges in particular. In his book, *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps,* Des Pres tries to account for the paradox that despite the collapse of all values, the inmates of the camps were still driven by a will to survive and live in a world that had been emptied of what had hitherto defined culture and civilisation. Des Pres refers to Nietzsche's *The Will to Power* to illustrate how mankind has always looked for a higher meaning outside of life itself. Bare existence has come to be subordinated to symbolic superstructures; within the framework of civilisation it has been relegated to a realm so low that it is often not even acknowledged as part of man anymore. In the course of analyzing the survivor's accounts, Des Pres reaches the conclusion that "life is its own ground and purpose" (196), and similar to Michaels he assigns to the earth the function of propelling life. When Michaels writes that "we look for the spirit precisely in the place of greatest degradation" and that "[i]t's from there that the new Adam must raise himself, must begin again" (167), she echoes Des Pres' description of the survivor who embodies the telluric spirit of Adam: "His soul lives *in* his flesh, and what his body says is that the human spirit can sink this low, can bear this tor-

ment, can suffer defilement and fear and unspeakable hardship and still exist" (209; emphasis in original).

The examples that Des Pres gives to illustrate how survivors are compelled by this will to live in the most extreme situations are striking.[7] However, in telling us how Dostoyevsky, who had been sentenced to death and taken to the place of execution, but was then released, arrived at the "awareness of life's immanent value" (167), Des Pres does not restrict his insight to survivors of the camps. Michaels, too, refers to this episode in Dostoyevsky's life. In *Fugitive Pieces*, it is Ben who imagines himself following Dostoyevsky to the place of execution and witnessing the condemned's shock when their blindfolds are removed, when they learn that they are to live:

> Never before have I seen faces to match those, with the bare revelation that still they live, that there has been no shot. I fall with the weight of life; that is, with the weight of Dostoyevsky's life, which unfolds from that moment with the intensity of a man who begins again. (212)

Ben describes the revelation of "life's immanent value"(Des Pres 167) as "fall[ing] with the weight of life." In using the idea of falling down in order to convey Ben's feelings at the moment of recognition Michaels captures what des Pres calls the "experience of radical de-sublimation" through which the survivor comes "close to earth" (166). The idea of falling recurs at another point in the novel. When Athos tells us: "I can't save a boy from a burning building . . . he must jump to earth" (45), this is a call to discard notions of a divine revelation from without and a call to fall back onto the ground of being itself.

A wonderful parable told by Athos illustrates how life is its own ground. As a young child Athos is taught by an old Jew about the "mystery of wood." He tells Jakob about how the old man had told him about a ship that had sunk into oblivion and had re-surfaced after its cargo, salt, had dissolved: "Do you know what else the hamal told me, Jakob? 'The great mystery of wood is not that it burns, but that it floats'" (28). Emptied of its content, devoid of meaning, the vessel surfaces. In the same way, Jakob "surface[s]" (5) from the bog after escaping the burning of his city and his people, a burning which can under no circumstances be read as a burnt offering, a sacrifice to a higher cause. The "great mystery of wood" is that it survives at times when ideological superstructures have failed to provide a ground for existence. It is an idea that is evoked again and again with "the mystery of wood" resonating as a *leitmotif* throughout the text.

IV.

Robert Alter, in a book on Benjamin, Scholem, and Kafka, situates these three writers between the two poles of tradition and modernity, and shows how the process of secularization in the modern world has affected the reading of the Jewish tradition upon which these writers draw. The book is called *Necessary Angel*, and it derives its title from a poem by Wallace Stevens, one of modernism's foremost representatives. It is no coincidence that Alter's book should bear the same title as Stevens' poetics, for in *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* Stevens writes: "the great poems of heaven and hell have been written and the great poem of the earth remains to be written" (142). Clearly, Stevens thought of himself as the one to write "the great poem of the earth." However, I suggest that Michaels has written, certainly not "*the* great poem of the earth," for she would never claim the authorship of one *supreme fiction*, but *a* "poem of the earth" (my emphasis).

In writing her "poem of the earth," Michaels renews kabbalistic thought. She thus revises a cosmological model that has been emptied of its divine content and fills it with new meaning: the moral grounding for human action is the "afterbirth of earth," that is, living matter itself. Des Pres observes "[h]ow infinitely sad [it is] that Hegel's 'secularization of the spirit' reached its first fulfillment in the concentration camps" (208), and it seems that Michaels has attempted to alert us to the moment when the human spirit denies its biological reality. Like Des Pres, Michaels counters the negation of life by relocating the human spirit in the body. In one of the most moving passages of the novel, she describes how even in the gas-chambers the victims still express "the terrifying hope of human cells"; and when she speaks of the "[b]are automatic faith of the body" (168), this recalls Des Pres' description of the survivor whose "soul lives *in* his flesh." Michaels' example of Jakob jumping from a burning building—is it a church, is it a temple?—constitutes the moment of reverse sublimation as the only possibility for salvation left.

I quote the excerpt which Alter uses to preface his book, not only because it captures so much of what Anne Michaels has set out to do in *Fugitive Pieces*, but also because I believe that Jakob could very well have used it as a preface to *Groundwork*, his collection of poetry:

> Yet I am the necessary angel of earth,
> Since, in my sight, you see the earth again.
>
> Cleared of its stiff and stubborn, man-locked set,
> And, in my hearing you hear its tragic drone

Rise liquidly in liquid lingerings,
Like watery words awash; like meanings said

By repetitions of half-meanings.

Read against Stevens' poem, *Fugitive Pieces* can be seen as depicting the moment in history when earth's "tragic drone," which has remained unheard, erupts into the final effacement of meaning.

Conclusion

Like Benjamin, Anne Michaels uses the kabbalistic tradition to combine historical materialism with the concept of messianic time in order to lay to rest a marxist materialism indebted to the ideas of a homogeneous and linear time. At a time when all overarching ideological structures have collapsed, Michaels turns to the history of living matter and to the recovery of the "gradual instant" when "wood become[s] stone" (140), that is, when history closes in on itself. As Michaels observes: "History is amoral: events occured. But memory is moral"(138). Like Benjamin, Michaels calls on us to "fan a spark of hope in the past"("Theses" 257), a spark which we find enclosed in the "brick" (161) of history that will knock us out again and again if we allow it to consolidate into a single all-encompassing structure, if we accept it unexamined.

I want to end with a short reflection on angels: In the Bible, Jakob wrestles with the angel at the river Jabbok (*Genesis* 32,22), the place where the living cross over to the realm of the dead (Scholem, *Kabbalah and Symbolism* 135). In *Fugitive Pieces* a new Jakob encounters the "Angelus Novus" who no longer carries a message of God, who "no longer sings any hymns" (Scholem, *Angel* 233). Jakob Beer's encounter with the "angel of history" takes place on the shores of a receding river, for history has come to a standstill. Witnessing how the spirits of his dead parents fly up toward an empty sky, Jakob is wrestling with the absence of angels. Ultimately, this absence is the lesson that Athos teaches Jakob. "How do we know there is a God?," Athos tells Jakob, "Because he keeps disappearing" (107).

NOTES

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the ethics of historical relation. I also wish to acknowledge the assistance of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) during the writing of this paper.

1 More often than not the "Theses on the Philosophy of History" remain rather impenetrable. A look at a passage in Benjamin's *Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert*, his reflections on a childhood in Berlin, provides a more accessible point of entry into his philosophy of history. The passage illustrates the call of conscience to transcend the mere *now*: the little boy, Walter, is told about a relative's death. The boy is in his room, lying in his bed, about to fall asleep, while his father is giving a detailed account of how his cousin died. Sensing that his father's rendering of the story is somehow incomplete, the boy decides always to remember the room, always to remember the bed: "the way you remember a place which you know that one day you would have to reenter in order to retrieve something that has been forgotten" (47; my translation). In fact, years later, the boy finds out about the cause of the cousin's death: "In this room my father had kept silent about one detail in the story. Namely, that the cousin had died of syphilis" (47; my translation). The room in Benjamin's story is described as a place where past, present and future do not follow one another in temporal sequence but are presented as one in a momentary conjunction: "you remember a place which you know that one day you would have to reenter in order to retrieve something that has been forgotten" (47; my translation). The boy senses, without knowing for sure, that his father is not telling the truth, and thus he feels the need to remember the room and the bed as the places where he caught a glimpse of a revelation to come, as places where the truth about the past will have been stored, although *in absentia*. Significantly, these places are the very places where the unknown and the dead traditionally haunt the living: you are in bed, dreaming at night, when the unconscious works on you; you are in your room, at home, when the visitations of ghosts turn your most intimate place into the "uncanny" (*das Unheimliche)* itself (Freud 379).

The way Benjamin describes the boy's experience is highly reminiscent of the aesthetics of *Vor-Schein* formulated by Ernst Bloch. In his aesthetics, Bloch advances the notion of *Vor-Schein*, "anticipatory illumination," to describe what art enables us to do: namely, to catch a momentary glimpse of *utopia*, the place that is no-place, the place of truth (*Utopian Function* 141).

2 In the "Theses" Benjamin writes: "A historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop" (264).

3 In a letter to Benjamin, Max Horkheimer most explicitly voices his discontent with this kind of aberration from historical materialism: "The concept of incompletion is idealistic, as long as completion has not been included in the concept. The injustices of the past happened and are behind us"(Tiedemann 106; my translation). Horkheimer's thoughts strongly echo Marx's in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*: "The revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead, for thus only can it discover its own true meaning" (26). Whereas Marx would have the living tread upon the graves of the dead in order to walk towards liberation and thus forsake the superstitiuous act of conjuring the dead, Benjamin wants us to enter the graves and commune with the dead in order to

seek redemption there. Unless we do so, the graves will continue to grow into the insurmountable tomb that Benjamin's "angel of history" ("Theses" 259) witnesses : a tomb that is forever blocking the entrance to paradise, forever negating Bloch's *spirit of utopia.*

4 *Heilsgeschichte*: the interpretation of history stressing God's saving grace.

5 To Scholem, in fact, the passage combines two motifs with which Benjamin was very familiar: one from Christian baroque thought and another from Jewish mysticism, both of which represent what Scholem terms a "melancholy gaze at the past of history"(*Angel* 233). In baroque allegory, history is viewed not as a process of giving shape to eternal life but as "a process of incessant decay"(*Angel* 233). Similarly, the kabbalistic notion of *Tikkun* presents a view of historical progress as an impediment to redemption. As Scholem explains elsewhere (*Kabbalah* 128-44), Lurianic doctrine distinguishes three phases of creation: *Zimzum, Shevirah,* and *Tikkun.* In *Zimzum,* God, the Divine Essence, contracts Himself and makes room for the creation of other beings. Thus it is through God's withdrawal from primordial space into His own being that the world is paradoxically created. In *Shevirah,* God returns to the world: Divine light floods into the vessels, the forms that are to give shelter to the emanations of God. But the light is too strong: the vessels break, and the *Shekhinah,* God's presence in the world, is propelled into exile. Finally, *Tikkun* denotes the restitution of the vessels, a restitution which can only be fully brought about by the messiah and the arrival of messianic time. In this sense, Scholem speaks of history's essentially fragmentary character.

6 Jakob is referred to as "Tollund Man, Grauballe Man" (5) at the very beginning of the novel. Thus, Michaels evokes the poetry of Seamus Heaney, the Irish poet who employs the image of the bog in relation to a past long deemed lost. Heaney's poems are populated with turf-cutters and bog-people, the preserved bodies of those who are released from the moors centuries after they have died. Resisting decay, these bodies bear witness to the unnatural circumstances of their respective deaths: Tollund Man died hanging, while Grauballe Man had his throat cut.

In *Fugitive Pieces,* the echoes of Heaney are strong, and they serve to underline Michaels' presentation of history as a process of siltation and sedimentation. There is Athos who figures as the turf-cutter in *Fugitive Pieces*: "digging" (5) through the layers of history he resembles the speaker in Heaney's poem "Digging" for whom the act of writing about his forefathers is very much an act of unearthing their past. Cutting up what has become solid with time, Athos provides Jakob with a "Vinland peathouse" (29) to protect the boy so that he himself may eventually restore the fluidity inherent to his name. There is Ben who as a child makes friends with "an Irish boy and a Dane," reads about bog-people and "derive[s] a fascinating comfort from their preservation" (221). Like Heaney's Grauballe Man who "lies on a pillow of turf" (69), Ben draws "the peaceful spongy blanket of peat" (221) over his shoulder and thus expresses a sense of feeling at rest knowing that traces of the past do emerge at times most unexpected. Finally, there is Jakob, "bog-boy" (5), who also finds protection in the bog when he hides in the swamps of Biskupin after his family has been murdered. But to Jakob, the bog eventually turns into something very threatening.

7 For example, see Nadezhda Mandelstam's account: "Our way of life kept us firmly rooted

to the ground, and was not conducive to the search for transcendental truths. Whenever I talked of suicide, M. used to say: 'Why hurry? The end is the same everywhere, and here they even hasten it for you.' Death was so much more real, so much simpler than life, that we all involuntarily tried to prolong our earthly existence, even if only for a brief moment. . . . Perhaps it is better to talk in more concrete terms of the fullness or intensity of existence, and in this sense there may have been something more deeply satisfying in our desperate clinging to life than in what people generally strive for." And David Rousset's account: "Dynamic awareness of the strength and beauty of the sheer fact of living, in itself, brutal, entirely stripped of all superstructures—living even through the worst cataclysms and most disastrous setbacks" (Des Pres 166- 67).

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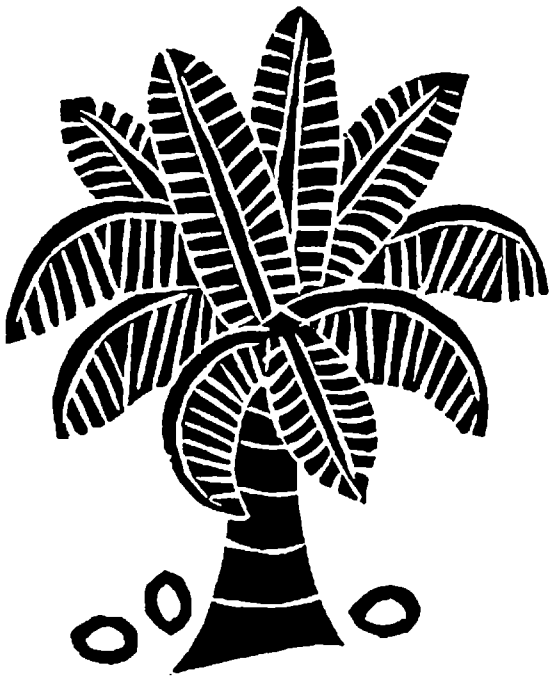

Jack Winter

A.Y.

I don't like to intrude, but I think this poem needs an introduction. You see, in Canada a few years ago there lived an old man who had been a famous painter: A.Y. Jackson (English-Canadian) very famous really, one of the Group of Seven. And there also lived a rich family: the McMichaels (Scottish-Canadian) a very rich family, one of the group of one. The McMichael family made a museum out of a part of its Ontario estate. It put into that museum all the Group of Seven famous paintings it could lay its coupons on ... *to save them,* the family said, *for ordinary Canadians* (Canadian-Canadian). Then, to show what it had saved, the McMichael family threw open its family doors for a fee, an ordinary fee. That was when some of us noticed the McMichaels had made another acquisition: A.Y. Jackson. The McMichael family had saved A.Y. Jackson for ordinary Canadians, and it showed him to them every day for the same fee. I met him there in the last year of his life. This poem is a record of that meeting.

Canada has no monuments and here is one, seated in a
corner of the room
By a ceiling to the floor window, tapping his feet to an
invisible pulse,
A writing desk across his knees, waiting for me to set the
famous fingers to work
On the margin of my three dollar print alongside *A.Y.
Jackson, First Snow Algoma, McMichael Conservation
Collection.*
Who is being collected here, what conserved?
First Snow Algoma, which bleats quietly on a wall, having
seen my muddy print slide by?
A.Y. Jackson, the claw of one stroke-deadened hand cur-
rently engaged in the greatest challenge of its career: the
placing of his name on my print?
A it writes, *y,* pauses while the nurse wipes spittle from the
jaw, corrects the knee, reactivates the claw,
J, a, spittle again, a sweater rearrangement also a shoulder,
C, k, and somewhere beyond but mostly on a wall

Algoma woods receive their benison of flakes and return
their smoke to the corny skies
While downstage right against the charred cadavers of trees
the final sumach bleeds.
S, o, n, and the nurse leans forward to extract the pen and
sheathe it in her private cleft, but the claw moves on ...
1, what is he doing? *9,* that's a three dollar print! *2, o.*
Outside the window winter is trying to die in the rubble of
the fall.
Only in the shadow of this museum are there stubborn fists
of snow.
A y jackson 1920. The claw is empty. The feet record no pulse.
Only the eyes swim up to me filled with cataract smoke.

As an ordinary Canadian (Montreal Jew living in Bath) I don't want to seem ungrateful to the McMichael family. I suppose it had been necessary to save A.Y. Jackson for me in this way. After all, he was given a room of his own and his food and things to paint with if he still cared to and a nurse with a cleft if he didn't and, when it became necessary, a grave. You see, A.Y. Jackson was all that was left of the Group of Seven. Now only the paintings are left. And the fee.

Peter Loeffler

From
Conjuring Colours
Parts I & II

Dreamstone 5

No key unlocks the stone to you
Mossladen
Guiltladen
Dream-fossiled
hesitatingly it
recalls its ages of inklings.
One word only
burns
caught in its keep.
Question the stone and it hits you
with its deadly silence.

Shadow Play I 6

When the shadow wells from its husk
broadcasting visions
then shun the sheltering roof.
Remain impatient
remain uncanny
restless.
And bestir yourself
lest your shadow root.

A Way 9

Grasp the ladder
it leads to the word:
acacia leaf
almond
reed boat horn
with red vowels
questioned and all conformed.

Let go
the ladder: Word. Belonging.

Translated from German by Maja M. Lange. UBC, December 1996 under the tutelage of George McWhirter, Dept. of Creative Writing

Traumstein 5

Kein Schlüssel wird den Stein dir öffnen
Moosbeladen
Schuldschwer
vom Traum umkrallt
ahnt er zögernd
sein Alter zurock.
Ein Wort nur
brennend
halt er gefangen.
Wenn du den Stein danach befragst
schlagt sein Schweigen dir tödlich zu.

Schattenspiel 1 6

Wenn der Schatten aus seiner Hülse bricht
und Bilder vorwarts drängen
dann vermeide das schützende Dach.
Bleib ungeduldig
bleib ungeheuer
unstet.
Und rühr dich fort
bevor dein Schatten Wurzeln schlägt.

Ein Weg 9

Die Leiter begreifen
sie fuhrt zum Wort:
Ahornblatt
Mandelkern
Schilf Kahn Horn
mit roten Vokalen
befragt gefügt und alles.

Die Leiter los
lassen: Wort. Besitz.

Reinhold Kramer

The 1919 Winnipeg General Strike and Margaret Sweatman's *Fox*

History and the Novel

Gerald Friesen's *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (1987), the most authoritative history of Western Canada, describes the Winnipeg General Strike as follows:

> In April 1919, when the increased militancy of the workers faced the determination of the employers, two relatively minor bargaining stalemates in the construction and metal trades were quickly transformed into a city-wide confrontation. The workers bore part of the responsibility for the crisis because they decided to test the newly fashionable weapon of the 'general strike', the mere threat of which, they thought, had won a similar contest in Winnipeg in the summer of 1918. And the employers bore part of the responsibility because, having bowed to the general strike threat a year earlier, and having heard the revolutionary talk of the labour leaders, they were not prepared to budge. . . . Huns, Bolsheviks, aliens—in short, revolutionaries—were threatening. . . . (Friesen 361)

Thus, the historical prose sentence: a line, a law of speech. Under a transcendent eye, the subjects methodically deploy verbs and causes: the workers test, threaten, and think (if mistakenly); the employers bow once, hear, and then refuse to budge. The transcendent voice develops ironies at the expense of both sides, the one too fashionable, the other using an antiquated jargon—"Huns, Bolsheviks." Balanced constructions, such as "the increased militancy of the workers faced the determination of the employers," promise not an incipient literariness, but the mimetic weight of balanced political forces and the author's equally-divided blame. The historian is not quite done with metaphors, but prefers those like "faced," "stalemate," and "bore," whose metaphoric qualities have mostly dissipated. These techniques allow

the historian to avoid the partisan rhetoric that often plagued interpretations of the Strike, interpretations on which Margaret Sweatman relies for her historical novel, *Fox*. Some early interpretations—one in Rev. John MacLean's diaries and another produced during the trials of the Strike leaders—made the Strike a revolutionary bid to destroy Western civilization, while later interpretations—such as those in Kenneth McNaught's *The Winnipeg Strike: 1919*, McNaught's *A Prophet in Politics: A Biography of J.S. Woodsworth*, and Mary Jordan's *Survival: Labour's Trials and Tribulations in Canada*—made the Strike an Alamo, an injustice around which Canadian labour and the New Democratic Party could rally.

Much as one might prefer Friesen's even-handed account, it too requires belief: in the structuralist faith that binaries can accurately represent the chaos of history, and in the academic faith that there is such a thing as transcendence, a voice removed from the chaos but still able to understand that chaos as if from inside. Hayden White, building on Émile Benveniste's analysis of the speech act, has called narrator-less description the dominant mode of emplotment in historiography: "events are chronologically recorded as they appear on the horizon of the story. No one speaks. The events seem to tell themselves" (3). Objective narration attempts to repress both the more obvious figures of writing and the present's use of the past. Historians, fearing the literary significations of their plots, have more and more attempted to drop signs of the 'ego' from the discourse, particularly by avoiding 'great man' histories in which one dominant 'ego', like the protagonist of a novel, gives shape to events. The result of such an attempt may be seen in R.T. Naylor's *Canada in the European Age* (1987). The narrative is marked by Naylor's wish to avoid names, history becoming entirely the circulation of capital and resources rather than the migrations and *gestes* of people. One might invert Stephen Dedalus's words: writing is a nightmare from which historiography is trying to escape.[1] But one cannot, Paul Ricoeur argues, simply "get rid of the *ornaments of prose* to do away with the *figures of poetry*" (Ricoeur 35, his emphasis). Much earlier, Walter Benjamin had already phrased White's and Ricoeur's recognition in a more positive way: "the past can be seized only as an image" (255). Without making a facile equation between history and fiction, these theorists insist that histories inevitably retain fictional qualities, even after repressing the more obvious signs of the novel.

Four main impulses have variously structured the image of history in this novel: a) the wish to remain true to the past; b) the wish to recover the

urgencies of the past; c) the wish to undermine historical 'documents' by exposing them as partisan constructions; d) the wish to expose what it is in the present that desires and uses the past. The first impulse corresponds to the ideals of traditional historiography and naturalistic fiction, the novelist following Zola's demand that fiction submit to the rigour of what is known. According to Robert Spoo, history is conceived of as "the substantial term, the ground of all legitimate verbalizations. Language is suspect until it is placed in the service of documents and statistics" (116). The second impulse opens room for fiction among the documents: whereas a history which aims at objectivity must limit itself to those passions inferred from actions and diaries, and must refrain from exploiting the passions of the reader, a historical fiction (such as the actions of Edward Waverley in Scott's *Waverley*) can make not only the passions of the larger history (the Jacobite rebellions) intelligible, but can also make that history seem urgent. For Tolstoy and Walter Scott, to revisit the historical line is to borrow from history, to weight the daydreams of literature with the specific gravity of history. Taken together, the first two impulses form the mimetic underlay of the traditional historical novel—the first impulse reaching for the dignity of an exact copy of the past, the second *embodying* that past.

For E.L Doctorow, Salman Rushdie, and George Bowering, however, to revisit the historical line means to parody it, at a distance filling the same sentence that Henry Ford, Mohammad, and George Vancouver would take up, but replacing them with three unballasted Mahounds. Impulses c) and d), having slowly evolved out of b), thus correspond to more recent historiographic theory where, in White's "emplotment," "story," and "seem," the historian repeatedly undermines the idea of a narrator-less, transcendent form. These postmodern impulses make the traditional historical novel seem all but impossible by inverting the first two impulses, so that the knowledge that past documents are constructions constantly intrudes upon our sense of 'true' history, and the *present*'s urgent desire for a particular past repeatedly colours *past* urgencies. We have been too easily knocked out by documents, decides the postmodern novelist. As a result, postmodern distrust of both the copy and the embodiment has been marked by a playful and strategic distortion of documents, and often, though not always, by an anti-mimetic tendency.[2]

Fox, Sweatman's award-winning novel about the Winnipeg General Strike, shows signs of *all four* impulses, and in Sweatman's unwillingness to

choose between postmodernism and the traditional historical novel lies much of *Fox*'s power. The novel follows two young, upper-class women: Eleanor becomes romantically interested in MacDougal, a Methodist minister who holds with the radically communitarian politics of the Social Gospel, while Eleanor's sensual cousin, Mary Trotter, prepares in a more designing fashion for marriage to the capitalist Drinkwater. Sweatman's use of documents and her attempt to make past languages (especially that of the Social Gospel) intelligible tie *Fox* to the older tradition of the historical novel, yet a willingness to change historical documents and events, coupled with a willingness to let the present self-consciously appear in the novel, ties her to postmodernism. The mixed genre novel of Dos Passos and, in Canada, of Michael Ondaatje is particularly suited to such an evocation of a variety of impulses and voices. Unlike her more recent novel, *Sam and Angie* (1996), in which a single ornate voice dominates, *Fox* contains letters, posters, newspaper headlines, newspaper articles, an insurance disclaimer, telegrams, diary entries, and prose fiction. Sweatman moves beyond Dos Passos and Ondaatje because she "relines" what were formerly prose documents. For Dos Passos and Ondaatje, the historical document generally symbolized a limited and objective account, between the lines of which the writer must search for the historical subject and into the frame of which the writer injects his or her own agonies.[3] For Sweatman, conversely, the relined and sometimes altered document can in its own figure already show not only 'true' history, such as it is, but also the intrusion of the present upon the past.

Socialist Gospels

There is, in *Fox*, an instructive moment during which the reader reads through the eyes of MacDougal not quite reading:

> When he sits at his work places, MacDougal is astonished to discover the notes half-hidden under splayed books, his up-and-down lopped-off handwriting, . . . *spiritual interpr . . . n earth of . . . nd love . . .* But his tin table is the place for composing the Book, *lowship welc . . . or race . . . en free . . .* like a wave curling back on itself. (47)

The trajectory of work and discovery mimics the passage of time, that process which Ricoeur calls the very basis of narrative. Written documents, "splayed" and "lopped-off" (only partially recoverable where, as in "*lowship*," enough of a word appears), further confirm for the reader an

embodied past, as if the writer were being faithful to a decayed manuscript. But a decayed manuscript is not what we are confronted with; rather, we feel the impressionistic limits of MacDougal's perception (on one level), and we sense Sweatman's decision to limit the reader's information (on another). The passage's alternation between the form of the prose sentence and a more elliptical form also reminds us of MacDougal's disjunct reading of the Social Gospel and our own disjunct reading, with Sweatman guiding, over his shoulder. MacDougal and Sweatman represent two extremes of historical access—MacDougal's lyrics the fund of documented history and Sweatman's self-reflexive lyrics the debt that the present must incur in all of its reconstructions of the past.

MacDougal is evidently based upon the Reverend William Ivens. Ivens ministered at the McDougall Memorial Methodist Church in Winnipeg and was deposed by the church board in 1918, specifically for his pacifism during World War I, but also more generally for his socialist sermons. Though references to the historical Ivens also appear in the novel, MacDougal's material simplicity recalls Salem Bland's description of Ivens (Butt 33); Ivens founded the Labour Church, at which the fictional MacDougal occasionally preaches (Sweatman 47); both ministers were, at least initially, patriarchal in their attitudes towards women (Butt 90-91); MacDougal is rousted out of bed to be arrested on the morning of June 17th as Ivens was (Jordan 123, Sweatman 184). The historical Ivens would not, however, have made much of a romantic hero: he was married at the time, and he looked a bit like Winston Churchill.

MacDougal's language—

> *The Labour Church must be*
> *the beacon*
> *that flashes the glad message*
> *from city to city*
> *until the whole earth*
> *is aflame*
> (80)

—is that of the radical ministers who, like Ivens, were directly involved in the Strike, or who, like Salem Bland and J.S. Woodsworth, laid the foundation in Western Canada for the Social Gospel, a discourse central to the Strike and to the subsequent founding of the CCF (later the NDP).[4] Sweatman breaks up the line of inherited socialist prose in order to recover, through poetry, the fervency of socialism in 1919. When the censor, Bill

Benstock, investigates MacDougal's bookshop, three book titles become quite evocative:

> Benstock speaks precisely, must write a sharp memorandum. "Yes. But the censorship laws are still in effect."
> "Yes, well that is a concern of ours, mine."
> Ours.
>
> *The Communist Manifesto The Origin*
> *of the Family Private Property*
> *and the State Wage Labour and Capital.*
> *Marx and Engels. Engels and Marx.*
>
> "These are books, words on a page."
> "Mr. MacDougal, do you know what sedition is? It's a hot word in a dry place." (23)

We may call the relined titles MacDougal's poem. The line break after "*Origin*" deflects "*Origin*" away from the ensuing phrase and back, appositively, towards "*The Communist Manifesto.*" *The Communist Manifesto* becomes the genesis of the social moment, the novel, and of history. The repetition of the authors' names in reverse order echoes, probably unconsciously, the opening of Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*—

> A man, a woman; a woman, a man
> Tristan, Isolde; Isolde, Tristan (von Strassburg, 43)—

a rhetorical (even mythic) technique which by its circularity implies that everything essential has been said.

Often the poeticized line overflows into prose narrative. In the same section the legislators' dialogue (dealing with the June 5th-6th Immigration Act amendments which allowed authorities to deport those immigrants—read strikers—found guilty of sedition) completes the found poem:

> *modern bourgeois society*
> *that has sprouted*
> *from the ruins*
> *of feudal society*
> *has not done away with*
>
> Gentlemen. It is late and we are all tired. We have worked hard tonight. (170-71)

Into the Marxian historical narrative of feudalism and bourgeois capitalism enter the words "Gentlemen" (which, it is true, have not been eliminated) and "worked," a highly loaded word when surplus value is at issue.

By relining sentences that MacDougal reads in *The Communist Manifesto*, Sweatman evokes the strikers' utopian fervour, the urgencies of 1919:

the bourgeoisie
has drowned
heavenly ecstasies of religious
fervour,
in the icy water
of egotistical
calculation. It has
resolved personal worth
into exchange value. In a used bookstore in Winnipeg, a man is chewing on an unlit pipe and reading, late, late into the night, into the small hours of the morning.
all that is solid
melts into air
all that is holy
is profaned, and man
compelled to face
his real conditions
his mutual relations
with sober eye.
(171-2)

Sweatman's refraction emphasizes the poetic qualities that are already there in Marx's "hot words," as she shapes the parallel clauses and phrases into direct counterpoints. In the first part of the quotation, the balanced parallelism between material solidity and metaphysical holiness discovers that the radical Methodists' unMarxian sense of spiritualized labour was already prefigured in Marx's language. Against his intent, Marx thus enters the Labour Church as an Isaiah. The phrases "his real conditions" and "his mutual relations" not only balance internally, but balance "all that is solid" and "all that is holy" across the verb "compelled": the gap after "compelled" acts as the caesura, while "compelled" itself becomes very nearly zeugmatic, distributing the destruction of traditional relations and the new free-market conditions in a counterpointed necessity. At the same time, the relining of the second part of the quotation excavates an economic metaphor buried under the balanced constructions: "worth" appears directly under "calculation," and "value" directly under "resolved," as if the poem were a balance sheet. Sweatman also focuses Marx's baptismal metaphor by maintaining the reference to "religious fervour" while deleting the original "chivalrous enthusiasm" and "philistine sentimentalism" (Marx 44), so that Marx imitates MacDougal's language and avoids the etymological joke—*en theos*—at the expense of spirituality.[5] Likewise, the "Toast & tea tea & toast" (85) refrain for a whole week of telephone operators' meals exaggerates the historical menu that Doug Smith reports in *Let Us Rise!*, where "Toast and tea" are eaten only at breakfast, while "Salmon sandwiches," "Bread and honey,"

and a few other plain meals alternate at lunch and dinner (Smith 42). At the same time as the document-poems help embody the operators' hunger and the ministers' urgent link between Marx and Methodism, the altered menus and edited words make the narrative slightly less reliable. Upon the palimpsest of MacDougal's poems and Marx's prose intrude Sweatman's contemporary poems.

On the opposite side of the Strike, with The Rev. John MacLean, Sweatman's relining of historical prose also conveys the urgencies of the past and the intrusion of the present. While his diaries provide a first-hand account of the conservative Methodist hierarchy's reactions to the Strike, and although his Methodist Conference committee decided to force Ivens' resignation from the ministry, MacLean never directly becomes a character in the novel, but Sweatman several times quotes him, [6] and, at the end of her last quotation of him, she finds the bones of his prose:

Thank God *Civic* *our Dominion*
our *Firm* *except aliens*
Governments *Citizens* *and Bolsheviks*
firm citizens (173)

The relining drops the logical connectives in MacLean's prose, connectives that are not supplied by argumentative coherence so much as by the grammar. Once the grammatical connections disappear, the fervent rhetoric and narrowness of MacLean's "our" appear starkly. His rhetoric aggressively displays the coordinated powers of religious authority, the state, and race; and is, therefore, quite susceptible to the late twentieth-century ironist.

As with that of the strikers, Sweatman occasionally alters the speech of the conservatives. For a lecture that the "Reverend (Captain) Wellington Bateman" gives to Mary, Sweatman stitches together quotations and paraphrases about the perfidy of the Hun from the Rev. Capt. Wellington Bridgman's book *Breaking Prairie Sod: The Story of a Pioneer Preacher in the Eighties with a Discussion of the Burning Question of To-day, "Shall the Alien Go?"* Bateman describes how returned soldiers broke up a socialist meeting on 26 Jan. 1919, some months before the Strike, chasing the unionists into the Austro-Hungarian Club and the German Club. Beyond the inevitable editing required to fit Bridgman's language to the occasion, Sweatman's additions exaggerate his British inflexion and make pointed the ironic contrast between Bateman's ministry and his xenophobia: "Well, it is a blessed mercy our boys were there to set things right. . . . we smashed them right

proper" (19). Here, again, Sweatman's changes to the historical discourse give socialism a moral precedence over conservatism.

Public Ownership

By giving MacLean a much less compelling rhetoric than MacDougal, Sweatman begins to expose what it is in the present that desires the past. The desires in *Fox* may be divided (for the moment) into the political and the private, roughly corresponding to the division of ideals between Eleanor and Mary. "I had this righteous idea that a book would be politically active," Sweatman has said (Sweatman 1993), and certainly Eleanor's development confirms the importance of a communitarian political desire in the novel. Eleanor moves steadily out of her father's sheltered Crescentwood, and begins, through her desire for MacDougal, to engage with the sweeping changes demanded by the strikers. Eleanor's engagement contrasts Mary's entrenchment. Mary retreats to the cottage and becomes engaged to Drinkwater, both to secure herself against any diminution of the comforts granted by private property and to collect all traces of the sensual.

The model of desire used here is one inadvertently articulated by Walter Dill Scott in 1911: "The man with the proper imagination is able to conceive of any commodity in such a way that it becomes an object of emotion to him and to those to whom he imparts his picture, and hence creates desire rather than a mere feeling of ought" (quoted in Ewen 31). Such a model avoids the psychoanalytic reduction of desire to the motivations and effects of a single ego or to the effects of a single set of impulses such as those that make up sexuality; at the same time the model leaves, under the rubric of "emotion," a place for the instincts, and therefore leaves a place for the sexual content of Eleanor's and Mary's desires. Scott's model is discursive, connected to possibilities and limits inherent in language, and is not restricted to its initial coercive context: we might call the advertiser a type of the writer, "commodity" a type of any human or natural production including, no doubt, both conservative and socialist discourses.

If fiction initially conveys the past's urgencies, in the depiction of desire, fiction also inevitably conveys *present* urgencies. At times it is difficult to know when Sweatman is quoting an historical source and when she is quoting herself. Some of the quotations can be identified, such as the first stanza of Sam Walter Foss's poem "The House By the Side of the Road," which Sweatman evidently found near the end of J.S. Woodsworth's *My*

Neighbour. However, by taking the poem out of the context of the social gospel and by dropping the more obvious social utilitarian stanzas, Sweatman creates a tone rather different from the original:

> *There are hermit souls that live withdrawn,*
> *In the peace of their discontent.*
> *There are souls like stars,*
> *that dwell apart,*
> *In a fellowless*
> *firmament.*

> [Eleanor and Grace] climb the stairs like dizzy children, swaying and bumping shoulders while they talk. They wander through the upper storey, past Eleanor's rooms, to Tony's. . . (31)

The new lining avoids much of the sing-song meter of Foss's original, and Eleanor's nearly sexual fascination with her dead brother, Tony, disturbs the poem's nineteenth-century optimism and Woodsworth's utopian use of the poem. At best, the image of past cannot be contained in the past; more likely, it is rarely even a writer's intention that the "commodity" be uninflected for the present reader.

Eleanor's stirring discovery—"*We are floating on the surface. Mary's face is falling from her bones, her face like crumpled paper. We are fictions*" (56)—soon reminds us, in postmodern fashion, that the desires expressed in *Fox* belong also to the 1980s. The novel's final words, under the heading "Photograph #6," remind us again: "It is the photograph on the front page today. The familiar brutal erotic. Pentimento. A momento" (200). If the pentimento, often called 'the painter's first thoughts,' signifies not only Eleanor's return to a photograph that began her journey towards the strikers, but also Sweatman's return to a historical photograph of the Strike (perhaps one found in *Let Us Rise!*), then Sweatman's identification with Eleanor requires us to ask how exactly the events of the late 1980s appear in Eleanor's utopian desire for community and Mary's sensual desire for things.

Sweatman's chapbook, *Private Property* (1988), provides the crucial link. Pentimentos of another sort, the stories entitled "Spoons" and "Eleanor's Operation" are first thoughts on the way to *Fox*. "Spoons" takes place in 1987, as Eleanor Grace Somerset Montague celebrates her birthday and her friend Drinkwater rages against a science fiction film that represented humans living outdoors eight years after a nuclear war:

> "We're talking about man. . . . Someone would say, hey no one's got the monopoly on separating oil and natural gas, stick a pipe down. . . ."

> "I don't know how to do that," Connie says.
> Drinkwater finds this painful. "Somebody would know. It's easy. Make the pumps and levers. And there'd be no competition! A free field!"
> "I don't know how to make a pump. And there wouldn't be any screws," says Connie. (9)

Here Connie's ironies—that nuclear war would destroy the educational and technological infrastructure—are directed against an over-optimistic faith in capitalism and against Drinkwater's troubling fantasy of deregulation, a faith and a fantasy expressed through the Drinkwater of 1987; later Sweatman transposes those ironies forward against the Drinkwater of 1919. In both versions, Sweatman supports the value of Eleanor's communitarian desires. Clearly, Sweatman's critique of capitalism arises not out of a particular interpretation of the Winnipeg General Strike, but, conversely, the interpretation of the Strike arises out of concerns about capitalism in the late 1980s. For Sweatman the present comes first, then the past.

Thus *Fox*'s dramatic return to the Strike, that originary moment of Canadian socialism, may point spectrally to an identity crisis of Manitoba socialism in the 1980s. In the late 1980s the New Democratic Party was attempting to hold onto its socialist rhetoric, a rhetoric which held so much symbolic value for its members (McAllister 9, Loxley 330) at the same time as the party resisted any actions—such as nationalization—which could be interpreted as threatening to private enterprise. After NDP premier Ed Schreyer's initiative to nationalize car insurance in the early 1970s,[7] neither Schreyer's second administration nor one-and-a-half Howard Pawley administrations (1981 until 1988) unveiled any distinctively socialist policies. The liberal makeover of the NDP helped the party at the polls, but weakened its sense of mission.[8] Via Eleanor, MacDougal, and the 1919 General Strike, *Fox* takes a different tack: the novel yearns for socialist origins, prior to the compromises of power.

Private Property

Yet the present has other, less-idealized desires, and those desires are also figured through Sweatman's handling of the past. The most significant earlier fictionalizations of the Strike tended to use the private self not just to embody, but to neutralize the Strike's politics. Rev. Charles Gordon (under the pseudonym "Ralph Connor") allowed individual passions in *To Him That Hath* (1921) to completely explain political action. Like many works of the period, *To Him That Hath* incongruously displays both a trust in

American optimism and a strong sense of genetic determinism along class and racial lines. Owner-employee relationships contain a high degree of condescension, and function only as long as the worker remains subordinate. Any questioning on the part of the worker symptomizes personal failings rather than social inequity. Where Sweatman de-romanticizes the "Special" constables, Gordon had romanticized. Also in contrast to *Fox*, *To Him That Hath*'s dénouement consists of a *striker* accidentally shooting someone, reversing the historical events of 21 June 1919, Bloody Saturday, on which day the Royal North West Mounted Police killed two strikers and wounded about thirty. Gordon's interpretation of the Strike had a good deal of force since Gordon was one of the 'neutral' mediators on the Council of Industry in Manitoba (represented in the novel as the General Board of Industry) set up after the Strike (Vipond 39).

Douglas Durkin's *The Magpie* (1923), though more complex and more sympathetic to the strikers' grievances, ends with a pastoral denunciation of both labour and capital. The novel's capitalists appear either decadent, wedded to comfort, or dictatorial. The Strike leaders are no better—either they are opportunists or they preach " a Gospel of Hate" (190). By the end of *The Magpie*, the protagonist leaves stock-broking to farm the land. The humane individual can only withdraw from the extremist politics of both sides and abandon the city, the locus of the new industrial economy. Anne Henry's play *Lulu Street* (1967) likewise reduces political commitment to personal integrity. The political meaning in the arrest of a Strike leader near the end of the play is transformed into the symbolism of personal expiation.[9]

Fox shows some direct debts to these neutralizing fictions, as well as displaying neutralizing elements of its own. It seems likely that the sexual aura surrounding Eleanor's interest in her dead brother, Tony, is Sweatman's elaboration of a phrase in *To Him That Hath*: "[Annette's] great passion was for her brother—her handsome, vivacious, audacious and mercurial brother, Tony" (Connor 31). *Fox* also recalls *Lulu Street* in that Elly's desire to go into the yard and dance without any clothes on (70) may have suggested Eleanor's dream of appearing in a negligé before MacDougal and other men (Sweatman 83), while Mary's pathological interest in Walter, a returned soldier, echoes Elly's wish to find out whether the returned soldier Ernie had killed anyone (Henry 24).[10]

Moreover, alongside Sweatman's transformation of non-fictional historical prose into fervent socialist poems, are lyrics of another sort. Marx's

phrase "melts into air" echoes Eleanor's earlier and very different use of "deliquescent":

Recumbent. A Word

> And tomorrow she will stand in the middle of every room, astonished, deliquescent. She can't concentrate.
>
> She knows
> what his hands
> feel like
> (soft)
> she is so in love
> with him
> she can't read
> she doesn't know
> what happens
> to her
> with him. (111)

The aesthetic and lyric interpretation of Eleanor's politics as a product of romantic and sexual desire for MacDougal reduces the novel's political impact. Style is the sign of the individual, the private apprehension of the phenomenal world, and Sweatman has hinted that style can immunize against politics: "Being fixated by style, as I always have been, I can read descriptions of atrocities and be studying the syntax. It's so grotesque, that characteristic of mine" (1993).

The sensuousness of Sweatman's language inevitably recalls Mary's sensual interest in private property—that of others as much as her own: "Mary is still not convinced thinking is any different from feeling, rubbing up against things" (61). Sweatman's second novel, *Sam and Angie* (1996), technically quite accomplished, arguably surrenders to a sensuous language. Although Sweatman implies a moral frame around both Sam's surveillance of his wife and Angela's aesthetic domination of all experience, the multiplicity of historical voices in *Fox* nevertheless devolve into a single and elegant contemporary voice in *Sam and Angie.* Sweatman's work-in-progress, a comic history set during the early years of Manitoba between 1869 and 1895 seems to promise a return to a multi-voiced form, but in *Sam and Angie* the voice almost always belongs to Angela, as in the following passage:

> He had chosen. . . Chinese neolithic water jars, a ram-shaped aquamarine of buff-ware with a green glaze decorated with pellets, discreet and intricate, gnomic, silent, autotelic. Each object was sufficient unto itself. Every object worthy of

> devotion. She counted these things as part of herself, as if in looking at Sam's tasteful acquisitions she were looking at her own portrait. (18)

Angela's desire, like the property, is private—more private even than sexuality. What comes first, we may ask of both novels, the autotelic beauty of objects or the moralizing narratives which ironically report thefts and infidelities?

The description of the telephone strike in *Fox* exemplifies the same problem, though less starkly:

> Five hundred Hello Girls working the nightshift. Making connections, quieter city, hum turned down low but potent nonetheless. Switchboards threaded through arteries, organized and labelled by locals, the voices entering through the headphones attached to the Hello Girls
>
> who receive them and give them to you.
> Wait I'll Connect You.
>
> Today is the Fifteenth of May, the very centre of spring. The sun outshines the light bulbs when the girls unscrew the little electric globes that register your call. There's half a minute when their hands forget their task, rest. Then they remember. They reach into pockets and purses and drawers, 500 hiding places for 500 small pieces of cork. And they put one piece of cork in the middle of the circuitry. Then they walk outside and there isn't anybody coming in to replace them. But they've left a message: This morning, the Hello Girls are saying Goodbye. (86)

Style here—the attempt to register events and machines sensately, the pull of metaphors, the thematic of communication, switchboard connections across the empty white of the page—almost neutralizes the historical role of the telephone operators as the first group to strike in sympathy with the Metal Trades, the first sign of a *General* Strike. By emphasizing the individual romantic creator, style resists communitarian ideals, and even in texts without postmodern intentions becomes self-referential. For this reason, historians have generally preferred the 'plain' or 'middle' style in the wish that it would seem to be no *style* at all. At the same time a developed style, speech writers and historical novelists know, is what pulls the past into emotional proximity, as it does when Mary thinks about her dying mother:

> Summers, as a child, Mary would sleep out here on the chaise, and her mother would stay with her.
>
> *husha, you are sleeping*
> *my hands on*
> *you my magic*
> *lantern*

> Together they would sleep here, summer nights. There are snow geese too. Mary hears the silver anguish in their voices. The doors are open. It's cold. Across the yard, broken willows, the frozen river, wide, the ice shifting, the echo of whales. She looks back to the open door in a shudder of wind. The geese fly north. Mama Mama, they cry. (52)

The reader's emotional proximity in this case is with the suffering upper class. "Spoons" too ends not where one might expect, with the separation of the other characters from the capitalist Drinkwater, but in his dance with Eleanor: "Eleanor wraps her heavy legs around Drinkwater's waist and they swing. They really swing" (10).

Sweatman has admitted feeling "illegitimate" in the presence of left-wing discourse (Sweatman 1997). Although Sweatman's grandfather, Travers Sweatman, died before she was born (Sweatman 1997), he had belonged to the Citizens' Committee of One Thousand which had suppressed the Strike, and later he had helped to prosecute the Strike leaders.[11] Her family, wealthy and still prominent in Winnipeg, has generally supported the Liberals. Sweatman herself has not been much involved in politics, but she did work briefly on a Liberal campaign (Sweatman 1997). One could perhaps be tempted to argue that *Fox*'s adoption of socialist discourse and Sweatman's depiction of Crescentwood rather than the North End respectively repeat the Liberal adoption of CCF/NDP social policy (unemployment insurance, old age security, and Medicare) and the Liberals' close ties with long-established Canadian elites. Terry Eagleton (145) and Gerald Graff have complained about what they see as the postmodern tendency "to reduce political alignments to matters of style and epistemology" (Graff 852).[12] Sweatman's more pessimistic comments on the political status of her novel go well beyond even the materialist critics: "It'll never actually make any difference in the world. If I was politically committed, I wouldn't be writing novels" (Sweatman 1993). A materialist might argue that by focussing on Eleanor's political development, Sweatman inoculates the reader against more fundamental systematic change.

Style and History

Yet history doesn't disappear under style in *Fox*. We have already seen how Sweatman refuses to overwhelm the socialist rhetoric of the past—not with her own sensuous language, not by means of irony. Indeed, stylized language, not just direct political action, shaped the Winnipeg General Strike,

as both sides used the 'common knowledge' of the day to prove the extremism of the other side. Both sides appealed to the British spirit of justice and fair play (Mitchell and Naylor 184);[13] both sides lamented the Kaiserism of the other side; the *Western Labour News* complained that the partisan nature of the *Manitoba Free Press* made it impossible for workers' voices to be heard, while the *Free Press* complained of censorship when, in the early stages of the Strike, walkouts prevented the *Free Press* from publishing. The charges that finally resulted in jail terms for the Strike's leaders were of seditious conspiracy, not of direct revolutionary action. Owning and agreeing with *The Communist Manifesto* ultimately cost R.B. Russell two years in jail (Smith 54). At Gibson's Landing, B.C., Woodsworth's family buried his writings in a bread box under a fallen log, fearing that the literature would be used in a charge of sedition against him (MacInnis 141). Language during the Strike was a thing in itself, a mediator between the individual and the collective, not merely a displacement of economic events.

We might go further: if Hayden White has shown just how impossible is the fantasy of a plain language 'without' or 'beyond' style (White 26-57), it should also be impossible directly to equate a particular style with a particular politics. While one might want to equate the mixed genre with socialism (after the example of Dos Passos), the aesthetic style with conservatism, and the refusal to decide between styles with liberalism, style can never tell the whole story of emplotment and historical mimesis. Since *Fox* not only lets the author's style intrude upon the past but also allows past languages to assert themselves, the novel cannot be reduced to a political proposition, including the potential thesis of a Liberal mediation between socialism and capitalism. Via Eleanor, the novel searches for moral legitimacy in the political sphere but, via Mary, despairs of such a direct fulfilment of political desire. More appropriate than a political label, a metaphor for Sweatman's relationship with the past appears when Sweatman describes a discovery that her protagonist Eleanor makes, a discovery curiously reminiscent of MacDougal's disjunct style of reading:

> She has recently discovered (and maybe this discovery has given her freedom) that she can indeed listen in a fragmentary way, skipping like a thin stone in and out of these conversations, alternating her listening with a conversation that she has begun with herself. In this way, Eleanor has discovered, she can listen and place the fragments that she takes from the men according to her own translation. And another thing: it doesn't matter anymore that her patterns of translation differ from MacDougal's or her father's. The men speak their public language and

> it is a marvel, their absolute sentences, and Eleanor, living under and between, always outside, has a place she can furnish according to her own design. She has decided this is good. (120)

Eleanor among the men is, historically considered, a surrogate for female suffrage, often allied to, but not exactly coincident with the Social Gospel; discursively considered, she is also a surrogate for Sweatman's procedure in the archive. Eleanor's "room of one's own" in language means that she dips in and out of the language of the Social Gospel in a way that describes *Sweatman's* form, no longer traversing the inherited line like a pilgrim. Sweatman's poetic style is her fragmentary reading of MacDougal's Book. MacDougal's Book is the rhetoric of the past—resisted and desired.

Fox culminates in the riot of Bloody Saturday, the day on which the Royal North-West Mounted Police and the Special Constables finally charged the crowd. The novel's line of sight is, in the end, from the point of view of the strikers. Sweatman qualifies history's referential and teleological emphasis by relining history and imagined history into a bewildering aesthetic object, as in the unclosed poetic fragment that ends the day:

> Everyone has gone home, except the red-coats, except the militia sitting in their cars with their machine guns, except a couple of Citizens who want to turn back. The city is quiet as a man with his hands up. He sees the blood blooming behind his eyelids, he lifts his face to the sun.
>
> *Deep in the ruined gardens of the Canon's mind* (198)

Here is White's historical sublime, an apperception in which history has no rational coherence. The presumed subject of the line, Canon (and poet) F.G. Scott, historically never experienced Bloody Saturday, having been called back to Québec before the Strike was over. A much-loved army chaplain, Scott had been called in as a mediator, and the army's inexplicable recalling of Scott to Québec prompted the suspicion that his assessment of the Strike was running counter to establishment interests, that his superiors had been urged to remove Scott so as to negate the moral authority he held over the veterans.[14] The distress of Bloody Saturday makes style and the altered record seem indispensable for an empathic apprehension of the past. The Canadian romantic poet who thought that good will could mediate between competing claims is in *Fox* forced to see what historically he did not see and react as historically he did not react. Yet *Fox* remains true to the major events of Bloody Saturday—the two deaths, the many wounded, the

labour surrender—just as the novel had earlier remained true to the Strike's competing voices. After the de-politicization that style can produce, Sweatman's continuing, though not total and not impartial, recourse to history in *Fox* betrays an appropriate paranoia that the past will escape us and that we will be left alone with our style.

NOTES

1 In contrast to Naylor's aseptic and unmotivated narrative, Burke describes a number of more successful challenges to the grand narratives of traditional histories.

2 This is generally the case, although the postmodern resistance against history and mimesis has sometimes been exaggerated by literary critics such as Foley. Often, distortions of history are set beside careful historical reconstructions, so that the relative emphasis on the historical and the ludic depends very much on the interpreter's preference. For example, Doctorow quotes directly from Ford's autobiography *My Life and Work*, but inserts the quotations into his own narrative form without signalling their presence. Rushdie's problematic treatment of Mohammad in *The Satanic Verses* has been well documented, particularly in Ruthven. 'Mahound,' however, may be contrasted with Rushdie's careful use of al-Tabari's 'satanic verses' incident.

On the usefulness of mimesis to postmodern novels, see Kramer.

3 It may be argued that the list of Buddy Bolden's bands and the list of his song titles in *Coming Through Slaughter* become poems, but Ondaatje's rhetorical shaping of these 'found' poems is not apparent.

4 Sweatman has said, "I hadn't worried about characters for my novel at all. The characters evolved out of styles, ways of speaking, ways of seeing the light in the room" (quoted in Prokosh D7). The cobbling of documented rhetoric onto her elegant descriptions of inner states, so successful in the novel, became a hindrance when Sweatman adapted *Fox* for a Prairie Theatre Exchange stage production in March of 1994. She discovered that she not only had to change the vignette structure of the novel, but also that characters required a more specific, moment-by-moment motivation.

5 Her paring down of quotations is also significant. "Left-wing discourse is awful when it's full," Sweatman says. In creating *Fox* she often started with longer archival quotations and had to pare them in order to lessen the melodrama, likening the original effects to an excess of ink in a painting. She adds, "I wanted to give the impression of it being historical discourse, but still make it palatable to the contemporary reader, because their real discourse was *so* melodramatic" (Sweatman 1993). Turning nineteenth- and early twentieth-century prose into poetry lifts some of the weight off the language.

6 By relying on Kenneth McNaught's transcriptions in *A Prophet in Politics: A Biography of J.S. Woodsworth*, Sweatman unintentionally seems to have gotten some of MacLean's entries wrong, though the changes do not necessarily affect the interpretation of the material. For example, McNaught cites MacLean's June 9th entry as reading "Rev. J.S. Woodsworth, son of Dr. James Woodsworth came all the way from Vancouver and

addressed the Bolsheviks last night at the Labour Temple. His mother and his brothers, sisters and family are feeling keenly his attitude." The reference in the diaries actually occurs a day earlier, and uses a different vocabulary: during his address to the Labour Church, Woodsworth "showed himself an ultra-pacifist and an agitator." He was, MacLean says, "breaking his mother's heart" and forming a "sad commentary upon the beautiful life of his sainted father" (MacLean, June 8, 1919). Perhaps there is, in contrast to the "General Diary," a "Special Diary" of which I am unaware.

7 Schreyer's was the first NDP government in Manitoba, from 1969-1977. While the nationalization of car insurance through the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation (commonly known as Autopac) early in Schreyer's first term created a certain amount of socialist euphoria, James McAllister nevertheless shows how subsequent attempted reforms of the economic system—the creation of the Manitoba Development Corporation, Pharmacare, the short-lived Guaranteed Annual Income, the jettisoned Treasury Branches Act—amounted merely to the "socialization of costs and the private appropriation of profits" (James O'Connor quoted in McAllister 68). Autopac, the least financially attractive type of insurance, remained the only 'nationalization' that did take place.

The federal NDP had already begun to reject nationalization in the early 1960s.

8 Although McAllister sees the 1970s as the watershed, the crisis made itself most felt in the 1980s—the publication date of McAllister's book, 1984, being a case in point. In the early 1980s it could be (and was) argued that it was only Schreyer's tight leadership which moved the party in a Liberal direction. While the Pawley government had relatively better relations with labour than Sterling Lyon's PC government had (Black 92-127), major labour requests for anti-scab and plant closure legislation were denied. The bargaining request that the NDP did grant, Final Offer Selection, was proposed in the first Pawley term, but wasn't enacted until 1987. In 1987 the government also had discussions in hope of purchasing InterCity Gas as a public utility, but negotiations broke down (Tudiver 313).

9 *Lulu Street* was first performed at the Manitoba Theatre Centre in March 1967, and was published in 1975.

10 Apart from these minor parallels, however, the two works are very different: *Lulu Street* takes place through characters from the North End, *Fox* mainly through those from affluent Crescentwood.

11 See Jordan's account.

12 One of *Fox*'s reviewers, Ormond McKague, argues that "the language of languor and elegance" doesn't fit the turbulent struggle, and that Sweatman disembowels the Strike (McKague 28).

13 Mitchell and Naylor imply that the appeal to British fairness may not have been simply a rhetorical tactic, but a camouflage for the nearness of radical political change: "If radical ideas about running the city and defeating capitalism were not loudly articulated—and the General Strike period was remarkable for workers' rhetorical restraint—was it because they were no longer thought? or was it that the deepening of the crisis meant that they were closer to fruition, and thus more dangerous to voice?" (Mitchell and Naylor 25).

14 Scott was the father of the poet and lawyer F.R. Scott, who became one of the primary authors of the Regina Manifesto.

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Cyril Dabydeen

Surrender

There are places in our midst
akin to larger rivers,
or a vast terrain—
you will continue to traverse.

All you have encountered
more than Epictetus
or other destitutes in ancient places
you must consider.

Now wander with crossings
more than the Greeks ever did,
this beginning of new life—
without the sense of history.

Conquest at the fingertips,
spires raised higher,
as if there's joy always
in stars moving.

The instinct of an ocean is what you bring
to this place with tides,
as I keep looking back at houses
on stilts, one with another.

John Donlan

View

An awful muddle near the water: wires
interrupt the sky, the port busily
illustrates Seven Modes of Transportation—

deathy mountain heights snow-clean
a relief in their indifference.

Level late sun
yellows the walls, leaf shadows
flicker and plunge.

Gerald Lynch

No Honey, I'm Home

Place Over Love in Alice Munro's Short Story Cycle, *Who Do You Think You Are?*[1]

Helen Hoy's account of Alice Munro's revisions to what would become *Who Do You Think You Are?* instantly achieved something of legendary status in Canadian bibliographic studies and publishing lore. Its chief features, earlier recounted by Munro to J.R. (Tim) Struthers, are the eleventh-hour radical transformation from a book of stories divided between the characters Rose and Janet to a book about Rose only; the rapid translation of Janet stories into Rose stories; and, not least to a professional writer, the monetary expense to Munro of making extensive changes to a book in galley proofs (Struthers, 29-32).[2] As Walter Martin observes, "these changes and revisions ... bear witness to Alice Munro's exacting artistic conscience and her devoted commitment to her work" (101). Certainly they do, and it is worth adding that this literary artist's devoted attention to the final form of *Who Do You Think You Are?* occurred with the only fully formed short story cycle she has written. In what follows, I want briefly to contextualize the masterful *Who Do You Think You Are?* in the continuum of Canadian short story cycles, to provide a fuller description of its complex form than has hitherto been given, and finally to offer a reading that addresses the essential question of selfhood and identity aggressively posed in the book's title. In doing so, I will pay closest attention to two stories: the second, "Privilege," and the last, "Who Do You Think You Are?" because "Privilege" fictionally analyzes the beginning of romantic-sexual love in Rose, and because the title story takes her home. In suggesting solutions to the endemically Canadian riddle of identity, *Who Do You Think You Are?*

argues fictionally for the potentially definitive importance of love and for the abiding residence of forgiveness and affirmation in the place of origin.

As I have suggested elsewhere, for possible reasons of history, philosophy and national character, even of geography and political arrangement, the short story cycle form has proven especially accommodating of Canadian writers ("The One," 93-94, 102). I have also argued that story cycles can most usefully be categorized broadly as interested primarily in either place or character. Canadian story cycles of place begin with Thomas Chandler Haliburton's *The Clockmaker* (1836), find pre-modern expression in Duncan Campbell Scott's *In the Village of Viger* (1896) and Stephen Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912), and continue into the contemporary period with such works as George Elliott's *The Kissing Man* (1962) and Jack Hodgins' *Spit Delaney's Island* (1976). Needless to say, there is some overlap in story cycles belonging to either of the two categories of place and character. *Who Do You Think You Are?* is in fact a supreme example of a contemporary story cycle of character wherein place, Hanratty, is recovered to play a definitive role in the formation of character and, later, the affirmation of identity, Rose's. Nevertheless, *Who* remains the story cycle's version of the bildungsroman, even of the künstlerroman, being about the growth of the protagonist Rose, and not about Hanratty per se. In the context of Canadian short story cycles of character, *Who* can be seen as part of a tradition that begins with Frederick Philip Grove's *Over Prairie Trails* (1922), and includes such other works as Margaret Laurence's *A Bird in the House* (1970) and Clark Blaise's *A North American Education* (1973).[3] Like Grove's persona, Rose travels from home in quest of herself, is tested, experiences failure, loss, ultimately enjoys some success, and temporarily returns home in something of a compromised and compromising frame of mind. In doing so, both the Grove persona and Rose can be viewed as expressing their authors' variously contingent answers to the key modern question of self-identity contained in *Who's* titular riddle, as well as illustrating that traditionally Canadian engagement with the question of individual and national identity in relation to place.[4]

The question posed in the title must of course be squarely addressed in any serious discussion of *Who Do You Think You Are?* Although the cycle includes considerations of representation in art and literature (see Heble, 105), Munro's fiction is not only, or even chiefly, metafiction, that self-

reflexive trope, indulgence in which the reactionary John Gardner dismissed as "jazzing around" (82). Alice Munro's fiction is so overwhelmingly realistic and representational that its questions about the presence of a centred self in the fictional character Rose should make us wonder, surely, about the same in ourselves. Is Rose presented finally by Munro as having won through to a stable sense of self? (Is stability of self-identity a thing to be desired? Robert Kroetsch's essay, "No Name Is My Name," offers one interesting answer in the negative.) If the answer is yes to the first question, how does Rose manage it? Or does Rose *manage* it? Is fictional selfhood not perhaps the mystery gift of her providential author, something like the surprising bounty of silver that pours forth from a pay-phone slot on the fairy-tale mountain in "Providence" (149)?[5] Or is Rose at the end of the story cycle the self-deluding figure of similarly essentialist notions of autonomous selfhood? In its recurrent use of acting and imitation as a metaphor of self-construction (to say nothing more, as the present essay does not, of the question of representation as theme [see Mathews]), *Who Do You Think You Are?* does tend to produce characters who are reflections of reflections of reflections, as Rose imitating Milton Homer in the title story is actually imitating Ralph Gillespie imitating Milton Homer, that "mimic of ferocious gifts and terrible energy" (192), who is himself something of a reflecting emanation of old Hanratty itself. In the mirror-in-a-mirror image, as in the *regressus ad infinitum* and the literary *mise en abîme*, Munro signals the difficulties of ultimately condensing, grounding and centering an ideal of self, though not necessarily the impossibility. And, again, as I have argued elsewhere ("The One," 96), the short story cycle form, with its various strategies of fragmentary coherence, has shown itself well suited to the modern and post-modern relegation of selfhood to a vaporous filter of various internal and external stimuli rather than the metaphysical ground of identity and meaning—or better suited than the conventional novel, with its implications of continuity, coherence and totality. As Ajay Heble has since observed (though without recognizing the story cycle form), Rose's story is a "kind of discontinuous history with its own missing chunks of information. By refusing to fill in gaps in time, by leaving out whole sections in the chapters that constitute Rose's life, Munro leaves much unexplained" (Heble, 117). And further:

> The text is marked by an absence that encompasses worlds of meaning, an absence that—like Munro's rhetoric of supposition and her use of the acting metaphor—lends thematic and structural instability to the stories in the collection. The instability in

> this instance serves once again to complicate the ontological problem. By refusing to construct narratives of continuity, by, as it were, letting the absences speak, Munro reformulates the volume's central question: just what or who is real? (117-18; see also Blodgett, 94)

Despite the compelling logic of such deconstructive considerations, I will argue and conclude below that Munro in *Who* does present the mature Rose as having achieved more of a stable sense of identity than Heble allows; and, what is as remarkable, Rose does so in relation to place and not to the ideal of a reifying love that she chases around most of the stories of this cycle.

W*ho Do You Think You Are?* is a wonderfully well wrought short story cycle, arguably Munro's best book (*pace* Martin, 98-101, who fails to appreciate the middle stories). With the exception of Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches*, I can think of no other story cycle so carefully shaped to its purposes (Lynch "Religion," 83-84). Most obviously, the stories follow Rose's growth chronologically from childhood to adolescence to middle-age, though there are temporal gaps, slippages and recurrences which readers would not expect to find in the conventional novel's version of bildungsroman but which are typical of the story cycle's destabilizing strategies. Martin has described the other obvious feature of the book's structure: its ten stories are divided so as to comprise a beginning, a middle, and an end. The first four stories focus on childhood and adolescence, the next four on Rose's life away from Hanratty, and the final two on her return to her place of origin (Martin, 98). But these two most apparent and conventional structural features can readily be seen to play both off one another and against readers' expectations: the chronological development is repeatedly disrupted not only by each discrete story[6] but also by those large narrative blocks grouping stories of childhood, adulthood and middle-age; and neither element (chronology and Aristotelian divisions) really accomplishes the illusion of continuity and coherence it usually does in novels. The stories of Rose are experienced by the reader more in stroboscopic flashes and flashbacks than in a steadily growing light, in piled reminiscences of memories in hindsight, with time sometimes looping back on itself like a claustrophobic Möbius strip, and with dead and freshly buried characters popping up in the opening of subsequent stories (as Flo does at the end of "Spelling" and the beginning of "Who Do You Think You Are?"). Thus is a life constructed and narrative time manipulated in the contemporary story cycle of character, in a way that ideally marries form and function for the post-modern sensibility.

Further, Rose's conservatively circular journey is doubly framed by the question posed in both the book's title and the title of the final story, which is then asked in the first story by her stepmother Flo (13) and in the final story by her English teacher, Miss Hattie Milton (196). And apart from the chronological development and those large groupings described by Martin, there are many other linkages among stories. For example, the middle section of four stories can be seen to form two groupings of companion pieces. The blatantly consumerist affair of "Mischief" (see Mathews, 189, and Redekop, 131) follows consequentially from the failure of marriage recounted in "The Beggar Maid"; that is, in "Mischief" Rose is used in a manner that could be read as poetic justice for the way she uses Patrick in "The Beggar Maid." The titles of the final two stories of the middle section, "Providence" and "Simon's Luck," obviously relate them as complementary, or juxtaposed (Heble, 114), stories on such important matters as the limits of self-determination and the role of happenstance in its mystical ("Providence") and mundane ("Simon's Luck") forms.

There may also be a principle of alteration at work in this story cycle.[7] The theme of the second story, "Privilege," the first flowing of Eros, recurs and is developed in the fourth, "Wild Swans," with its depiction of an act of complicit (and questionable) molestation, which theme recurs and is developed in the sixth story, "Mischief," with its tawdry failed affair and group sex, and is seen again in the eighth story, "Simon's Luck"—and seen to doom that potentially redemptive relationship. Such procrustean construing may seem less violent when it is considered that all the other stories of the first eight—"Royal Beatings," "Half a Grapefruit," "The Beggar Maid" and "Providence"—are not about romantic-sexual relations. "The Beggar Maid," about Rose's meeting her husband, may seem to contradict this pattern, but it doesn't: it, like the other three stories in this alternate group—one, three, and seven—is about acting as an alternate means to Rose's empowerment in her search for and shaping of self-identity. All of which is to say, the first eight stories may alternate in exploring two possible avenues to answering the question of the book's title: acting and love. And there are yet other possibilities, complementary and enriching, for viewing the ordering of stories in *Who do You Think You Are?* But suffice it to say that it is no wonder Munro was kept up all one weekend and busy for a week, at considerable eventual monetary expense, revising towards the final version of the book (Ross, 82). Although her first major revision of the "Rose and Janet"

manuscript, which comprised six stories for each, had been to do away with the structural symmetry (Martin, 106) which, with various kinds of rigid ordering, is a *bête noire* of so much of Munro's fiction, it would appear that an organic, architectonic impulse is inherent in this artist, perhaps in all art, and beyond even Alice Munro's conscious control.

Over all, the stories of *Who* proceed in a way definitive of the story cycle's reliance on what Forest L. Ingram has called "the dynamic patterns of recurrence and development" (20; see also Luscher, 149). To give but one example of the book's many dynamic patterns: the covert imagery used to describe the molestation of fourteen-year-old Rose in "Wild Swans" (60-62) is inverted in "The Beggar Maid" when Rose assaults Patrick (79), is used again in "Mischief" (113) and in "Simon's Luck" (161), and ultimately in the title story (199). The recurrence of the imagery of concealment in these instances is not obvious, and its development from contexts of molestation to power games to complementary love to non-sexual bonding is even less so. In the first instance Rose is supposedly powerless; with Patrick she is bullying; with Clifford in "Mischief" she is shown to be somewhat naive and victimized, though in the final instance here she again turns disadvantage to selfish advantage; in "Simon's Luck" she is under the covers with a potential nurturing life mate, "the man for my life!" as Rose says (164); and in "Who Do You Think You Are?" Rose and Ralph Gillespie are secretly forming a bond that will ultimately tie Rose to Hanratty in affirming fashion. But *Who Do You Think You Are?* is woven through with imagery in such patterns of recurrence and development. A close reading of all the stories for the purpose of highlighting their many patterns would provide what is hardly called for any longer: evidence of Munro's artistry in layering meanings (see the subtitle of Carscallen's book, *The Other Country: Patterns in the Writing of Alice Munro*). What is worth remarking here, however, is the way in which short story sequencing generally, and the dynamics of the short story cycle especially, facilitate this strength of her literary art.

Another intriguing, and previously unremarked, formal feature of *Who* is the way that each individual story mimics the shape and movement of the whole cycle. The example of one story can adequately illustrate this final formal observation. "Royal Beatings," the first story, tells its tale of two beatings—the one, of Rose, melodramatic, female-orchestrated and cathartic; the other, of Becky Tyde's father, real, male and murderous—and concludes with an epilogue of sorts (see Mathews, 185-86), a kind of literary coda. The

reminiscent narrative in the subjective third person, followed by a later reminiscent reflection (the coda), is typical of the structure of most of the stories in *Who.*[8] One purpose of these literary codas, and most didactically so in "Royal Beatings" and "Half a Grapefruit," is to show how she who controls the representation of the past—in these two it is the sensationalist/sentimentalist media—controls its presentation in the present, thereby enabling revision of the past and creation of self-serving histories. In a magnification of this arrangement, the whole cycle begins in Hanratty and childhood and moves steadily outward, to adolescence and high school across the bridge, to university in London, Ontario, to Canada's west coast, and swoops back to Hanratty in the final two stories. The concluding story, "Who Do You Think You Are?" functions similarly to those reflective codas to most of the individual stories; and in it Rose—former TV hostess, popular actor—finally assumes a kind of creative control of the representation of her own history, establishing grounds for optimism for her present and her imagined future. So, despite Magdalene Redekop's assertion that "these stories cannot be construed as making up concentric circles like Dante's celestial rose" (129), *Who Do You Think You Are?* can nonetheless be conceived as cycling/spiraling away from the original site of self-formation constituted by Flo and Hanratty, reaching an apex of self-willed explorations, then diving back to the place of origin (to Flo in "Spelling," the penultimate story, and to Hanratty in the last), which is seen now through Rose as affirmingly definitive and forgivingly redemptive. Excursus and recursus, the romantic quest pattern, whether in the *Odyssey* or *The Wizard of Oz*: as destabilizingly post-modern as *Who* can be in its interrogation of subjectivity, it is also finally quite conservative and conventional in its structure and in its conclusions about the basis of self-identity, quite reassuring. And such an appreciative reading may also account for Munro's simultaneous popularity with general readers and paramount status among literary critics.

Who Do You Think You Are? is a story cycle, then, not only in terms of genre labels and the theorizing of that genre (Ingram; Luscher; Lynch, 1991), but also cyclical in its overall movement because, quite simply, it is a sequence of stories that begins in Hanratty and returns there. And more than that: dizzyingly, it comprises cycles within cycles and utilizes the short story cycle's dynamic patterns of recurrence and development to marked advantage in the exploration of its most obvious theme, which is, as I have said, posed neatly in its riddling title.

In fictionally formulating answers to its titular question, *Who Do You Think You Are?* emphasizes nurture over nature, especially (and perhaps inevitably in a bildungsroman) the importance of the formative years, and focuses on place of origin as equally definitive of why you are who you are. Why else does the first story, "Royal Beatings," begin with Flo as a kind of primary speaker (see Heble, 97, 101, 109), with the remembered death of the biological mother, and with so much talk of eggs (1-2) if not implicitly to downplay the *ab ovum* argument in favour of the environmental? Of greater potential importance throughout the stories, however, is the role of love, all forms of love, but especially of romantic-sexual love whose formation and exercise is determined both circumstantially and inherently. Why else is the character named Rose if not to underscore the potential importance of romantic-sexual love in the formation of her character and sense of self?[9] As Ildikó de Papp Carrington has indicated, *Who Do You Think You Are?* "constitutes an organic whole, and the humiliations of love are one of the major themes integrating and unifying it" (124).

The generative figure of romantic-sexual love in *Who Do You Think You Are?* is honey, which is soon figured as candy, and subsequently as all forms of sweets, and is used euphemistically in the epithet "honey-dumper" to figure the fusion of the romantic-sexual and the scatological. (Undoubtedly Munro is playing seriously with those two stereotypical gifts of the romantic lover: flowers—Rose—and candy.) Following the introduction of the home environment in "Royal Beatings," the second story, "Privilege," details the formation and first expression of love in Rose. Here, the primary image of Eros as honey is given after the young Rose has her infatuation with an older girl, Cora, encouraged by Cora's teasing invitation to "*Come on up, honey*"(32):

> The opening, the increase, the flow, of love. Sexual love, not sure yet exactly what it needed to concentrate on. It must be there from the start, like the hard white honey in the pail, waiting to melt and flow. There was some sharpness lacking, some urgency missing; there was the incidental difference in the sex of the person chosen; otherwise it was the same thing, the same thing that has overtaken Rose since. The high tide; the indelible folly; the flash flood. (33)

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of this passage or the story in which it occurs. The narrator is speculating on an essentialist view of Eros and stating regretfully ("the same thing, the same thing") that the pattern of love which "Privilege" narrates becomes deterministically repetitive in Rose's life. Its sensually symbolic description of "the hard white honey in

the pail" that liquefies supports a view that Munro will be dealing exclusively with female desire, despite "the incidental difference in the sex of the person chosen." And although this narrator, here more third-person omniscient than subjectively Rose, will eventually return to a portrayal of romantic-sexual desire in suggestively Freudian-Lacanian terms—as a striving to satisfy either a biological or psychic-linguistic lack—Eros here is the inexplicable given of human nature. (As I will argue below in discussing the title story, Hanratty as place of origin is ultimately accorded a similar generative/metaphysical significance.)

In the beginning of "Privilege," the very first unconscious rousing of Rose's proto-sexual interest is presented against a backdrop of tacit Freudian theorizing on the child's confusion of the excremental and procreative functions. In spying on Mr. Burns in his outdoor privy, Rose "thought she had seen testicles but on reflection she believed it was only a bum" (25); and the copulating brother-and-sister act, Shorty and Franny, "perform" in an outdoor toilet (25-26). This scatological connection between procreation and defecation, with associations of defenceless exposure, persists figuratively in Rose's romantic obsession with Cora. As the realist Flo sneers, Cora's grandfather is none other than the "honey-dumper" (36), the cleaner of outdoor johns, with "honey" being a euphemism for excrement: "Her grandfather was the honey-dumper. That meant he went around cleaning out toilets" (30). (Perhaps it is only fortuitous that the central passage above uses the word "flow" twice to signal the beginnings of romantic-sexual love; but such use, if intentional, would be nicely ironic, because sharp-boned Flo is anathema to the kind of prostrate puddling being described; in fact, she provides the "sharpness lacking," if too cuttingly.) I am guided here by Norman O. Brown's intriguing analysis-cum-defence of Swift's "excremental vision" in *Life Against Death.* Brown argues that the "real theme" of Swift's scatological writings "is the conflict between our animal body, appropriately epitomized in the anal function, and our pretentious sublimations, more specifically, the pretensions of sublimated or romantic-Platonic love" (186). Brown's citations from Freud's writings provide a compelling gloss on Munro's story of the birth of Eros (187-88), but suffice it here to say that in "Privilege" Munro is no less intrigued by humankind's repressive repugnance at the knowledge that *inter urinas et faeces nascimur* than was the original speaker of the phrase, St. Augustine, or Freud himself, or Brown.[10] In the "conflict between our animal body" and "our pretentious sublimations,"

the body ultimately equals disruptive death in the "life against death" war waged by neurotic consciousness. Consequently, it is not surprising that the passage giving *Who's* informing vision of Eros as honey is followed immediately by a description of "the game of funerals," which is played only by girls (33). In many of the stories of *Who Do You Think You Are?* the female body especially is associated paradoxically with death, with the scatological (for instance, the patriarchal Principal in "Half a Grapefruit" refers to a Kotex pad as a "disgusting object" [40]), and with imagery of entropic tendencies towards disorder against which struggle predominantly male notions of order and respectability.

Moreover, sexual desire becomes for Rose, as a consequence of her first love, decidedly narcissistic, in a way that will also persist deterministically through her various affairs. Rose's love for Cora is announced in an oddly phrased one-sentence paragraph: "It was Cora Rose loved" (30). The inverted construction of this sentence emphasizes the subjective experience of loving at the expense of the object of love, a condition that the central passage on Eros-as-honey makes clear again with its dismissal of the importance of such features as the sex of the beloved, that "incidental difference."[11] Rose's loving Cora leads to a worship which expresses itself in a suggestively Lacanian desire to *be* Cora, which can be seen as a wish to represent the object of desire to herself (to Rose) as herself—there is never any real desire on Rose's part for a real relationship. What Rose craves is to possess, to internalize and embody, Cora's presence and power, and the high road to that empowerment is imitation: "... Rose was obsessed. She spent her time trying to walk and look like Cora, repeating every word she had ever heard her say. Trying to *be* her" (32). Thus in responding to her first love—the initial "high tide" and "flash flood"—Rose finds what eventually will become her life's vocation: acting. But acting, the convincing assumption of other identities, though it may provide an expedient *modus operandi*, cannot furnish an answer to the crucial question of identity. In ironic point of fact, such a career path leads ("indelible folly") in the very opposite direction, as much later (in "Simon's Luck") Rose will flee her potentially ideal mate for an acting job.

The passage on Eros as honey is echoed immediately, amplifying its importance, in the description of Rose longing for Cora: "When she thought of Cora she had the sense of a glowing dark spot, a melting center, a smell and taste of burnt chocolate, that she could never get at" (34). Apparently it

is the possession, not of the ostensibly real object of desire, but of the sweet impossible ideal of that desire that is unattainable (and again both Freud's concept of the narcissist's unattainable "ego ideal" and Lacan's concept of the "mirror stage" come to mind). In the confused attempt to secure what is really the reflecting fabrication of Eros (or of libido)—its displacement in/cathexis of Cora—Rose steals some candy from Flo's store and takes the bag to school, "carrying it under her skirt, the top of it tucked into the elastic top of her underpants" (34). Not to belabour the obvious lasciviously, but the secreted location of the bag of candy makes obvious indeed that the sweets are to be read as a love offering from Rose's brimming honey-pot (the image and fictional logic *are* Munro's: "hard white honey in a pail"). Everything goes wrong. Rose's thievery and normal girlish foolishness are brutally exposed. And it is Flo's role to dam the first flowing of romantic-sexual love in Rose, in effect doing the seemingly impossible and making the flow of honey retreat. Flo is seen to do so in a passage that, again, picks up on the central image of Eros as an inherent lump of honey that melts. Following the exposure of her crush, Rose's "feelings were at the moment shocked and exposed, and already, though she didn't know it, starting to wither and curl up at the edges. Flo was a drying blast" (35). "The candy was in no condition for eating, anyway. It was all squeezed and melted together, so that Flo had to throw it out" (35). But what is it that Flo finds bemusedly repellent in Rose's romantic infatuation? The un-subjective third-person narrator gives the answer unequivocally: "It was love she sickened at. It was the enslavement, the self-abasement, the self-deception" (35). The coda to "Privilege" then describes the changes in Hanratty before and after the war, and concludes with another one-sentence paragraph, "Cora's grandfather had to retire, and there never was another honey-dumper" (37). Readers can confidently conclude that there is no need for another honey-dumper because, in terms of the excrement-equals-honey-equals-a-generative-and-potentially-definitive-Eros trope of this story, Rose has had all the honey dumped out of her. And the candy-disposing honey-dumper is Flo, her not-so-wicked stepmother, if one yet full of witchery.

The lesson that Rose learns in "Privilege" comes hard, then, at the feet of Flo. It is not a lesson to encourage hope for the character's achieving stable selfhood via love, because it involves love intimately with humiliating exposure (prepared for at her real school in the confusion of the excremental and the procreative functions surrounding the unaware Mr. "Burns-your-balls"). To avoid the shame of exposure, Rose opts to pursue the path of actress,

mistakenly thinking she thereby acquires the power responsible for her humiliation, and unconsciously she now takes Flo for her model, the true perpetrator of the humiliation. Imitation/acting for Rose is indeed a sincere form of flattery, but what it flatters is power, and Rose's desire to act is a strategy of empowerment. At the close of "Wild Swans," the story that gives the swan song of Rose's childhood, she is shown expressing envy of a woman who imitates Frances Farmer, the actress whose life and career were significantly tragic. And in the story's concluding sentences, imitation/acting is presented not in imagery of the fairy-tale, ugly-duckling metamorphic, but in skin-shedding, reptilian imagery: "[Rose] thought it would be an especially fine thing, to manage a transformation like that. To dare it; to get away with it, to enter on preposterous adventures in your own, but newly named skin" (64). Prepared so at the end of childhood, like some shirking, serpent-supplanting Eve, Rose enters on the preposterous affairs of her adult life.

Also, because of the events of "Privilege," love continues for Rose as very much a narcissistic passion and pastime, with unfortunate repercussions in her various love affairs throughout the cycle. The two best examples are with Clifford in "Mischief" and with Simon in "Simon's Luck." With Clifford, Rose's attraction in her first and most unsuccessful adultery is clearly narcissistic. Clifford's wife's, Jocelyn's, description of his background shows it to be the mirror image of Rose's: "the arthritic father, the small grocery store in a town in upstate New York, the poor tough neighborhood. [Jocelyn] had talked about his problems as a child; the inappropriate talent, the grudging parents, the jeering schoolmates" (110). Too obviously perhaps, this description could, with but an insignificant change of detail, accurately describe Rose's life. Reflecting on Jocelyn's information, Rose thinks, "What Jocelyn called bitterness seemed to Rose something more complex and more ordinary; just the weariness, suppleness, deviousness, meanness, common to a class. Common to Clifford's class, and Rose's" (111). Rose's desire for romantic-sexual love from Clifford is mostly a greedy and selfish need, however justified by her situation in a bad marriage to the patriarchally named and honey-filled Patrick Blatchford (which marriage Rose nonetheless determined). But the whole of "Mischief," easily the ugliest story of the cycle, portrays relationships in cannibalistic/consumerist terms, from the woman at the party who has written a play "about a woman who ate her own children" (106) (and note Clifford's first words to Rose: "Oh Rose. Rose baby" [109]), to the concluding sexual threesome, which

comes across more as a sort of witch's smorgasbord than as sexual pleasure, or even as voyeuristic titillation: "Though Clifford paid preliminary homage to them both, [Rose] was the one he finally made love to, rather quickly on the nubbly hooked rug. Jocelyn seemed to hover above them making comforting noises of assent" (132). The deceptive, forest-dwelling Jocelyn of the "foul fire" (131), who is also a maternal echo of stepmother Flo, can even be seen to have orchestrated this humiliating consumption of Rose by Jocelyn herself and the fiddling Clifford.

Having fallen into the midst of a ménage-à-trois, Rose, "at some level she was too sluggish to reach for, [feels] appalled and sad" (132). Rose may be too weary to exercise her moral muscle, but as Redekop observes, "surely the reader is urged not to be so sluggish a consumer" (131). The "level" here gestured towards is the level at which Rose lives, or lived rather, in Hanratty, with Flo, both of whose prudish morality and proscriptions against public display, "parading around" (191, 203), would have kept Rose from baring herself on the nubbly rug. Furthermore, the spatial imagery of levels points to the concluding story of the cycle, whose title repeats the book's definitive question and which substitutes place of origin for romantic-sexual love as foundational answer, employing in its closing lines the more comforting image of horizontal "slots" over (277) in place of the vertical and disturbing "levels" down of "Mischief." But it is indeed an ugly lesson in using other people that Rose adopts from her experience in "Mischief," as the ending makes clear in the style of shallow self-affirmation movements: "Sometime later she decided to go on being friends with Clifford and Jocelyn, because she needed such friends occasionally, at that stage of her life" (132). I would suggest that for Rose "that stage" not only connotes the mistaken thespian trope but also something of an extending mirror stage. What "Privilege" made clear, "Mischief" confirms: Rose is not going to answer the titular question through romantic-sexual love, though love remains a powerful inducement—as had Clifford himself, the male tease—to that end. In "Simon's Luck," Rose is allowed one final, stumbling kick at the honeyed can.

With Simon, Rose is attracted at first because she thinks again that he is, as she says, "'Like me'" (159). But Simon soon emerges as more complement than reflection, and Rose declares that she has met the "man for [her] life!" (164). Indeed, there is no call to contradict her: Simon is practical, nurturing, a knowledgeable gardener (for this Rose): "'Learn not to be so thin-skinned,' said Simon, as if he were taking her over, in a sensible way,

along with the house and garden" (163).[12] And unlike all the other men in *Who Do You Think You Are?* (such as Rose's unnamed father and Patrick Blatchford), with the notable exception of Ralph Gillespie in the concluding story, Simon is a good actor (161), one whose name connotes foundation in a new law of love. It may be, therefore, that the potentially ideal mate for Rose, Simon, is something of a reflection and a complement. But Rose ultimately rejects Simon, for involved reasons of selfish un-involvement. All the parodic ratiocination accompanying her flight from Simon suggests that she is choosing to be finished finally with playing the woman-victim in romantic-sexual relationships—and that there is no other role for a woman in love other than the victim position, mainly because the aging of men's bodies is more acceptable, sexually speaking, than is women's.[13] Or Rose's self-involved reasoning can be summed up more sympathetically as follows: emotionally she does not want to leave herself vulnerable to the very humiliation that she first experienced at Flo's hands via the intermediation of Cora and at Jocelyn's via Clifford; and even if love with Simon would have proven to be the real thing, she finally prefers in her escape to recover "the private balance spring" of which love, whether good or bad in the end, robs her; she desires now only to renew her somewhat neurotic affiliation with a "little dry kernel of probity." The now-ironic, subjective third-person narrator caps Rose's implicitly feminist line of reasoning thus: "So she thought" (170), "thus implying the possibility that Rose's wholesale rejection of love might, after all, be a mistake" (Carrington, 142). That "little dry kernel of probity," like "Mischief's" untouched "level" of common (Hanratty/Flo) sense, is also a repetition in other form of the lump of "hard white honey" symbolizing immature or dammed romantic-sexual love. To touch base with Hanratty/Flo can be redemptive, as it could have been before participating in the threesome at the end of "Mischief," and it can be tragic, as in Rose's flight from Simon.

In a very real sense, then, Flo, by dumping all the "honey" out of Rose early in her life, has made her incapable of accepting the real thing when it comes along in the person of Simon. Although it may well sound like the cliché of an open-line talk show on love, Rose cannot permit herself to be vulnerable to potential humiliation for the sake of love, and Munro seems to be suggesting that such an open posture is prerequisite. A feminist reading might well argue that Rose has to reject Simon if she is to achieve an autonomous identity as a woman, and such an argument may have some-

thing ideological to commend it. However, because of the weighty irony of the true fictional situation—Simon's dying—I cannot but agree with Carrington who writes that Rose's running "lament thus becomes a subtle parody of the feminist protest against the exacting standards of sexual attractiveness men apply to women but never to themselves." Carrington goes so far as to call "Simon's Luck" an "anti-feminist story," and observes too that "Rose's protracted psychological struggle to free herself from Simon, to regain that 'little dry kernel of probity', though undeniably crucial to her conception of herself, turns out to be a fight to free herself from a dead man" (143). It is as difficult to accept that Munro, perhaps the English-speaking world's reigning monarch on matters of the fictional heart, would dismiss the constructive benefits of, if not the ontological necessity for, romantic-sexual love. She did say in 1975 that "doing without men is an impossibility ... obviously sex is the big thing, and the whole thing of emotions that radiate out from good sex, which seems to be so central in adult life, and so irreplaceable" (quoted in Ross, 79; ellipsis in original).

Perhaps the most compelling argument in favour of my reading of Rose's life in love is the fact that Simon dies of pancreatic cancer (172). The repercussions of this piece of news are ironic and immense. They involve, as the ending of "Simon's Luck" makes clear, the baselessness of much of Rose's reasoning in making the momentous decision to abandon Simon because she feels abandoned, aging, and thus vulnerable to exposure and humiliation. Here it is the male, not the female, body that represents disruptive death ("*memento mori, memento mori*," Simon intones to Rose in his role as The Old Philosopher [161]), as Rose is shown to learn at the end: "It was preposterous, it was unfair ... that Rose even at this late date could have thought herself the only one who seriously lacked power" (173; see Carrington, 143). The piece of delayed information also comments, as this story turns at its conclusion to metafictional considerations, on the way stories work as literary art as opposed to how TV shows work, and how various forms of storytelling represent the unpredictability of reality. For my purposes, though, the piece of news about the cause of Simon's death again picks up that central image of Eros as honey which was given first in "Privilege" and subsequently displaced in various ways. Which is to say, Simon's death from cancer of the pancreas involves the very organ that regulates sugar in the blood. Simon could have functioned as a kind of pancreas in Rose's life, for however long—never mind how silly such a pancreas-centric reading may

sound to those who believe that Munro is advocating the necessity of Rose's being totally independent of men if she is correctly to answer the riddle, Who do you think you are?[14]

By "Spelling," when the cycle first returns to the place of origin in Hanratty, returning Rose to Flo, Flo herself has developed a consuming, a revolting and suggestively obscene craving for any sweets. She "might tip the jug of maple syrup up against her mouth and drink it like wine. She loved sweet things now, craved them. Brown sugar by the spoonful, maple syrup, tinned puddings, jelly, globs of sweetness to slide down her throat" (175; see also 181-82). Well before this point in the cycle, such a craving can only signal a commensurate lack of love, the hungry absence which is attendant here on the abandonment that overtakes those who grow old in these stories. Flo's craving is monstrous indeed. By the logic of this fiction, she grows the greatest obsessive-compulsive need for the sweet substitute for love because she is the character most without love (her only rival in this regard is Milton Homer, about whom more below). In Rose's dream of the old folks home where Flo is to be committed, she sees the caged old people being offered "choice" food: "chocolate mousse, trifle, Black Forest Cake." In the final cage, Rose discovers Flo, "handsomely seated on a throne-like chair, ... and looking pleased with herself, for showing powers she had kept secret till now" (184). The queenly secret is, I believe, Flo's determining role in Rose's life, the subconscious "spelling" that she worked, which is echoed in the queenly Cora with her two "attendants" (31) and in Jocelyn's witchcraft in "Mischief." Flo's is a determining influence that the opening sentences of "Royal Beatings" can, in hindsight, be seen to have established: "*Royal Beating.* That was Flo's promise. You are going to get one Royal Beating." This can now be read both as prediction for Rose's life in love and as tribute to Flo's primary powers of suggestion.

As I have argued, the most damaging aspect of Flo's determining role is that she dried up the metaphorically and potentially definitive honey/love in Rose, acting as too severe a realistic check on Rose's romantic tendencies (which are evident immediately when Rose plays with the phrase "royal beating"). At the end of "Spelling," Flo is entering terminal senility, and in an increasingly delirious condition thinks she is in hospital for a gallbladder operation.

> "... Do you know how many gallstones they took out of me? Fifteen! One as big as a pullet's egg. I got them somewhere. I'm going to take them home." She pulled at the sheets, searching. "They were in a bottle."

"I've got them already," said Rose. "I took them home."
"Did you? Did you show your father?"
"Yes."
"Oh, well, that's where they are then," said Flo, and she lay down and closed her eyes. (188)

This concluding scene between the two women, as moving as it is, nonetheless argues fictionally that Flo substituted a stone of gall for the lump of honey in Rose, a displacement which subsequently made love something of a non-starter in her life, and made her, at the crux of her relationship with Simon, opt for the return of the symbolically echoing "little dry kernel of probity." James Carscallen similarly interprets the parting scene with Flo: "eggs and gall are what we expect from the stubborn Old Woman that she is, and Rose is accepting the Old Woman's role in taking them to herself" (517). Observe too that at the end of Flo's life there is a return to the mothers and eggs of the opening pages of "Royal Beatings." The difference here is that where Rose's biological mother died with the feeling that she had ingested an egg (2), Flo has the gallish egg removed from her and passed on to Rose. What are the expressions of this stony gall? It suggests generally an embittered narcissistic implosion rather than a loving flow, with associations of withholding, distrust, fear of exposure, prudishness and prurience, bitterness, irritability, and (inevitably) biliousness—everything, in fact, that is Flo (though in "Royal Beatings," "hard pride and skepticism" are already given as part of "Rose's nature" [5]). Conversely, Rose's father gives the accounting of Flo's virtues: "Flo was his idea of what a woman ought to be. ... A woman ought to be energetic, practical, clever at making and saving; she ought to be shrewd, good at bargaining and bossing and seeing through people's pretensions. At the same time she should be naive intellectually, childlike, contemptuous of maps and long words and anything in books, full of charming jumbled notions, superstitions, traditional beliefs" (45). Interestingly, it is to this unnamed and long-dead patriarch, Rose's father, that Flo wants Rose to show the transferred gallstones. Perhaps Flo had also precluded warmer relations between Rose and her father; perhaps Rose, under Flo's tutelage, inadvertently became too much the kind of woman her father admired, for there is no mention of love in his catalogue.

Primarily, then, because of Flo's influence on who she is, romantic love could never be definitive for Rose. That is why Flo is the first to put the essential question to her: "Who do you think you are?" (13). In her quest to

solve the riddle of identity, it was necessary for Rose at the end of "Spelling" to recognize Flo's role in her life and to accept emotionally that romantic-sexual love is not going to provide an answer for her. This latter truth she had recognized intellectually in "Simon's Luck," and the impossibility of a definitive love in her life would appear to be Rose's luck, her bad luck: you do not get to choose your parents, biological or adoptive. But this is not to say that Munro is dismissing the potentially definitive role that romantic-sexual love can play in the construction and affirmation of self-identity, for men and women. Having recognized in this first of the two "return stories" that conclude *Who Do You Think You Are?* the primary importance of Flo in making her who she is—in fact, Rose affirms this recognition with her simple "Yes"—Rose is prepared for her return home. If she is ever to have a sense of self confirmed, apparently she must rely instead on her connection to place of origin, to Hanratty. That is why in the final story the third-person narrator at her most subjective is careful to dismiss any romantic-sexual element from Rose's feelings for Ralph Gillespie: "She was enough a child of her time to wonder if what she felt about him was simply sexual warmth, sexual curiosity; she did not think it was" (205). That is about as declarative as Munro's fiction ever gets. As far as Rose's self-identity is concerned, we are no longer considering the reifying power of romantic love.

In "Half a Grapefruit," the mistake which had led to Rose's dreaded public humiliation had been her "wanting badly to align herself with towners, against her place of origin" (38). Where "Spelling" returned Rose to various sources—to Hanratty secondarily, but primarily to the font of her own spleen in Flo's gall, as it were—"Who Do You Think You Are?" returns her most fully to her place of origin, returns the cycle to its titular riddle, and returns readers to that same question of identity. I have written in more detail elsewhere about the function of these characteristic return stories of story cycles (1991, 98), so will rehearse here only their broad outlines. Functionally, they probably derive from the tradition of the French *ballade*, where an *envoi* caps the poem in a refrain-like manner, restating the poem's main theme(s) and often incorporating many of its preceding images and symbols. Thus the title of the return story to Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches*, "L'Envoi: The Train to Mariposa." The term *return story* devolves from the Romantic Return Poem, typified in such classics as Wordsworth's "Lines Composed A Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" and Charles G.D. Roberts' "The Tantramar Revisited," where the poet-speaker returns to a scene of his youth and medi-

tates on the passage of time and the effects of, as Roberts puts it, "the hands of chance and change." But the true subject of a return poem, as of a return story, is identity, the identity of an individual in relation to a particular place, a community, and/or a country. Viewed in these terms, "Who Do You Think You Are?" is, like Leacock's "L'Envoi: The Train to Mariposa," exemplary of this element of story cycles. What may appear remarkable, though, is that a contemporary story cycle by a woman should conclude suggesting an answer to the riddle of self-identity that priorizes the definitive power of place in a way that recalls Leacock's musings on the importance of Mariposa and, before him, Duncan Campbell Scott's on the value of Viger.

Within "Who Do You Think You Are?" the riddling question is asked in final framing fashion by one Miss Hattie Milton (196). She is very much a figure of origins, of what made Hanratty what it was and no longer is: "Miss Hattie Milton taught at the high school. She had been teaching there longer than all the other teachers combined and was more important than the Principal. She taught English ... and the thing she was famous for was keeping order" (195). Thus, it could be said that the question of identity is finally asked of Rose *by* Hanratty itself through the person of Miss Hattie Milton. Because for Rose the answer to the riddle posed here figuratively by place *is* place, she must find a means of reconnecting herself affirmatively to Hanratty. And her only way to do so—to reconnect with her place of origin, and so to answer the question—lies through the grotesque figure of Miss Hattie's nephew, Milton Homer. So I disagree with Redekop, who writes, "Hattie Milton's question 'Who do you think you are?'—if directed at Milton Homer—would have no answer" (143). That is only literally true; symbolically, Milton Homer could answer that he is more mascot and scapegoat than town idiot; that he is also a figure of carnival, loudly and viciously mocking the pretensions of official Hanratty as it does that thing which it censures in its citizens: parades about (191-93). He is also, I think, one of Munro's richest creations: a personification of Hanratty, an emanation, symbolically evocative, yet nicely particularized. And as Heble observes, he "is of particular interest to Rose because he represents something of a mythology of the past" (119). Appropriately by this point in the story cycle, Milton Homer, like Becky Tyde in the first story, is presented as one who is silent only with sweets in his mouth (189); he also seriously snatches candy tossed for children at the parades (192), and gluttonously gobbles down sweets at the Milton sisters' annual class party (197). As the latest generation of the foundational

Miltons, with his insatiable hunger for sweets which is matched only by Flo in "Spelling," Milton Homer (and was there ever a more foundational name than one that takes those of the two epic poets of the Classical and the Christian traditions?) argues that Hanratty was and is a town without love. And it is the only place that Rose has left, to return to.

The only way to Milton Homer for Rose—the way to touch base with her place of origin, and thereby to approach an answer to the story's and the book's and Flo's and Hattie Milton's and Hanratty's question of identity—lies through Ralph Gillespie, an old high-school friend whom she meets again on returning to Hanratty at the end of the story cycle. In keeping with her narcissistic bent, Ralph is like Rose; a kind of inherent familiarity is what first drew them to one another in high school (199). Ralph is also one of those who showed Rose the power of imitation/acting by doing a distinguishing Milton Homer imitation for his classmates: deeply impressed, Rose "wanted to do the same. Not Milton Homer; she did not want to do Milton Homer. She wanted to fill up in that magical, releasing way, transform herself; she wanted the courage and the power" (200). Naturally, Rose sees acting as an empowering activity, which it becomes for her (most damagingly so in her marriage to Patrick). But where Rose also learns to negotiate the extra-Hanratty world with other roles, Ralph fails in the outside world, is radically injured in a navy accident and has to be rebuilt "from scratch," as Flo says (201). Finally, Ralph "Milton Homer'd himself right out of a job" (202) at the Legion Hall, doing imitations none of the newer residents recognized, and mistakenly plunged to his death in its basement. Ralph Gillespie is for Rose, then, both a generative presence and a figure of entrapment within Hanratty, one who dies, as his obituary records, because "he mistook the basement door for the exit door and lost his balance" (206). Rose found the exit, as in leaving Simon she recovered a too-rigid "private balance spring" (170). So it is Ralph, not Simon, who can be read, if anyone can, as the measure to this point of Rose's liberated, limited success.

For present purposes, the more important aspect of this distant, deconstructed and reconstructed Ralph Gillespie is that he provides Rose's point of contact with what emerges as her redemptive place of origin in Hanratty. Rose's imitation of Milton Homer is, as was suggested earlier, an imitation of Ralph's imitation of Milton Homer. Remarking this chain of imitators, Heble concurs that "this movement away from a sense of an origin is re-enacted many years later when Rose meets up with Ralph at the Legion Hall

in Hanratty" (120). And, to repeat, Milton Homer is himself "a mimic of ferocious gifts and terrible energy" (192), whose subject is official Hanratty and its citizens at their most ostentatiously parading. Ralph is even associated with that other foundational character in Rose's life, Flo, who, resurrected now in the manner of return stories, claims that Ralph in his refusal to show pain is "Like me. I don't let on" (201). With Ralph established as a distant figure of origins in Hanratty—and, via the much imitated Milton Homer, as the only way back to remote Hanratty—the final few puzzling pages of *Who Do You Think You Are?* can be read as a conversation between Rose and Hanratty; or read as a narrative commentary on Rose and her relation to place of origin in Hanratty.

The narrator writes through Rose that Ralph/Hanratty does "want something" from her, but that he/it is unable to find expression:

> But when Rose remembered this unsatisfactory conversation she seemed to recall a wave of kindness, of sympathy and forgiveness, though certainly no words of that kind had been spoken. That peculiar shame which she carried around with her seemed to have been eased. The thing she was ashamed of, in acting, was that she might have been paying attention to the wrong things, reporting antics, when there was always something further, a tone, a depth, a light, that she couldn't get and wouldn't get. And it wasn't just about acting she suspected this. Everything she had done could sometimes be seen as a mistake. She had never felt this more strongly than when she was talking to Ralph Gillespie, but when she thought about him afterwards her mistakes appeared unimportant. (205)

Rose's shame is that in her career as actress and retailer of Hanratty lore she, like Ralph, may have been Milton Homering, imitating only surface peculiarities, and thereby missing in others as well as herself the interior lives and relations that make us who we are. And not just in acting: "Everything she had done could sometimes be seen as a mistake." What a monumental self-confession this is, linking her whole life to the falsification of bad acting, confronting her with the possibility that she has never had an authentic life. Whatever else can be said about this character, it must be conceded that Rose's behaviour in the final pages of the book demonstrates commendable courage as she trains an unflinching gaze on the mirror of who she is: Ralph Gillespie, Milton Homer, Hanratty. But Ralph *as* distant Hanratty not only confronts her with this possibility of inauthenticity, he also proffers a kind of redemption. For Rose's revisioning memory finds, through Ralph to Milton Homer to the Misses Miltons to Hanratty, some vague sense of forgiveness for her sins of imitative omission, a discovery which seems to entail a kind of confirmation

of the self-identity she has sought and fled throughout the cycle.

Confirmation is the right word, because one of Milton Homer's "public function[s]" (191) is as a priestly figure whose mock-christening incantation stresses, in typical Hanratty fashion, the possibility of the death of the newborn (see Redekop, 142). What gets confirmed at the end of *Who Do You Think You Are?* is a middle-aged woman's acceptance of self-identity as connected intimately to an unattractive place of origin. Although I think that in the following comment Redekop is overly cautious, I nonetheless agree with the sense of her conclusion: "The fact that no powerful autonomous subject can be constructed does not negate the importance of knowing who you think you are, of knowing the limits of yourself, the place where the boundaries of self dissolve and flow into the self of some other. Munro pictures the pain of isolation and offers as comfort a sense of community—however small" (147). In line with such a modest reading, the enigmatic closing sentence of this story cycle is appropriately interrogative: "What could she say about herself and Ralph Gillespie, except that she felt his life, close, closer than the lives of men she'd loved, one slot over from her own?" (206). "Closer than the lives of men she'd loved" because, as I have argued, romantic-sexual love was, after the events of "Privilege," never potentially definitive for Rose. "One slot over from her own" in terms of a spatial and temporal image that places Rose beside Ralph, who is one slot over from Milton Homer, who is one slot over from his aunts, who are one slot over from Hanratty—the place of origin which is posited here by Munro (one slot over from Rose?) very much as a metaphysical signifier with the power to bestow a reassuring degree of identity, meaning, and presence of self to self—a reifying self-consciousness. True, this signifier, "Hanratty," is itself quite unstable, always changing, and perhaps it will eventually threaten a subject such as Rose with 'Ralph Gillespieing' herself out of a warmly confirmed sense of selfhood—thus the aptness of the closing question mark. But regardless of the hint of eternal deferment suggested by the *mise en abîme* of imitations of imitations and the indeterminacy of that closing question, this story cycle in its return to place of origin nonetheless confirms Rose's self-identity, her constructed subjectivity, if you will. Unless some radically positive development occurs in the human brain, an evolution which evolutionary biologists tell us is most unlikely, there will never be a compellingly logical way to establish the ground of selfhood, whether in fiction or philosophy (the enigmatic closing pages of *Who* at least make that quite

clear). Self-consciousness is *per se* its own proof. But after Rose has accepted that romantic-sexual love cannot be definitive for her, her obvious contentment at the end of the cycle, her sense of forgiveness and well-being, *can* be traced back to her relation to Hanratty as place of origin. Perhaps the complex point of view so artfully manipulated here at the close of the story cycle conveys that what Rose cannot be shown to say to herself, we as readers of educated imagination can intimate. *Who Do You Think You Are?* rounds itself off not as a fictionally philosophical writing of subjectivity as an endlessly deferred chain of signification, but as one masterful writer's act of faith in what George Steiner, in the title of his book, calls "real presences."

NOTES

1 I am grateful to the anonymous readers for *Canadian Literature* for their advice on an earlier version of this article

2 As Hoy documents so fascinatingly (59-62), three of the stories from the "Rose and Janet" manuscript—"Connection," "The Stone in the Field" and "The Moons of Jupiter"—became part of *The Moons of Jupiter*(1982); other Janet stories, which had begun life as Rose Stories, were translated back into Rose stories; "Simon's Luck" was added; and "Who Do You Think You Are?" was written especially to end the revised manuscript.

3 Although John Metcalf (45-87) argues (naively) the unimportance of such works as D.C. Scott's *In the Village of Viger* to the continuum of the Canadian short story (he phoned Alice Munro to ascertain if she had read the book; at that time she hadn't), one need simply recall Bakhtin's concept of "genre memory," which is illustrated by the following passage from *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*: "We are not interested in the influence of separate individual authors, individual works, individual themes, ideas, images—what interests us is precisely the influence of the *generic tradition itself* which was transmitted through the particular authors"(159, emphasis in original; see further 106, 121). Northrop Frye's similar concept of an "imaginative continuum" also deserves quotation: "A reader may feel the same unreality in efforts to attach Canadian writers to a tradition made up of earlier writers whom they may not have read or greatly admired. I have felt this myself whenever I have written about Canadian literature. Yet I keep coming back to the feeling that there does seem to be such a thing as an imaginative continuum, and that writers are conditioned in their attitudes by their predecessors, or by the cultural climate of their predecessors, whether there is conscious influence or not" (250). I am grateful to Gwendolyn Guth for pointing me towards the Bakhtin material.

4 Another interesting bit of publishing lore about *Who Do You Think You Are?* is that its American and British publishers changed its title to *The Beggar Maid: Stories of Rose and Flo* because they feared their readers would not understand the implied put-down in the Canadian idiom (see Struthers, 29); also, from the beginning, Munro's American editor at Norton, Sherry Huber, strove to turn *Who* into a novel, whereas her Canadian editor at

Macmillan, Douglas Gibson, accepted the work for what it is—a story cycle (see Hoy, 67-68)

5 See Blodgett (99), who views Rose's ill luck in arranging a rendezvous with her lover Tom as a providential parallel to the pay-phone money.

6 The opening sentences of stories often flout readers' expectations of coherence: "Rose wrote the Entrance, she went across the bridge, she went to high school" ("Half a Grapefruit," 38); "Patrick Blatchford was in love with Rose" ("The Beggar Maid," 65); "Rose gets lonely in new places; she wishes she had invitations" ("Simon's Luck," 152).

7 See Lynch (1992/3), where I make a similar argument for the organization of Duncan Campbell Scott's *In the Village of Viger*.

8 Oddly, Gerald Noonan thinks the point of view first person, persistently speaking of "Rose, the narrator in all ten stories" (168). See Heble (103-04) for an enlightening analysis of a textual site where the narrative indeed slips from third-person subjective to first-person plural.

9 See Redekop (126-130) for an extended discussion of Rose's name.

10 See Carrington (43-48) for a discussion of "Royal Beatings" in terms of Freud's "A Child Is Being Beaten."

11 Freud's controversial distinction (*On Narcissism* 6-11) between "object libido" and "ego libido" comes to mind as a useful gloss; in short, the narcissist is one whose libido turns from cathecting objects to cathecting the ego, which word, "ego," is used in the Narcissism essay as we use the word "self." I am grateful to Dr. David Fairweather for directing me to Freud's essay on narcissism.

12 See Carrington (138-42) for a discussion of imagery of warmth in this story.

13 It might be objected that Simon is the one who leaves Rose, since he doesn't contact her and eventually dies. But the story is told only from Rose's point of view, and from Rose's point of view her decision to leave constitutes a flight from Simon and the demands of reciprocal love. Moreover, the reasons for her decision to flee have only to do with her own unwillingness to submit to the exposure that enduring intimacy entails. Given the immediate cause of her self-centred flight west—one weekend's silence from Simon—her action is clearly rash, perhaps even hysterical. See the long internal 'monologue' that begins tellingly with "She could not remember what they had said about Simon coming again" (164) and concludes with what I read as un-subjective third-person irony: "So she thought" (170). Finally, had Rose overcome her fears, she would have discovered that Simon, perhaps even now aware that he is dying of cancer, was attempting to spare Rose the pain of his ultimate departure.

14 There are numerous other uses of the honey image that, when taken together, support the argument that it forms a telling pattern in the cycle. Although it doesn't begin in earnest until the central passage in "Privilege," the image of compensatory sweets is introduced in relation to Rose's second model (after Flo), Becky Tyde, in "Royal Beatings." The performing Becky, another actress of a kind, "would put a whole cookie in her mouth if she felt like it" (6), and does so only to stop herself from telling explicitly the mysterious tale that determines her mocking role in Hanratty. The secondary displacement of Eros into sweets is shown later in this story when Flo placates the royally beaten Rose with rich treats (19), and Carrington (126) suggests that Rose's solitary self-teasing behaviour with the syrupy treats is masturbatory. The sluttish Ruby Caruthers salvages what self-

respect she can by refusing the bribe of cupcakes (42). Candy figures a number of times in "Wild Swans," but most significantly as part of the perverse undertaker's bribe in Flo's incident-determining story (57). When in "The Beggar Maid" Rose capitulates under various pressures to accept Patrick's proposal of marriage, she wakes up in the middle of the night craving sweets (80); similarly after first having sex with Patrick: "She thought of celebration. What occurred to her was something delicious to eat, a sundae at Boomers, apple pie with hot cinnamon sauce" (81). The craving in this latter situation is typical of the way the image is used throughout the remainder of the stories: those who lack love, or those whose love has remained a hard white lump of honey, crave the substitute, in a way that parallels (according to the Freudian theory of anal fixation) the misers' and millionaires' grasping after all filthy lucre. In "Providence," Rose feels guilty for giving her daughter Anna sweet breakfast cereals instead of the conventional mothering she believes Anna needs (140-41). In something of an ironic inversion, Rose's mistaken break from Simon is signalled to her in a restaurant's yonically shaped desert containers: "... the thick glass dishes they put ice-cream or jello in. It was those dishes that told her of her changed state. She could not have said she found them shapely, or eloquent, without misstating the case. All she could have said was that she saw them in a way that wouldn't be possible to a person in any stage of love" (170). She finds the empty concave containers for (substitutive) sweets reassuring because she is heading away from the real thing, from love with another, towards a mistakenly desired, loveless independence. And, of course, she is also moving towards that other wrong-headed alternative in her life, an acting job (in, by the way, a TV series that sounds very much like CBC's "The Beachcombers" [171]).

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Miranda Pearson

Three Years Deep

in the dream of mothering
her body speaking the soft language of hands
hips curved not for eyes
but to carry
speaking the early language
of *bloom spread kick wipe*
as she changed species
the baby a hard peach
felling her to the floor
in a green flapping gown
the sudden batter
that neither gas
nor oxygen could balm

nurses carried away silver kidney dishes
sloshing with port-blood
the lamp a drunken eye
careening over her
as she gave up all modesty
and split her skin
in to a new country
where her body was peasant
shrouded
where it had displayed

now she would walk
invisible to men
and be happy
relieved of the trussed corset
of the feminine
no longer the younger sister
using frippery as currency
walking in a hungry body

now she *was food*
and she fed herself
full-fat
a revolving refectory
her child's soft hair and skin
the only scent
she needs to breathe

Susan Ioannou

Mourner

Invisible dark glasses
can't shut the fright from his eyes.

Fog thins
and under his feet, the edge
reminds
how far, far down
a figure has disappeared.

An aftershock of sparks
flies up
singeing his skin
—promises unkept too long:
she's gone.

Chinmoy Banerjee

Polyphonic Form and Effective Aesthetic in *Obasan*

The generally accepted reading of *Obasan* follows the surface of Naomi's telling to discover a therapeutic narrative in which a woman, pathologically silenced by the multiple traumas of sexual molestation, mother's abandonment, political internment and the condition of the Japanese culture of silence, finds her voice and comes to writing. Obasan and Aunt Emily are usually seen as antithetical, with Obasan representing Japanese values in her resolute silence and Emily representing the Canadian/Nisei culture of outspokenness: Naomi comes to voice through a dialectical synthesis of this opposition. However, this interpretation has been powerfully challenged by Donald Goellnicht's argument that the novel is a postmodern metafiction and that Naomi is not a pathologically muted subject but, rather, a postmodern historian one step ahead of Aunt Emily (293). In her attempt to recuperate the therapeutic narrative in the interest of a political reading, Barbara Kanefsky has accepted Goellnicht's description of Naomi as postmodern but argued that postmodernity itself is the sickness from which Naomi is cured at the end of the novel (11-23).

But the therapeutic model has dubious political value since, being structured on the binaries of therapist/patient and health/sickness (powerful/powerless, normal/abnormal) and producing a narrative of normalization (in which the reader is already positioned as normal), it erases the signature of marginalized agency in the novel and disables us from seeing the trace of power within relative "powerlessness." Instead, I would argue, we can produce a more transformative reading by using Michel de Certeau's notion of

the rhetoric of everyday life and by considering Naomi's dreams as allegories of theory and subject formation. I will also maintain that the novel is polyphonic in Bakhtin's sense, being distinguished from univocal dialectic on the one hand, and postmodern relativism, on the other: it is an exchange of valid voices that engage the reader in the ethical and political question of injustice and oppression.[1] Bakhtin describes polyphony as "a communion of unmerged souls" (26). In *Obasan*, the Christian communion of Nakayama sensei and the "loveless communion" of Aunt Emily's "white paper bread" (182) preside dialogically over the recovery of memory to produce the third communion of polyphony that enables effective remembering.

While the mimetic (Harris, Kanefsky, Willis, Rose) and formalist (Gottlieb, Merivale) readings of *Obasan* have variously uncovered the force of the novel as truth-telling and its coherence as an aesthetic object, Goellnicht has persuasively noted that *Obasan* is "not an organically whole, seamless, realistic novel, but a disruptive, or polyphonous, generic mixture" (288). But Goellnicht's further argument that the novel is an autoreferential postmodernist metafiction as theorized by Linda Hutcheon is seriously flawed. Kanefsky has raised a number of internal contradictions in Goellnicht's argument. To these I would add the implausible conclusion that the novel exposes the official version of history as a lie while at the same time maintaining that "history is relative" (291), and that "uncertainties in epistemology" (294) can somehow become "an urging to action" (302). But the more basic problem with the claim that the novel is postmodern is that the formulaic equation of "historiographic metafiction" with the postmodern ignores all specificity of production and reception and is theoretically meaningless. Challenges to realism or the authority of dominant historiography are not specifically postmodern, and apparently "postmodern" strategies often have very different origins and trajectories from the postmodern as a condition of Western knowledge as theorized by Lyotard or a condition of late capitalist culture as theorized by Jameson. Moreover, the imposition of the dominant values of the Western academic institution on heterogenous productions is a hegemonic practice despite its claim to be anti-hegemonic.[2] *Obasan* is heterogenous, discordant, and polyphonic, but it is never in any doubt about truth and falsehood or justice and injustice; it challenges the authority of single-voiced discourse, but it does so not merely as an issue in epistemology but as a strategy for justice. Its heterogeneity of material, multiplicity of voices, metafictional reflexivity, perspectivism, and

narrative disjunction are brought into aesthetic coherence in a process that puts the reader into play and compels the construction of an ethical centre.

The heterogeneity of Obasan is foregrounded by its framing with a metalinguistic poem before the beginning and a juridico-political document after the end. It is also obvious that the reflexive-poetic language of private experience and the languages of the public sphere appear dialogically throughout the novel, the first as an element of Naomi's subjective reflection and the second as the element of Aunt Emily's being as a "word warrior" and the documentation in her package of the past. Further, neither Naomi's private world nor Emily's public sphere is linguistically simple and homogenous. Naomi's zone of language encompasses the poetic, the oneiric, the everyday, irony, parody, quotation, muteness and stammering, while the languages of the public sphere range from the euphemistic lies of the state, through the racial mythologies of demagogues and ideological distortions of newspapers to the critical discourse of the few who opposed the internment and the indignant protest of Emily. In the sphere of everyday life Naomi's utterance meets at the outside the aggressive language of naming, othering and gazing of the dominant, while from within its culturally specific subaltern condition it adopts a hiding of speech and glance, a practice which allies it to the Native Indian, as seen in the shyness of children (2) and the muteness of the old Indian in Rough Lock's story (146-47), and of which Obasan's dense silence is the extreme pole. Naomi's "speaking dreams" use an even more hidden language to offer an alternative narrative of oppression, recognition and liberation.

The many languages in *Obasan*, however, do not have the same status. Rather, the discourse of the subaltern in the narrative reverses the subject/object relation of the referent world, so that the languages of dominance become objects, quoted, parodied, and disempowered in the text, while a coalition of subaltern languages/ signifying practices emerges in a polyphony of resistance. It is this coalition, implicitly achieved through polyphony in *Obasan*, not through univocality (Kanefsky 16), that is explicitly thematized in *Itsuka*: "Although . . . we must speak with one voice, there is more than one view" (202).

The languages of bureaucrats, statesmen, journalists, and civic leaders embalmed in Emily's file are object languages that are examined and seen through, not dialogized: "'Interior Housing Projects'" (34); "'Facts About Evacuees in Alberta' . . . 'Grinning and Happy'" (193). When the language of

domination appears internalized within the subaltern in the form of self-hatred, as in Stephen's rejection of Obasan's offer, "'Not that kind of food'" (115), it is distanced as an object by Naomi's voice but requires the reader's self-positioning in relation to assimilation for its evaluation. The internalized domination of the man at the conference who "applauded the wholesale imprisonment of Canadian and American Japanese" (35), produces a more complex interaction. Naomi responds to Emily's indignation with unmarked quotations of hegemonic discourse offering a series of subject positions: "Maybe . . . he's trying to be conciliatory and see the point of view of the other side . . . the welfare of the whole is more important than the welfare of the part . . . the collective can only be calmed by the sacrifice of the minority" (35). The dominant discourse, internally distanced in utterance by Naomi's own language consciousness ("I said feebly"), ranges from the liberal imperative, through oppressive populism to outright scapegoating, and is drawn from the archive of official arguments used to justify injustice. Emily's retort cuts through the liberal imperative, indicating its paralysing effect on the oppressed, but since the narration brackets Emily's criticism by a familiar mockery of her activist zeal, the burden of judgement falls on the reader, who must recognize the languages at play between Naomi and Emily and find his/her own position in the process. However, when Naomi engages in overt parody, as in, "'Indian Chief from Canadian Prairie'—souvenir of Alberta, made in Japan" (2), her display of the language of domination, appropriation and commodification assumes an alignment with a critical reader. In other words the objectified language of domination is presented in *Obasan* with a shifting distance that demands the reader's active engagement in the process of ethical and political positioning.

Set against the languages of domination, the languages of the marginalized, ranging from the articulate oppositional rhetoric of Emily to the silence of Obasan and the dreams of Naomi, are different modes of resistance engaged in a conversation. Usually, Emily's language of the Hebrew prophet ("'Write the vision and make it plain. Habakkuk 2:2'" [31]) is taken as the standard by which Obasan's and Naomi's silence is judged, while their resistant practice of everyday life remains unrecognized. This neglect of the duality of silence and speech affirmed in the opening poem is no doubt based on the Western valorization of speech that Cheung has shown to be inapplicable in Chinese and Japanese cultures. But it is also based on the dominant notion of struggle as open, positional confrontation, for which the Hebrew prophet

provides the paradigm. However, Michel de Certeau's study of everyday practices as operations through which the marginalized manifest their agency and resistance to the domination they cannot challenge, offers a perspective that helps us to see what so far has remained invisible in *Obasan.*

De Certeau argues that in modern society marginality is the condition of the disempowered and silenced majority (xvii), but that this vast body of powerless consumer-immigrants (40), unable ever to escape the system that dominates them, nevertheless practice an ancient tactical "art," akin to Sophistic rhetoric, in which dwelling, moving about, speaking, cooking and similar activities become maneuvers, tricks on the adversary on his own turf, ways of producing a difference in what is given and expected. De Certeau also makes an important distinction between strategy and tactic that is particularly useful in the context of *Obasan.* "Strategy," de Certeau writes, is the calculation of forces between two adversarial identities that both possess territorial bases and a certain power. A "tactic" on the other hand, "is an art of the weak" (37), the operation of those who, powerless and without their proper space, must function within enemy territory, finding ingenious ways of making use of the strong, and thus lending "a political dimension to everyday practices" (xvii). With this distinction we can see that while Emily is engaged in building a strategic form of struggle by creating a base in the Japanese Canadian community around their identity as victims of injustice, the other Japanese Canadians in the book are engaged in tactical responses to their powerlessness, whose symbol may be Uncle's ambiguous stone bread. The trajectory of the narrative may then be read not simply as a transition from pathological silence to healing voice but also as a movement of dispersed tactics toward an empowered strategy.

The stone bread is usually read as a sign of victimization, the transformation of food into stone, a symbol of immigrant life dominated by "necessity" (Wong). Yet, shifting our attention from the object in isolation to the context of its production, we notice that it is the product of a free recipe that Uncle has made his own, adding various leftovers over the years but continuing to produce a consistently hard bread, generative of family jokes, to his dying day. Since this is not a necessary act, how are we to read the operation of a superb craftsman continuing happily to produce his own version of an alien food distinctly different from the "real thing"? This bread of hardship is a product of pleasure, a transformation of the alien into the homely, a nourisher of humour. It is not only the bread that has been turned into

stone by oppression but the stone that has been turned into bread by the oppressed who refuse to be victims. It is precisely the kind of ruse that de Certeau describes as the "subtle art of 'renters' who know how to insinuate their countless differences into the dominant text" (xxii).

Obasan too, marked as she is by deprivation and old age, is tactically engaged in the organization of her domestic space and in the use of her deafness and silence. Resisting by her deafness any demand she does not care to acknowledge, she dwells in the home she has made within her deprivation:

> She is deaf to my concern and begins to gouge out the black sticky mud wedged against the heel. . . . She takes a sheet of newspaper from the pile that is kept beside the entrance and the mud drops down in clumps. In a tin can are a blunt knife and a screwdriver. Everything else is in its place. She is altogether at home here. (15)

Naomi has learnt that Obasan "will do what she will do" (17) and that her answers are always oblique (18) when she decides to answer at all. Goellnicht's suggestion that Obasan exemplifies the silence "that cannot speak" (294) is certainly mistaken because not only does Obasan speak with her resistant obliqueness and not speak when silence is more tactical, but she utters herself with her own profoundly expressive accent: "Everyone someday dies" (11). However, her primary mode of engagement with her world is through the practice of domestic life in which the constraints of poverty are met with conservation and order: "Obasan never discards anything. Besides the twine ball, there's a ball of string full of knots, a number of balls of wool bits, and even short bits of thread twirled around popsickle sticks that are stacked up like soldiers in a black woven box" (44). The subtle excess of this order is perfectly aligned with the program of the paradigmatic anti-hero cited by de Certeau as representing a new politics of the marginalized: the production, under the conditions of severe constraint, of "'very small, almost invisible pleasures, little extras'" (xxiv). Arguing in a very different register toward the same effect, Linda Williams has demonstrated that the American sex-worker, pornographer and performance artist Annie Sprinkle affirms her agency within a system in which the female body is "saturated" with commodified sex (316), by neither denying that she is a whore nor fighting the system that names her but by affirming within the space of the discourse that constructs her "something that is not named in 'whore': her own desire, surprisingly new pleasures" (307).

Stephen, the one most crippled by the internment in having internalized

racism and rejected his community, wholly escapes his trapped condition through his musical talent, turning the bars of his prison into a xylophone (220). But for Naomi, whose hyphenated existence is represented in her shuttling between Cecil and Granton, daily life is a series of tactical combats, an aspect that is emphasized by placing the two scenes set in Cecil and Granton at the beginning and end of the novel. In the first (Chapter Two), as a minority teacher in a racist community, Naomi defends herself against students who proxy for that community, facing in Sigmund's aggressive speech the familiar attacks on her name, personal life and authority. Naomi meets this attack with silence and evasion and by pedagogically transforming it into a lesson, though she covers her tactical success with the camouflage of incompetence. (The display of weakness is a defensive gesture common to the powerless, though it has been cited specifically in relation to Asian-American writing [Wong 77]. In the narrator's address to the reader, the gesture locates the reader in the dominant position.) Responding to the question on love, Naomi records that Uncle's reaction to her own curiosity ("In ruv? What that?" 6) had staged the cultural specificity of "love" as she diverts the question toward the constructedness of the concept, "Why do you suppose, we use the preposition 'in' when we talk about love?'" (6). In response to the question about marriage she goes behind the question to elicit the answer implied in her counter question, that it comes from a parental, racist denial of her authority: "'My mother says you don't look old enough to be a teacher'. . . . It must be my size. . . . Was it my youthfulness or my oriental face?" (6). With the proxy character of the attack becoming even clearer when Sigmund names Naomi as spinster and old maid (terms obviously picked up at home), Naomi responds by the ruse of naturalizing the condition of being unmarried: "'I suppose I am an old maid . . . So is my aunt in Toronto" (8). However, at the level of her self-representation in the text, Naomi both denigrates herself and subverts the dominant discourse of sexism ("spinster," "old maid") by identifying it parodically with pseudo-scientific racism: "Must be something in the blood. A crone-prone syndrome. We should hire ourselves out for a research study" (8).

These tactics are repeated with variation in Naomi's encounter with the widower who takes her out on a date and asks where she comes from and how long she has been in the country. Naomi turns the tables on this aggression by making it an occasion for a lesson in the generational names of Japanese Canadians, underlining the ruse by ingenuously apologizing to

the reader for assuming pedagogical authority: "Sometimes I think I have been teaching school too long" (7). Her textual response to the widower's insistent interrogation, however, is a parody of the identity card that Japanese Canadians like Isamu had had to carry (24), that is, again, an act that is simultaneously self-denigrating and subversive. Finding herself positioned by her date's interrogation as an alien other who is already marked as inferior and required to display her inferiority, Naomi represents herself by miming what she is expected to be in order to turn the gaze itself into an object:

> I should have something with my picture on it and a statement below that tells who I am. Megumi Naomi Nakane. Born June 18, 1936, Vancouver, British Columbia. Marital status. Old maid. Health: Fine, I suppose. Occupation: School teacher. I am bored to death with teaching and ready to retire. . . . Personality: Tense. Is that past or present tense? It's perpetual tense. I have the social graces of a common housefly. That's self-denigrating, isn't it. (7)

At the other end of the book, in chapter thirty-four, the Barkers' condolence visit is an invasion of Naomi's base in Obasan's home, and as such it produces a shift from tactical maneuvre to strategic combat. On the surface Naomi's reluctance to let the Barkers in seems to illustrate what Naomi had called her "social graces of a common housefly," but this self-representation is undercut when the power relation displayed in the visit is exposed. While Mr. Barker "steps...unbidden" (222) into the house of his former labourers, Naomi remembers the occasion when, Penny having taken her to their house, Mrs. Barker had shut the door in her face. Placed within the context of this uneven relation of power, Naomi's reluctance to invite the Barkers reveals under its appearance of social awkwardness a resistance to domination based on race and class.

As one of the powerless being invaded by the powerful, Naomi treats the visit tactically at the level of represented action, employing her weakness as strength, but at the textual level, where she is empowered in her own space, she offers a strategic awareness of the dominant. Mrs. Barker, sitting like a flagpole, "represents the Barker kingdom, a tiny but confident country. But momentarily she is planted here on this soil beside Obasan's own dark flag" (224), while Obasan is "impenetrable" in her silence, "deaf and impassive, unavailable for questioning or their ministrations. . . . she remains inviolate" (224-25). (The sexual metaphor for invasion and domination, with the woman as an instrument of the male aggressor, and therefore the target of hostility, refers this episode to the first dream in the book, which I will take

up later). The very elements of Obasan's subaltern condition, the sedimentation of poverty, the kakimochi and the tea-stained cups with grease lines, become instruments for the discomfiture of the enemy as Mrs. Barker "shifts uncomfortably. . . . breathing unevenly" (224). Mrs. Barker's absurdly "polite" question whether Obasan would be "all right on her own" (implying that she should be sent to the all-white old folks' home) meets the response of Naomi's throat-clearing and stammering, which make Mrs. Barker "uncomfortable that I do not speak" (224). Again underlining the tactical ruse of her behavior with a self-denigrating comment, "I lack communication skills," Naomi confronts the aggression strategically in textual space, enclosing the aggressor's gaze in her own and turning the dominator's subjectivity into an object: Mrs. Barker "sits like a bird poised for flight" (223).

> Her eyes dart back and forth. I find myself donning her restless eyes like a pair of trick glasses. She must think the house is an obstacle course. (222)
>
> What is it she smells? What foreign odour sends its message down into her body alerting her limbs? If only I could banish all that offends her delicate sensibilities. Especially the strong smell of miso and daicon and shoyu. Especially all the dust that Obasan and I are too short to see. Mrs. Barker's glance at Obasan is one of condescension. Or is it solicitude? We are dogs, she and I, sniffing for clues, our throats quivering with subliminal growls. (224)

I read these episodes as demonstrating that tactic and strategy are not antithetical practices but operations situated in different contours of power, so that the subaltern agency manifesting itself in the maneuvres of everyday life can flow into a strategic position with the acquisition of power and a base of operation. Obasan, Uncle and Naomi are not the merely passive and silent antithesis to Emily's empowering speech, but already grounded in the political practice of everyday life, they are involved in a communion with Emily. Practice, de Certeau has argued, is a mode of enunciation: silent tactic can be in a dialogic relation to strategic speech.

As the variety of languages and practices in Obasan produce discriminating positioning, the existence of a number of perspectives in the novel does not imply any general scepticism either, but rather generates the construction of a more adequate perspective through the integration of the fragmentary. At the political level, where perspective is related to power, the lies of the dominant are objectified and exposed while the silenced truth of the subaltern is legitimated ("'Facts About evacuees in Alberta'. . . . 'Grinning and Happy'. . . . The fact is . . . I cannot bear the memory" 193-94). Even at the epistemological level, where perspectival openness is a basic feature of

the novel as a metafiction, it does not produce the kind of postmodern scepticism that Goellnicht and Kanefsky find. Both Naomi's memory and Emily's documents offer fragments that require the other for completion, Emily's wider view situating Naomi's experiential perspective within the history of the community and Naomi's experience adding the force of testimony to Emily's documentation. When Naomi writes that "Aunt Emily's Christmas in 1941 is not the Christmas I remember" (79), it is not, as Goellnicht affirms, an example of "the textualised nature of facts" (293), but the recognition of the need to complete partial individual experience through dialogue with others: "I feel like a burglar as I read, breaking into a private house only to discover it's my childhood house filled with corners and rooms I've never seen" (79). Indeed, Naomi's lack of authority as a narrator, with the limited knowledge of a protected child within a situation that was largely incomprehensible to adults in her community, is a device for engaging and empowering the reader in the construction of the narrative. Diminishing the authority of the narrator and fragmenting the narrative lead in *Obasan* not to relativism but to an engagement of the reader in totalisation, the process of producing a coherent, inclusive and dynamic understanding of the world.

Naomi's text also uses perspective to ethically centre and historically contextualise the internment within the contiguous catastrophes of the Native Indian genocide in North America and the nuclear bombing of Japan. The otherwise redundant invocation of Sitting Bull in the first chapter ("Uncle could be Chief Sitting Bull squatting here." 2), Naomi's own identification with Rough Lock Bill in her dream (to which I will return later), and the recognition of similarity between Native and Japanese children (2), place the internment on a scale of injustice in the history of North America, affirming both an identity of the oppressed and the priority of the Native's dispossession. The foundational erasure of the Native in Canada is thematized in the first dream in the book, which opens with an ideological version of history that naturalizes the colonial as the indigene and provides the discursive ground for the subsequent racism in British Columbia: "They also are here, the other man and woman. They have been here before us, forever in the forest." (28). Seen in the context of this dream, Naomi's text is a revision that puts the Native back into the history from which they have been erased, recognizing their prior displacement in the remembrance of the Japanese Canadian dispersal.

The structure of *Obasan* engages the reader in the positioned production of several narratives. The framing narrative of Naomi's reluctant remembering and the framed fragments of remembered and documented past are stitched together by narratives moving between the present and the past. The first of these is the enigma of the mother, for whose absence Naomi seeks answers she is denied, and the knowledge of whose death brings the narrative to a conclusion. This is a literal narrative of plenitude, loss, search, denial, and discovery, though its association with the theme of presence, absence and coming to language invites the psychoanalytical narrative of the move from the pre-Oedipal through the resolution of the Oedipal phase (Magnusson). The enigma of Naomi's resistance to memory also generates a mimetic narrative guided by Naomi's explicit recognition of the pain of remembering lost happiness and intense unhappiness, which functions rhetorically to make the loss and the suffering all the more expressive. But this enigma (seeking in the past the determination of the present) also creates the space for a psychological narrative of victimization originating in the Old Man Gower episode, while the complex of betrayal, lie, abuse, silencing, and ambivalence in the episode invites a metonymic reading in which the personal becomes an allegory of the history of the community. These narratives of psychological crippling brought about by the internment and healed through the coming to voice have been traced by most readings of the novel.

But the narrative thread that follows the enigma of the "speaking dreams" has received little attention, perhaps because it offers a very different narrative than do realistic readings. The oneiric language, to which the opening poem draws particular attention, presents an achronous narrative in which a vision of the overthrow of colonial history is followed by a processive emergence of the political subject through the binary opposition of the oppressor and the oppressed to a final passage beyond the binary. It offers a larger history than the immediate one documented in the novel, an implicit, gendered theory of patriarchal, colonial domination and liberation, a refusal of the victim position apparently presented at the realistic level, and a going beyond the necessary political level of opposing external oppression.

Although, in a reading that is generally accepted, Gottlieb has found Naomi's initial dream to be "ominous, but . . . not yet openly horrible" (43), the dream is actually a prophetic vision of immigration, colonial oppression, resistance, and liberation. The first stage of the dream is a scene of

arrival in a "forest" or "a heavily treed slope," where "the other man and woman" are already there, "been here before us, forever in the forest" (28). This, as I have already pointed out is colonial history in which the Native has been erased, the colonialist naturalized and the immigrant defined as the only late comer. In the first glimpse of arrival, for a "flickering moment," the colonial woman, engaged in labour "appears as she once was, naked, youthful, voluptuous" (28). But in the next stage of the dream this vision of original beauty is replaced by a more usual sense of deformation, as the initial vision becomes a "mirage" and the woman's "face is now harsh again and angular as quartz—square, a coarse golden brown" (28). The man, clearly the patriarchal colonial, "a British martinet," commands all into the service of his labour of cutting trees, "His glance is a raised baton" (29). The affect of this stage is "Weariness," symbolized in the "smoky curtain continuously rising" (29). But in the next stage, "at the heart of the forest," there is an epiphany, "a realization is airborne . . . a flock of birds in sudden flight" (29). A fraction of a second's delay in the yawn of the man's pet lion-dog, whose "obedience is phenomenal," leads to the awareness that it is not natural but a robot, a man-made thing. In this instant "a house of cards silently collapses. Instantly in our telepathic world, the knowing spreads and the great boulder enclosing change splits apart" (29). A faulty operation of a hinge in the machine demythologizes colonial domination, exposing its construction and enabling its overthrow. At this revolutionary point, the colonial woman, now deformed further into a cyborg, attempts to retard change by "reciting" to the dreamer in an archaic language "an ancient mythical contract made between herself and the man," but is ineffective because "the language has been forgotten" (30). This woman, incrementally deformed in the service of colonial patriarchy, is the prophetic type (since Naomi has this dream before reading Emily's document) of the "National President of the Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire" (82) who accused all Japanese Canadians of being spies and saboteurs and whose progeny appear in the Mrs. Barkers of Naomi's experience. However, the cyborg woman's failure to contain change opens the last and happy stage of the dream, in which Uncle "stands in the depth of the forest" (suggesting his legitimated presence, at the centre, the "heart"), performing a ritual dance, while "someone," who will turn out to be the mother in later dreams, is trying to speak, and the man who had claimed aboriginal status, now a "British officer . . . wearing an army uniform" is "disappearing to the left" (30).

This overarching dream is followed by a group of three related and iterative dreams connected with the experience of being molested, first by Old Man Gower and then, "over and over again" (61), by others. In the earliest of these, the child's ambivalence of desire—"I clamber unbidden onto his lap. His hands are frightening and pleasurable" (65)— splits her body apart, creating a chasm in the pre-Oedipal body she shared with her mother, and producing her separateness as "I": "In the centre of my body is a rift. . . . the mountain yawns apart as the chasm spreads. My mother is on one side of the rift. I am on the other. . . My legs are being sawn in half" (65). While the splitting of the body images the separation from the mother through ambivalence, the "I" is mutilated into immobility by the sense of complicity in an act of violation. As a result there is no sense of the agency of violation in this dream, only the grammatical mark of passivity: "legs are being sawn."

In the later dreams, this wholly passive image of violent rupture changes to one of "flight, terror and pursuit," in which a space is opened for the subject and agency, even if it is for complicity under duress: "The only way to be saved from harm was to become seductive" (61). The pre-subjective ambivalence of terror-pleasure in the initial dream of rupture is replaced in these dreams by the clarity of the symbolic (the domain of language founded on binary oppositions such as pursuer/pursued, saved/harmed) with the emergence of the subject and agency. In the final version the dream moves even further toward the symbolic-social in identifying the individual with the collective oppressed subject, representing it in an extremity of victim position literally prone under its oppressor, and producing through its "terrible ending" the political knowledge that the ambiguous agency of seduction is futile:

> . . . three beautiful oriental women lay naked in the muddy road, flat on their backs . . . Several soldiers stood . . . in front of them . . . guarding these . . . prisoners captured from a nearby village.
>
> The woman closest by made a simpering coy gesture with her hands. She touched her hair and wiggled her body slightly—seductively. An almost inaudible whimper or sob was drowned in her chest. She was trying to use the only weapon she had—her desirability. This is what a punished dog feels—this abject longing, wretchedness, fear, and utter helplessness. She lay on the edge of nausea, stretched between hatred and lust.
>
> The soldiers lifted their rifles . . . A few inches from the body, the first woman's right foot lay like a solid wooden boot neatly severed . . . The soldiers could not be won. Dread and deathly loathing cut through the women. (61-62)

This group of dreams speaks a subject in process moving from ambivalent passivity toward an increasingly clear emergence of the subject as agent positioned in loathing against the oppressor. Its language converges with Emily's in producing a political subject.

The dreams of the Slocan period trace an intermediary stage of this emergence, in which there is a growing recognition of the self as identified with a series of victims, while the oppressor takes shape as the British doctor and the nurse who transform the hospital to a place of torture. In the first hospital dream, father, the butchered chicken, Rough Lock Bill ("Redskins" [147] being displaced metonymically by "red stubble" in Naomi's statement, "my neck and chin are covered with a thick red stubble") and "I" are identified metaphorically with a book whose content has been erased (150). At this stage there is only the identity of erased victims but neither oppressor nor agency. But in the later repetitions of the dream, a series of tortured and wounded creatures, including one racially marked by colour— the baby with yellow ("fried-egg") eyes and yellow excrement and a wound on his head— are opposed to the torturing agency of the angry British doctor and the nurse, who "combs and combs my hair, the sharp teeth scraping the top of my head" (158). At the same time, however, the dreams indicate the agency of endurance in the dreamer that refers back to her refusal to cry ("weeds . . . do not moan . . . Nor do the trees cry," 150), and her reflection on heroic endurance, "Could I hide in a wagon of hay and not cry out if I were stabbed by a bayonet?" (72).

The last two dreams (167 and 227-28), narrate the progressive emergence of mother from the initial "straining to speak" (30) in the forest. In the first dream, mother is still only a feeling (": is here . . . not here"), "reaching out to me" in a reversal of the dream of separation in childhood (167). While in the earlier dream the dreamer had her legs sawn, here she dances round the mother-as-Maypole, moving but retaining connection. The other half of the dream similarly modifies the actual departure scene, with the mothership leaving but remaining "tied to me" by streamers, which break but become the wake "that reaches out with tentacles to embrace me" (167). The dream's promise of a lost wholeness wakes Naomi to the return of her father and a recovery of plenitude: "I am in my father's arms again my father's arms" (170).

In the last dream, the memory recovered in the novel condenses into the development of the initial dream. The first scene takes the dreamer to a

courtyard/graveyard, "the place of the dead," but not, Naomi insists remembering Marvell, "a 'fine and private place'" (227). It is a house that is not a place of security, "we are never safe enough" (227). All the dead in Naomi's family, including Obasan as a child (since she is not yet matured in death) appear in the courtyard, where the soldiers, ever present in Naomi's dreams, are "eager for murder" (227), and "We die again and again" (227). The scene enacts the ongoing cycle of oppression, of forever being in an unsafe place.

The second stage of the dream is very different in emotional colour. Now the courtyard, as the centre of the house (domestic space), seems to displace the "depth of the forest" (strange, outside space) in which Uncle had performed his dance in the opening dream (30), as mother, who had only been "someone" in the earlier dream, fully appears performing the same dance. Within this centred space, "Mother stood in the centre" (227), symbolising love in the most conventional way: the rose in her mouth is "red as a heart," and her mouth itself is shaped as a heart. The banality of the symbol, however, is interestingly disturbed by the stem of the rose in mother's mouth, which is a knotted string "like the twine and string of Obasan's ball" (227), an emblem of a life of deprivation marked by the care with which it is lived. So that, mother and Obasan turn out to be paradoxically identical, not only through the metonymy of the dream but in the contrast, when Naomi finds her dream mother's "heart-shaped mouth" displaced by Obasan's "skin-coloured mouth open—a short dry cave" (228). This shift from mother to Obasan at the point of mother's fullest appearance seems to indicate Naomi's transition from the need of an imaginary condition of presence to the recognition of symbolic substitution as the path to her lost mother. The dream, then, offers a pre-knowledge of what Naomi will understand after the news of her mother's death: that "for a child there is no presence without flesh. But perhaps because I am no longer a child I can know your presence though you are not here" (243).

In the final stage of the dream, Naomi's access to her mother is barred by the appearance of the Grand Inquisitor, the composite figure of invasion, interrogation, prejudgment, silencing, murder, and torture in the novel: "he was prying open my mother's lips, prying open my eyes" (228). Bringing together all the figures of oppression in the novel, the Inquisitor is specifically identified with the Old Man Gower, "the top of his head a shiny skin cap" (61; 228). The agent of violation and silencing is also the interrogator

who coerces speech and compels visibility, so that the position of the oppressor occupies both the production of silence and speech. The Inquisitor's demand to know is already "a judgment and a refusal to hear" (228), his interrogation is already an accusation, his demand for speech already a silencing. However, in perhaps the most radical move in the novel Naomi discovers her own identity with the Inquisitor:

> What the Grand Inquisitor has never learned is that the avenues of speech are the avenues of silence. To hear my mother, to attend her speech, to attend the sound of stone, he must first become silent. Only when he enters her abandonment will he be released from his own. (228)

Obviously, the oppressor figure of patriarchal authority in the novel neither needs to attend to Naomi's mother nor to be released from abandonment: what is addressed to it is the product of Naomi's identification across the binary oppositions of oppressor/oppressed and man/woman. Having moved from the ambivalence of the victim position to a clear, political hatred of the oppressor, Naomi discovers in this dream her double positioning as oppressor and oppressed: "the Grand Inquisitor gnaws at my bones. . . Am I her accuser?" (228). (There is a foreshadowing of this double positioning in Naomi's seeing herself as both Goldilocks and Baby Bear [126]). Naomi recognizes that the silenced subaltern cannot be reached by a demand for speech but has to be approached through the silence itself by attending to the conditions of her "abandonment," which in this case will turn out to be both the horror of the war and the code of not communicating suffering in Japanese culture. This has a theoretical parallel in Spivak's argument that the demand of the radical Western intellectual for the speech of the subaltern is blind to the fact that, caught between patriarchy and imperialism, the Third World woman has no discursive space from which to speak and can be reached only by articulating the conditions of her silence.

Against Emily's activist vision, necessarily based on the clear demarcation of binary oppositions—"Write the vision and make it plain" (31)—Naomi presents a sense of truth "more murky, shadowy and grey" (32). This difference is revealed in the pattern of their narratives, Emily's showing a simple opposition of the oppressor and the oppressed and a unidirectional development of trust, betrayal, lies, injustice, and protest. Naomi's narrative, by contrast, shows a pattern of plenitude, loss, and reconstruction with the recognition that although the loss is a result of external oppression, the experience of plenitude (in the idylls of both Vancouver and Slocan) is

already contaminated with violence (the hen episode in Vancouver), cruelty (the chicken episode in Slocan), scapegoating (the butterflies and bath episodes in Slocan), and betrayal (the episode of drowning). Emily's political view sees the oppressor outside while Naomi's ethical view also sees the oppressor within. But this is not a contradiction because, as Naomi's dreams indicate, the passage to the ethical is through the political. Naomi's murkiness introduces ethical complexity into the binary clarity of political vision, acknowledging the necessity of maintaining the oppressed/oppressor, us/them oppositions while at the same time dissolving them in the recognition that there are others more oppressed than us, that the oppressing other is also within, that Baby Bear and Goldilocks are sisters under the skin. In my reading the languages and narratives in *Obasan* interact and combine in a polyphony to activate the memory of injustice toward the practice of an ethical politics that is not only oppositional but also reflexive.

NOTES

1 The polyphonic novel, Bakhtin writes, contains a "*plurality of independent and unmerged voices . . . a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices*" (6) in an "unfinalized dialogue" (32). "*The polyphonic novel is dialogic through and through.* Dialogic relationships exist among all elements of the novelistic structure" (40). Polyphony does not follow the dialectical path of "thesis, antithesis and synthesis" (26). It is "pluralistic" (26). But it "has nothing in common with relativism (or dogmatism). . . . both relativism and dogmatism equally exclude all argumentation, all authentic dialogue, by making it either unnecessary (relativism) or impossible (dogmatism)" (69). The emphasis is Bakhtin's.

2 This criticism of hegemonic postmodernism has been argued from different points by Sangari and Appiah. Sangari writes: "the postmodern obsession with antimimetic form is always on the lookout for new modes of 'self' fracture. . . . Postmodern skepticism is the complex product of a historical conjuncture and is constructed as both symptom and critique of the contemporary economic and social formation of the West" (144-45). Referring to the anti-realist and sceptical delegitimation of Western and nationalist historiography in the work of Yambo Ouologuem, whom he considers typical of the "post-colonial stage" in African writing, Appiah writes that though such work may seem postmodern, "the basis for the project of delegitimation is very much not the postmodernist one: rather, it is grounded in an appeal to an ethical universal . . . in an appeal to a certain simple respect for human suffering" (152).

Diana Brydon has offered some useful distinctions between the post-modern and the post-colonial in arguing for a variety of post-colonial voices in Canada. "Perhaps the clearest difference between a post-modernist practice and a post-colonial practice emerges through their different uses of history. . . . Without denying that things hap-

pened, post-modernism focuses on the problems raised by history's textualised accessibility: on the problems of representation, and on the impossibility of retrieving truth. Post-colonialism, in contrast, without denying history's textualized accessibility, focuses on the reality of a past that has influenced the present" (201). Though Brydon is arguing specifically for Mordecai Richler and Kristjana Gunnars as post-colonial voices, her argument clearly would encompass Kogawa.

3 Kristeva's concept of the "subject in process/ on trial" provides a useful gloss on the signifying practices in Obasan. Kristeva argues that the "subject in process/ on trial" is the cross-roads of the fluid mobility of the semiotic chora—the space of the drives—and the regulated (semantic-syntactical) stability of the symbolic domain of language—the space of the social. The subject in process, as the space between the free-flowing energy of the drives and the hierarchized regulations governing language is the space of the creative, the ethical and the subversive, where genuine change takes place. Categorizing signifying practices into four types, narrative, metalanguage, contemplation and "the text," which is a practice of "poetic language," Kristeva argues that the last is the most heterogenous, being the destabilizing (of meaning and the subject) utterance of the semiotic within the symbolic. Obasan clearly presents Naomi's subjectivity in process as it is articulated in the intersection (dialogue) of heterogeneous signifying practices including the poetic, the narrative and the metalanguage of mastery, to which both the language of the Canadian state and its challenge in Aunt Emily belong. There is also a suggestive parallelism between Kristeva's emphasis on "irruption" as the characteristic of the subject in process, marking its mobility and creative potentiality, and Kogawa's metaphor of the bursting stone for the "living word" and change.

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Paddy McCallum

Saturday Night Reading, 1971

For Earle Birney

A draft of wind across the campus light,
perhaps the thousand drafts
of late October bringing scent of berries
from the throat of the mountain bear.

I was hiding. It was wise to hide from bears
for to come upon one in late October
even in hope of hearing his song
(these bears sing of elsewhere)
is to grunt or run.

I stood still, hiding.

I watched the fur of the bear turn white.
I heard the voice of the bear make peculiar
laughter, and was terrified.

The beautiful eyes of the bear
glowed moraine as they fell upon me.
I would never leave these woods
or the path so heavy with frost.

The bear winked.

In a bear-blink he caught me. His head
cocked thoughtfully, "Hey there,"
he sang, "comin' in?" and my spine
bent like a porcupine and my paws
knew the world around me.

Sing? I would dig if I could not sing
in his green woods exploding.

Janice Fiamengo

"Susceptible to no common translation"[1]

Language and Idealism in Sara Jeannette Duncan's *The Imperialist*

At the turn of the century, Canada's cultural periodicals chronicled an impassioned debate amongst intellectuals and politicians over Canada's place in the British Empire. For some, imperialism was a relic of the past, tying Canada to colonial dependency. For others, including Sara Jeannette Duncan, it was the key to the future, guaranteeing Canada's economic and political strength as a commonwealth partner. But for Duncan it was also much more: a lofty ideal essential to national identity and necessary to defend Canada from American materialism. Wishing to silence critics of imperialism who spoke only about trade relations and defence agreements, Duncan in *The Imperialist* defends "'the moral aspect'" (155) of the British connection, a truth so self-evident as to need no explanation, but so imperilled as to warrant an entire novel in its defence.

According to poststructuralist theory, the search for a self-authenticating truth beyond language is the oldest dream of Western metaphysics, doomed to falter on the bedrock of language (Norris 19).[2] In *The Imperialist*, the morality of imperialism is the truth that makes all other kinds of judgement and discrimination possible, a transcendent principle capable of governing economic and political decisions. But critics such as Frank Davey and Francis Zichy have contended that Duncan's support for imperialism is ambiguous; Lorne seems to be set up for failure, his principles inevitably (perhaps even justly) defeated by the monetary considerations and practical realities the imperial ideal claims to govern. Peter Allen argues that uncertainty is the keynote of the novel, making Duncan "an eloquent and important witness

to the ambiguity of our developing national identity in the years before World War I" (388). I will argue that Duncan's ambiguous presentation of imperialism has another source in the "bottomless relativity" (Norris 58) of language itself, as Duncan's privileging of imperial truth becomes entangled in self-generated contradictions. As the novel develops, Duncan makes Lorne's doomed quest to realize the Imperial Idea an analogue for the writer's quest to express the ideal. She opposes spirit to matter, the ineffable to the tangible, and the ideal to the material in order to establish the transcendence of the imperial essence and literary truth, but in both cases her pursuit of the privileged term exposes the ubiquity of its material other. Ultimately, Duncan's irony both acknowledges, and protects against, the inevitability of failure.

The debate over Canada's future *vis-à-vis* the strengthening or loosening of ties with England has been thoroughly outlined by Carl Berger and discussed by a number of critics in relation to *The Imperialist* (Dean, Heble, Tausky "Writing"), so I will not rehearse it in detail except to take a look at one of Duncan's predecessors in the debate. The work of Goldwin Smith provides a useful context for Duncan's emphasis on the imperial ideal. As Ajay Heble notes (218), Smith was one of the most articulate opponents of imperialism; his *Canada and the Canadian Question* (1891) went so far as to claim that Canada's destiny lay in complete political union with the United States. Despite their ideological differences, Duncan was friendly with Smith, having met him during her term as journalist for *The Week* in the 1880s. Duncan had left Canada by the time of the book's publication, voluntarily exiled to Calcutta through her marriage to Everard Cotes. However, given her acquaintance with Smith and her deep interest in Canadian politics, it is likely that Duncan knew of *Canada and the Canadian Question*, in which Smith argued for an American commonwealth on the grounds of economics and utility. Union with the United States, Smith contended, "would greatly raise the value of property in Canada" and would generally "bring with it a great increase of prosperity" (212). According to Smith, all of Canada's "natural relations," that is, her "diplomatic and commercial" ties, were with the United States (192). Where once, it is true, the Empire had offered needed military protection and markets, now the imperial connection was an economic and military handicap for both Britain and Canada, weakened by distance and difference of interests.

Of imperial affection, moral allegiance, or principle, Smith had little to say; imperialism was a pretty flower, "[b]ut to be sound, it must after all

have its root in some kind of utility, and when the root is dead the days of the flower are numbered" (201). When Smith spoke in metaphors, he tended to figure imperialism as a flimsy garment or fabric, its lack of hard substance a marker of its unimportance. Loyalty to the Crown, for example, was merely an "airy fabric" (211). And if the economic and political bases of imperial connection (trade relations, imperial defence) were more tangible, they also comprised a thinning garment: "Of dominion over the Colony," Smith claimed, using a metaphor that positioned Canadians as mice or some other destructive vermin, "barely a rag remains to the mother country, and even that remnant is grudged, and is being constantly nibbled away" (194). Speaking of the prestige attributed to the imperial connection, Smith asserted that the Dominion merely "bears the train, not wears the royal robe" (198). These metaphors of thin or useless fabric—a rag, a remnant, inconsequential finery—represent the imperial connection as insubstantial and flimsy, not durable enough to clothe the body of political destiny.

It was arguments such as Smith's, if not Smith's itself, that Duncan had in mind in *The Imperialist*, which attacks the economic obsessions of the age and fears for the survival of the intangible in an era dominated by business values. In launching such an attack, Duncan was hardly alone; Jeff Nunokawa has argued that Victorian and Edwardian novels are obsessed with money and with marking out some human sphere safe from "the comprehensive grasp of the commodity form" (3). The emphasis in *The Imperialist* on metaphors of fabric in opposition to figures of economic calculation (it is, as we will see, the very insubstantiality of the Murchisons' "spiritual and mental fabric" [45] that elicits the admiration of Duncan's narrator) suggests Duncan's privileging of what Smith dismissed as immaterial. In *A Different Point of View*, Misao Dean shows the extent to which Duncan was influenced by idealist philosophy, which "saw the material world as an embodiment of transcendent values whose significance could be brought out in realist fiction through careful selection of detail" (11). Detailed description was valuable not because it represented a thing in itself but because it evoked unchanging truths and values.[3] In *The Imperialist*, Duncan sets out to shift the terms of debate away from economics and towards the "ideals that transcended the profit motive" (Dean 16).

As she surveys her small Canadian town, Duncan's narrator suggests that it is still possible to call upon the "sentiment of affection for the reigning house" (62) to distinguish Canadians from Americans, despite the fit of

American shoes on Canadian feet (144). But defining the distinctiveness of Canadian values is no simple task. What matters is often what is most difficult to put into words: passions, principles, and moral truths quite "outside the facts of life" (63) and only to be grasped "by deed of imagination and energy and love" (82). Describing the Elgin townspeople's loyalty to England, the narrator emphasizes that it is inarticulate: imperial affection "was among the things not ordinarily alluded to, because of the shyness that attaches to all feeling that cannot be justified in plain terms" (63). Although critics such as Faye Hammill (157) have interpreted this statement as demonstrating the philistinism or hard-headed practicality of the people of Elgin, Duncan emphasizes that it is shyness, not disregard, that prevents speech. Some of the most positive characters in the novel—particularly John Murchison—refrain from speaking about the things they cherish, as if protecting their ideals through silence.

Thus, Duncan's challenge in *The Imperialist* is to give words to ideals even while recognizing that what is most valuable in human experience escapes language. The parallel with her hero, Lorne, is obvious, for Lorne too is able to look beyond the obvious and "to see larger things" (83). Lorne also insists on speaking about what other people in Elgin acknowledge only obliquely. He is indignant to discover that the newspapers discuss the Imperial Question as if "'all its merits could be put into dollars and cents'" while ignoring "'the higher level'" altogether (155). Although he recognizes the practical spirit in Elgin, its preoccupation, even "on the eve of a great far-reaching transaction with the mother country" with the material "terms of the bargain" (171), Lorne is finally unable to confine himself to a strict economic reckoning. Lorne's surrender to "the rush of the Idea" (262) separates him absolutely from characters such as Octavius Milburn, whom Duncan condemns with an economic metaphor as the "man of averages, balances, the safe level" (53). Risking speech is dangerous, but essential if human values are to survive the onslaught of economic doctrine.

In championing Lorne's ideal, Duncan is not suggesting that material considerations are irrelevant. She concedes the fundamental importance of such business ventures as John Murchison's stove manufactory, but also insists on its less obvious significance. Lorne's father's business acumen and commercial success are held up for admiration by Duncan's narrator when readers are invited to share the satisfied glance of John and Dr. Drummond around the prosperous store-room at the beginning of the second chapter:

"It was no longer a light stock. The two men involuntarily glanced round them for the satisfaction of the contrast Murchison evoked" (22). As she depicts their quiet appreciation of the fuller stock, the narrator emphasizes the shop's status as a signifier of material prosperity. Only the "[f]inicking" would complain about the "iterating ring" from the iron foundry up the street (23) and only the hopelessly class-conscious, such as Alfred Hesketh, would feel anything but respect for John Murchison, a man at whom "[p]eople looked twice" (19).

But Duncan also suggests that the shop plays a part in a less tangible transformation, which is the process by which the two men have become Canadians, mingling not only their material fortunes but their whole being in the "fabric" of the new country (20). The two men immigrated around the same time "to add their labour and their lives to the building of this little outpost of Empire" (20). Introducing the men, Duncan refers to this transformation, and although her language denotes an economic exchange, business is a metaphor for some deeper transaction of the spirit. The men's participation in building the community was "the frankest transfer, without thought of return; they were there to spend and be spent within the circumference of the spot they had chosen, with no ambition beyond. In the course of nature, even their bones and their memories would enter into the fabric" (20). In the description, physical and spiritual, bones and memories, the business cycle and natural time, are placed side by side, the intertwined threads weaving the fabric of the new country, built of hard work and moral commitment.

In working such metaphors, which negotiate between material facts and transcendent truths, Duncan's textual strategy supports Lorne's idealism. Duncan's blending of economics with the immaterial fabric of national existence emphasizes that prosperity, though important, is not everything; it alone does not make a country great. In an essay on imperialism and morality, Terrence L. Craig points out that the equation of morality with the British Empire is so self-evident to Duncan as to require no explanation: "for all the debate and rhetoric staged throughout the novel, the moral base of the British Empire is presented as a given, and as an incontrovertible argument" (419). This is true, but Duncan's reticence about the explicit meaning of British morality may also stem from her sense that it cannot be calculated or measured: it is, in Advena's words, "'the thing itself, the precious thing'" (121) that stands above what are "'*only* political, economic, material'" realities of social development (123, emphasis mine). As a centuries-old civilization,

England "'has accumulations that won't depreciate'" (156), a kind of cultural capital worth significant investment by the colonies (156), even if the returns cannot be entered in any ledger. Here, Duncan's references to economics serve to emphasize the values that surpass it.

A number of critics have noted Duncan's privileging of the imagination. As Tausky observes, the capacity for imaginative vision is a line of demarcation distinguishing those characters Duncan approves from those she dismisses (*Novelist* 161-62).[4] Lack of imagination, for example, mires Hesketh in class consciousness in the very moment of denying it, when in his determination not to condescend to Lorne's shop-keeping father, he can't help but condescend. Fortunately for his own self-satisfaction, he can't recognize his failure and is able to "reflect[ ] afterward that he had been quite equal to the occasion" (174). By contrast, Lorne's imagination allows him to see his father for a moment as Hesketh does, and to adjust his conception so that it contains, without being altered by, Hesketh's view. Believing with Henry James that the novelist's experience of life could be likened to "a huge spider web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue" (83-84), Duncan creates a novel that evaluates its characters according to the fineness of their perceptions and at the same time emphasizes the novelist's own sensitivity of response.

This sensitivity is particularly attuned to the ineffable. When she describes what separates the Murchison family from the other citizens of Elgin, Duncan emphasizes both the Murchisons' superiority and Elgin's limitations with reference to an indefinable quality. The Murchisons are "too good" for their community, but their difference is subtle: "[i]t was a matter of quality, of spiritual and mental fabric; they were hardly aware that they had it, but it marked them with a difference, and a difference is the one thing a small community, accustomed comfortably to scan its own intelligible averages, will not tolerate" (45). The Murchisons threaten Elgin because there is something about them that cannot be "scanned," made intelligible. This difference baffles Elgin in refusing to take a recognizable form (such as excessive piety or greed, the accepted idiosyncrasies) and the Murchisons themselves are not even conscious of the quality. Duncan's qualifications ("in a manner," "hardly aware" [45]) emphasize the subtlety of the distinction, highlighting her own wariness of over-statement, her consciousness of the potential in language for clumsy simplification. Duncan's interest in the limits of language—and conversely, in its limitless possibilities—is foregrounded.

Here and throughout the novel, her thematic emphasis on an elusive "spiritual and mental fabric" (45) is paralleled by her rhetorical technique, which might be likened to the practice of disentangling the threads of a fabric, tracing its complex interweaving without threatening the integrity of the fabric. As we will see, a certain unravelling is inevitable.

That the Murchisons' difference is "susceptible to no common translation" (45) validates them as a subject of Duncan's novel, for her success in translating them will prove *The Imperialist* to be an *un*common translation. One of the many damning revelations about Dora Milburn is the grossness of her capacity to translate details into abstract truths. Duncan's description of Dora as possessing a "dull surface to the more delicate vibration of things" (272) seems to echo James, above. Noticing Lorne for the first time, Dora interprets his value based on physical characteristics, "the set of his shoulders and the carriage of his head" (60), rather than on the qualities of character that they denote, and the narrator tells us sorrowfully that Lorne's attractiveness "might have been translated in simple terms of integrity and force by any one who looked for those things. Miss Milburn was incapable of such detail, but she saw truly enough in the mass" (60). The uncommon skills needed to translate the Murchisons legitimize both their moral worth, at the level of plot, and their textual worth, at the level of novelistic discourse. Dora, on the other hand, is worthy only of a dime novel.

Even the narrator's rather flippant comment that "there was an allure about a young man in a bank as difficult to define as to resist" (47) suggests that we are attracted to what cannot be pigeonholed by language. And when Walter Winter translates Lorne's as yet inarticulate ambitions into crude self-promotion, commenting that it would be a "'[v]ery useful thing'" (58) for Lorne to have a part in the Ormiston defence, Lorne shrinks from his corrupting language, and the narrator commends his delicacy, noting that "[i]t is one thing to entertain a private vision and another to see it materialized on other lips" (59). Sometimes, Duncan intimates, an ideal is best maintained when it is not articulated at all, as when Lorne's family discusses the practical aspects of the trade delegation (such as which arguments will work best with the English) while content to allow the larger implications, for Lorne and the country, "to sit there with [Cruickshank], significant and propitious, in the middle of the sofa" (99). They glance at it occasionally with great satisfaction but do not speak of it.

If we turn next to Duncan's description of Elgin, we notice again her

preference for fine distinctions and complex processes of transformation: the social subtleties that demand an uncommon translation. The "analysis of social principles in Elgin," the narrator warns, is "an adventure of difficulty" (48); its complexity requires the skills of a serious and astute observer. Thus Duncan begins her social history by highlighting the challenge it offers. Elgin originated in a transplanted English order, complete with rigid social distinctions, and has experienced the "process of blending"—awkward but ultimately salutary—that goes into "the making of a nation" (49). While still caring about "where to draw the line," Elgin is rapidly becoming an essentially classless society of "hard-working folk together" (49). Duncan focuses on the elusive alchemy that turns a collection of business enterprises into a vibrant, spirited community. Through the struggle to survive, Canada has become a more egalitarian society than England, "too fundamentally occupied with the amount of capital invested, and too profoundly aware how hard it was to come by" to care too much about the degree of social deference due to the piano tuner or the drygoods merchant. Ultimately, it is not the remaining class distinctions that matter, for they too will fade, but the "certain bright freedom" that is "of the essence" (49).

Duncan emphasizes that this breaking down of social distinctions is connected to trade but not reducible to it. Twice she describes, in lists, the forces responsible for smoothing over the "lines of demarcation" brought to Canada by the original English settlers (48). What happened to dissolve the Family Compact social order of judges, doctors, lawyers, and preachers was that "[t]rade flourished, education improved, politics changed" (48). Only a few sentences later, Duncan repeats this triumvirate, emphasizing that the "original dignified group" (48) was broken up by the new social forces in the country: "Prosperous traders foreclosed them, the spirit of the times defeated them, young Liberals succeeded them in office" (49). Typical here is Duncan's blending of ideal principle with economic fact. At the same time that trade begins to level the social hierarchy, public education gradually spreads to everyone, making self-determination possible. Material development underpins social progress, but less tangible achievements such as social cohesion, egalitarian community, and that "new quality in the blood" (142) are what really matter—and escape quantification—for the political idealist and the novelist.

The focus on social alchemy is also evident in an oft-quoted passage describing market day in Elgin, "a scene of activity but not of excitement, or

in any sense of joy" (80). Duncan's account performs the transformation from commercial transaction to community spirit in the progressive abstraction of its language. It begins with a description of market activity; market day is a scene of such seriousness ("the matter . . . of too hard an importance" [80]) that any conversation not necessary to business is thought frivolous. Duncan suggests, self-consciously, that one should not idealize this hard scramble for livelihood because "[l]ife on an Elgin market day was a serious presentment even when the sun shone, and at times when it rained or snowed the aesthetic seemed a wholly unjustifiable point of view" (81). In consequence, the language is strictly economic: the "margin" between misery and prosperity is small; the farmers and shoppers take part in an "enterprise" long established; that enterprise is their "narrow inheritance" from Fox County forebears (81).

But as if the allusion to inheritance has opened a wider view, Duncan's metaphors shift. Reference to the "bones" in the village graveyard is succeeded by a description of the "enduring *heart of the new country* already old in acquiescence" and the "deep *root of the race* in the land" (81, emphasis mine). The economic is succeeded by the organic, "twisted and unlovely," but nonetheless promising growth and endurance. Whereas a few sentences earlier, Duncan had stressed that the struggling vitality of the market square represented "no fresh broken ground of dramatic promise," her reference to the "root of the race" is accompanied by the declaration that this race "hold[s] the promise of all" (81). In the space of a few lines, Elgin Market Square is translated from a mere centre of commercial activity to a microcosm, a metonym, of "the history of the whole Province" (81).

For such translation to take place, Duncan suggests, young visionaries like Lorne Murchison are necessary. Lorne occupies the intermediary position in the lists Duncan had articulated, standing for education and the "spirit" of the new country. He is particularly capable of responding to the idea of his country. Descending from his law office opposite the market square, Lorne experiences a mystical sense of oneness with, and a subjective possession of, the struggling farmers and merchants of Elgin:

> A tenderness seized him for the farmers of Fox County, a throb of enthusiasm for the idea they represented, which had become for him suddenly moving and pictorial. (82)

One might note in passing here Duncan's contradictory insistence on the presence and absence of class in this moment of identification (an issue

developed in detail by Teresa Hubel). Lorne's sense of his identity as a Canadian is confirmed as he stands watching the merchants engaged in the hard struggle for economic survival. Lorne has no real part in this struggle, yet he claims membership through sympathetic identification. Through an exercise of the imagination that transcends class boundaries even as it depends on them, Lorne comes into possession of his national identity.

The fact of Lorne's escape from the struggle allows his romanticized perception of it, enabling Duncan, who had earlier warned against idealizing market day, to indulge in such idealization. What seems to authorize such idealization is the sensitivity of the observer and fidelity to two kinds of truth. In the moment that Lorne takes possession of Elgin's essence, the farmers of Fox County are both real people and wonderful abstractions: Lorne translates them into idea, but he doesn't lose sight of their material struggle. The ability to balance these two kinds of vision is crucial—both to politics and art. Duncan even describes it as a mysterious inspiration: Lorne's apprehension of his country seizes him just as suddenly and completely as does his vision of Walter Ormiston's innocence, which "came to him and stayed with him like a chapter in a novel" (95). In Lorne, the "narrow inheritance" (81) of commercial activity—the hard possibility of livelihood—becomes the "great and helpless . . . inheritance" of the man of principle who carries a vision of his country (82).

In the character of Lorne, then, Duncan vindicates not only fidelity to ideals but her own craft as political novelist: both create a vision, in language, of something greater than its vehicle. For example, when describing how Lorne manages Walter Ormiston's defence, Duncan stresses Lorne's fidelity to fact, combined with an almost mystical divination of human nature; the description might just as effectively be applied to the novelist's art. Lorne's argument succeeds because of his mastery of narrative design and literary truth; he tells his story so well that the listeners in the courtroom, including the jury, "[see] the plot at once as he constructed it" (96). Logic, rebuttal, and counter-evidence are part of Lorne's procedure, but they are not the whole or the strongest part. His real power is his ability to transform facts—some of them rather damning—into a beautiful narrative of wronged innocence. Like the novelist, Lorne persuades through the smoothest of trickery, a sleight of hand (Duncan uses the word *legerdemain*) more convincing than fact because it appeals to that quality of "romance . . . not yet . . . trampled down by reason" (96).

The "not yet" introduces doubt into the sentence, suggesting that Lorne's rhetorical power may not last. But Duncan doesn't suggest that artful rhetoric is manipulation only. Lorne's whole quality of being is an essential part of the defence: "His nature came into this, his gravity and gentleness, his sympathy, his young angry irony" (96). And in the early weeks of the election campaign, the effect of Lorne's rhetoric on the farmers to whom he appeals is at least as powerful. If language can work transformative magic, Lorne's certainly does, for "his talk had been so trenchant, so vivid and pictorial, that the gathered farmers listened with open mouths, like children, pathetically used with life, to a grown-up fairy tale" (258). In consistently paralleling the writer's craft with the politician's mission, Duncan implies that both succeed when they summon a vision of something fine and elusive. But Lorne's ability to ply his art is soon checked by his political advisors, who fear the force of reason—or at least, of self-interest. Lorne's language saves Walter Ormiston's life; the irony is that when he stands "at the bar for the life of a nation" (267), idealist language is insufficient, as it was, ultimately, for Duncan's novelistic defence (Tausky "Audiences" 470, 482).[5]

In "'This little outpost of Empire'," Heble suggests that a primary turning point in Lorne's attitude to England occurs after his visit to London as part of the imperial communications delegation. From slavish imitation and idolatry of all things English, Lorne comes to regard Canada as England's equal, if not its superior, a recognition that forms "a crucial stage in the process of Canada's decolonization" (Heble 220). I would argue that this shift is less one of substance than of emphasis. The trip to England does nothing to diminish Lorne's zeal for what England symbolizes, for Lorne carries back with him certain "beautiful beliefs" unspoiled (143). The visit strengthens his faith in the practical virtues of Canada, its clean air, open spaces, and economic opportunity, but it also strengthens his conviction that practical virtues are not enough for Canada: the nation needs the vision of the political idealist, "the inrush of the essential" (131), to be made real. While the other members of the delegation are "full of the terms of their bargain" with "little use for schemes that did not commend themselves on a basis of common profit" (130), Lorne looks beyond the material level, "higher and further . . . he only lifted up his heart" (131). Although Lorne can and does argue the economic aspect of imperialism, stressing in a conversation with Hesketh England's need for a boost in manufacturing, his economic theories all proceed from—and are designed to support—a messianic vision of

England as the moral centre of culture, "'the heart of the Empire, the conscience of the world, and the Mecca of the race'" (140).

Even while admiring Lorne's vision, however, Duncan stresses how the bottom line ultimately encroaches upon the most ardent idealism. Moral and cultural values are vulnerable to—in fact, are underwritten by—monetary interests, and we are meant to understand it as a damning moment indeed when, having delivered an impassioned plea for his higher vision at the final election rally, Lorne must listen to the Minister of Public Works deliver "a telling speech, with the chink of hard cash in every sentence" as political corrective to his own dangerous oration (268). Having planned, at the urging of his advisors, a speech to enumerate the tangible material benefits that Fox County has received from the Liberal party, a solid listing of the Liberal account, Lorne finds himself delivering the visionary "jehad" (261) he had composed in the early days of his candidature. This speech best reveals Duncan's preoccupation with language straining against its limits.

Most critics have assumed that Lorne's unleashing of his ideal during the crucial election speech is a simple, disastrous miscalculation. Tausky calls it a "fatal error in tactics" (*Novelist* 156); Michael Peterman sees the moment as evidence of Lorne's "failure to maintain a realistic perspective" (351). The constituents of Fox County may like the idea of Empire, but they vote where their material interests lie. Even Lorne recognizes that "[a]fter all, victory was the thing" (258), agreeing to limit his speech to practical issues. Why then, does Lorne return to his transcendent ideal at the crucial moment? Perhaps Lorne's inability to abandon his original speech reveals his intuitive understanding that one cannot hold to a principle while betraying it in practice, that if one "submitted the common formulas" (as Cruickshank does during the imperial trade delegation), then one also inevitably "submitted to them" (131). Zichy argues that Lorne's speech fails because it reveals ambiguities in Lorne's and his community's conception of imperialism, exposing a bitterness toward England that Lorne may not even recognize (397). I would argue, instead, that in both its elegiac tone, already lamenting what it claims to propose, and its revelation of the insistence of the material in the ideal, Lorne's speech foreshadows rather than causes his defeat.

In his speech, Lorne pleads with voters not to let selfish considerations or rational calculation determine their vote, instructing them to be true to the idea of imperialism—its ideals of loyalty, self-sacrifice, justice—regardless of how the practical implementation might affect them. In voting for the

Liberals, they will not be voting only for Imperial Preference Trade, but for "'the ideals of British government'" (264) and for Canada's full participation in British civilization. But while Lorne insists on imperialism as a transcendent principle, his language continually evokes the material practices of empire: trade, immigration, invasion, commerce. His metaphors suggest that it is difficult to talk about the ideal of empire apart from material transactions. The transfer of power from Great Britain to North America is figured in terms of "'port'" and "'entry'" (263). Lorne refers to a "'momentous sailing-day'" in "'the far harbour of time'" that will see the administrative centre of empire cross the Atlantic to the Dominion (263). In Lorne's impassioned rhetoric, British political and constitutional principles are a "'precious cargo'" (264) that Canada has been fortunate enough to import, a cargo that the Americans, in an allusion to the Boston Tea Party, have precipitously thrown "'overboard'" (264). In gratitude, Canadians "'chose rather to render what impost it brought'" (246). Lorne figures Canada's relations with the U.S. in terms of cheap, unsatisfactory "'commercial bargains'" (246), matter not of weighty transport but of "'pine plank'" and "'bushel of barley'" (265). Attempting to articulate the higher meaning of imperialism, Lorne cannot escape an economic framework. Even the most abstract ideals—loyalty and national character—are couched in the language of trade and commerce.

With all his talk of imperial relations—the mingling of peoples and the birth of nations—Lorne's language turns to sexual relations. Defining Canada's history, her "'spirit of amity'" with the mother country, in opposition to America's intemperate revolt (267), Lorne refers to the United States using the metaphor of prostitution. America is a woman who sells herself, sacrificing better feelings for market relations; she is "'[t]he daughter who left the old stock to be the light woman among nations, welcoming all comers, mingling her pure blood, polluting her lofty ideals until it is hard indeed to recognize the features and the aims of her honourable youth'" (267). Here, the United States is linked with immorality and miscegenation, while Canada is linked with fidelity to family origins. As if beyond his control, Lorne's pursuit of imperialism's truth betrays a preoccupation with the bodies of prostitutes. Lorne quickly switches metaphors. Rejecting the intemperate figure of the prostitute for one drawn from his own, more respectable, field of Law, Lorne imagines a future "'union of the Anglo-Saxon nations of the world'" and prophesies that "'the predominant partner

in that firm will be the one that brings Canada'" (267). Piling metaphor upon metaphor, Lorne gropes for the figure to house the Idea, to embody the abstract principle of Empire, yet he finds himself "hopelessly adrift" (264), not only from his planned speech, but from any stable chain of metaphors. Even while his language endeavours to infuse the material practices of empire with the animating fervour of imperial loyalty, that language suggests, despite his best intentions, that empire is unalterably a matter of trade, easily detachable from (in fact, more workable and profitable without) the abstractions of imperial sentiment or idealism.

Perhaps more disturbing is the fact that Lorne's speech is not really so different from Alfred Hesketh's ludicrous paean to imperial greatness in Jordanville: although in form more elegant, in expression more striking, and in intention more sincere, Lorne's speech, like Hesketh's, relies on an assumed reverence for the British connection in the abstract, a respect based on tradition and colonial idealism that has little purchase in the every-day life of the community. Hesketh's speech has too many references to noble lords, and too much emphasis on empty abstractions for his Jordanville audience of "big, quiet, expectant" farmers (219). Hesketh's declaration that "'[e]ven proposals for mutual commercial benefit may be underpinned . . . by loftier principles than those of the market-place and the counting-house'" (223) strikes his listeners as both condescending and suspicious. And yet surely these words are really Lorne's, absorbed by Hesketh's "open" (read empty) mind during one of their many discussions; it is Lorne, after all, and not Hesketh, who has held to the ideal of imperialism. The idea that economic alliances might be cemented by nothing firmer than "'the mutual esteem, the inherent integrity, and the willing compromise of the British race'" (223) is rightly dismissed by the working people of Elgin, and yet Hesketh's is precisely the argument from "'the moral aspect'" that Lorne urges Hugh Finlay to preach to his congregation (155). The problem of the ineffable, Duncan suggests, is precisely that, unrecognized and inarticulate, it may be nothing at all. What appears most remote from material contamination may paradoxically be that which is most easily appropriated, most subject to the pollution of insincerity and formulaic observance.

Lorne's celebration of imperialism is meant to support Canadian nationalism in emphasizing a greater role for Canada within the empire, but in practice, his appeal to patriotism only further muddles his representation. If the essence of imperialism is moral rather than economic, centred in

character and ideals rather than military power, then it is a fluid commodity indeed. While Lorne may declare that England is the "'heart of the Empire'" (140), his description of Canada's place in the body of the Commonwealth frequently disregards anatomical rigour. In Lorne's vision, the mantle of imperial power passes to Canada as the spirit passes from a corpse to a vigorous host. "'England has outlived her own body. Apart from her heart and her history, England is an area where certain trades are carried on—still carried on. In the scrolls of the future it is already written that the centre of the Empire must shift—and where, if not to Canada?'" (262). Although Lorne's praise of Canada is meant to support a reinvigorated empire, it appears to predict its imminent demise.

As Berger has pointed out, imperialists never advocated maintaining the status quo in their support for the imperial connection; on the contrary, they believed that Canada would increase its power in relation to England because "[t]he British Empire belonged to Canadians [and] the power it represented was rightly theirs to share" (108). In imperialists' grand vision, Canada would compensate Britain for its losses due to over-population, pauperization, and unhealthy industrialization, all of which were producing a sickly and demoralized citizenry. In one of his arguments with Hesketh, for example, Lorne points out that England needs Canada, with its healthy farmers, as a bulwark against "'the degeneration of the class she draws her army from'" (138). Canada, "'the northern and strenuous half'" of the North American continent, is "'destined to move with sure steps and steady mind to greater growth and higher place among the nations than any of us can now imagine'" (263). Although Lorne maintains the over-riding importance of England's "'heart and her history'" (262), he suggests that England's dying body will not long maintain its animating breath, and that the spirit of the empire will also pass across the Atlantic, that in fact, "'for all the purposes that matter most,'" it already has (264). Although the dematerialization of empire is necessary to Lorne's grand conception of Canadian destiny, it ultimately leaves the future of relations between Canada and England on less than solid ground. Taken all together, Lorne's statements seem to leave the heart of the empire dangerously stranded somewhere mid-Atlantic. One wonders how the heart of Britannia can survive at all when the body is so close to failing; yet over-attention to the body may well destroy the heart, as imperialists recognized in their quarrel with the Manchester school, who stressed the costs to England of maintaining

colonies. In the inevitable muddling of his metaphors, Lorne's struggle to articulate his ideal is doomed.

Some critics have interpreted the ambiguities in Lorne's speech to mean that Duncan does not support Lorne's political vision. Davey has suggested that *The Imperialist* demonstrates the inevitable and appropriate defeat of idealism, exposing "both the shallow pragmatism of Elgin's Canada and the emptiness of British 'principle'" (431). There is further evidence for such a view in Duncan's handling of sub-plots. By paralleling two romance plots with her story of political ideals, Duncan invites readers to interpret Lorne's political commitment alongside the romantic idealism more conventionally anatomized by novelists. She even brings romance and politics together when she suggests that love of country and sexual love may spring from the same source: both originate in "the shadow of the ideal; and who can analyze that, and say, 'Of this class is the will to believe in the integrity of the beloved and false; of that is the desire to lift a nation to the level of its mountain-ranges?'" (300). Here, Duncan suggests that the naïveté enabling Lorne to continue to believe in Dora's purity (despite every evidence to the contrary) is the same enabling fiction behind his loyalty to imperialism. And although Duncan often links the novelist's art with that of the politician to celebrate both, she also links writing and passionate idealism to their mutual detriment in her description of Advena and Hugh's affair. Advena and Hugh's courtship centres on a shared love of books, and their long discussions of truth in art both conceal and exacerbate their longing for one another. Eventually, they try to substitute a noble ideal of self-sacrifice for the consummation of physical love, risking their happiness in the process. Exposing the inadequacy of their "aesthetic ecstasy of self-torture" (212), Duncan suggests that the endeavour of the novelist may also be merely deception, a wasteful pursuit of "realms of idea lying just beyond the achievement of thought, approachable, visible by phrases, brokenly" (212). In both cases, desire is maintained only through its continual frustration. Perhaps politics too works through the promise of what can never be realized.

Such irony persistently troubles Duncan's presentation of the ideal, and some critics have suggested that it undermines it fatally. Zichy, for example, detects "a note of underlying scepticism" throughout the narrator's presentation of Lorne's imperial ideals (389). Zichy claims that Lorne's idealism cannot contain the deep contradictions in Canada's historical relationship to Great Britain; ironically, Lorne's very assertions of loyalty and respect for

the British connection reveal "a subdued and sometimes sorrowful calling into question of the very tradition being invoked" (397). Although Zichy's reading is essentially right, I think it over-emphasizes the contradiction in Lorne's appeal to the moral values of sacrifice, suffering, and loyalty. When Lorne exclaims, in the passion of his nationalist jehad, "'thank God, we were long poor'" (267), Zichy detects a note of defeatism: "Lorne is asking his audience to be grateful for poverty, to take pride in self-limitation" (397). I read Lorne's celebration of poverty not as a mark of resignation or acceptance of limitation, but as the promise of future greatness, for as in the Loyalist tradition, the very sacrifice of those loyal to the Crown guaranteed their eventual triumph. Nonetheless, Zichy is correct to highlight the many ironies that trouble Lorne's idealism throughout the novel (395). Tausky, in contrast, refers to Duncan's "sympathetic irony" ("Audiences" 475), suggesting a much softer criticism of the characters she admires. The question here is how to read Duncan's irony. I am inclined to think that Lorne's difficulties and failures work, paradoxically, to affirm the value of his ideal.

In commenting on the work of another ardent Canadian imperialist, Stephen Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*, Jack Hodgins has suggested of Canadian irony that it has a pre-emptive function: we "quickly mock ourselves rather than have others think we presume to take ourselves seriously" (188). Such self-mockery is a protective cover for more serious idealism, in Leacock's case for the "defiant eulogy" (189) that Hodgins finds at the heart of *Sunshine Sketches*. Given Duncan's insistence on the importance of the unspeakable, and on the necessity of striving to voice what is bound to fall short of full expression, I think it likely that scepticism and irony in Duncan similarly function to protect, even while exposing, idealism and its failure. Linda Hutcheon categorizes this as "irony self protective" and defines it as "the irony that saves face, that allows what one critic calls the contemplation of life's absurdity without being defeated by it" (7). Lorne's rhetorical excesses and confusions are indeed targets of irony, yet that irony functions as a form of narrative armour, set up to shield something precious and vulnerable. Ironic perspective allows Duncan to expose the "inevitable poignant bruising of ideals" (Hospital 313) by ruthless materialism and yet to maintain the ideal as something that deserves to "stand[ ] by itself to be considered, apart from the object, one may say" (167). Irony means that the Canadian ideal can be rescued over and over again from its collision with the real.

Even if we accept Lorne's defeat as appropriate, we recognize that chronicling a defeat does not preclude one from admiring what is defeated: Duncan did, after all, read Lorne's speech at a Toronto reception held in her honour (Tausky, "Audiences" 470). Ultimately, her novel is a defence of idealism as well as a wry, elegiac admission of its vulnerability. Duncan's much-celebrated irony and linguistic play support a complex vision in which serious interrogation and nostalgia co-exist. The fact that the ideal is continually betrayed at the level of praxis means that the desire of the idealist politician, and of the writer, is forever frustrated—but also forever renewed.

Duncan wrote at a time when the Canadian economy was shifting away from agriculture towards industry, and when the critique of materialism waged in the pages of Canada's cultural periodicals seemed helpless against the dominance of business ideology. As Zichy comments, Duncan's open-ended conclusion reflects the inconclusiveness of the Imperial Question when Duncan was finishing her novel.[6] In her final paragraph, the parallel between Lorne's partnership with Cruickshank and the possibilities of an alliance between Canada and Great Britain cannot be traced because "it is too soon, or perhaps it is too late" (309). Duncan's final sentence evokes the fabric metaphor by which she has emphasized both the strength and the mystery of national affairs. "The shuttles fly, weaving the will of the nations, with a skein for ever dipped again; and [Lorne] goes forth to his share in the task among those by whose hand and direction the pattern and the colours will be made" (309). It is a particularly cumbersome and obscure sentence, and in a novel that has privileged the unspeakable and the unseen, this is perhaps a fitting note on which to end. Yet the fact that Duncan chooses again to emphasize the link between her (chastened yet) idealistic hero and the young country whose essence he so vigorously championed suggests that Duncan continued to value "the impulse that is beyond our calculation" in her reckoning of Canada's future (300). For Duncan, the future was indeed uncertain, an uncertainty tied to her fears that materialism would cease to be the foundation of national strength and would become the entire edifice. Her belief in fiction offered no guarantees, for language revealed its instability on every level. In writing her elegy for the ideal, Duncan thought to immortalize it in language, even while alert to the multiple ironies in the project.

NOTES

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1 Duncan 45.

2 Poststructuralist explorations of language have been developed by many thinkers; among the most accessible are Christopher Norris and Stephen Scobie. See, for example, Norris' discussion of deconstruction's insistence on the "irreducibility of metaphor" (66) and the need to subject the "figurative props" (80) of thought to a thorough scrutiny. See also Scobie's description of the metaphysics of presence and the Derridean critique:

> Every metaphysical system presupposes that there is at least one positive term, that there is a privileged spot at which the whole system of proliferating differences begins. This spot may have many different names—God, truth, beauty; a transcendental signified; the Platonic Idea; self-presence, the individual subject; history; the triumph of the proletariat; "external reality"—but in each case it is a source, an *origin*, a point beyond which there is no further back to go, an always without an already. But Derrida's argument is that, if we take Saussure seriously, if we accept that there are no positive terms *at the level of the signified*, then no such origin can exist. The origin is, always already, non-original. (3, emphasis in original)

3 See especially 11-18; 41-57; 82-89; 103-14. Dean traces the historical context for Duncan's interest in balancing the real against the ideal, locating it in "the popular version of idealism, derived from Carlyle and Arnold, which eventually came to dominate Canadian intellectual life and which persisted in Canada long after the rest of the English-speaking world had gone on to modernist materialism" (11). According to Dean, "[t]he necessity of connecting the ideal with the real, and of preserving the ideal against the incursions of the real, is a prominent theme in all of Duncan's work" (53). Dean's study, which makes many insightful points about *The Imperialist*, is particularly concerned with exploring Duncan's "theory of literary realism" (46). My analysis essentially agrees with Dean's conclusions except that I detect more conflict at the discursive level in the balancing of ideal and real, and I look in more detail at the manner in which Duncan's use of metaphor plays out this struggle.

4 Hammill extends this observation by demonstrating that "characters are frequently defined against one another in terms of their reading habits and views on literature" (157).

5 Tausky notes that "some of the reviews of *The Imperialist* in England were not only the most negative Duncan ever received in her career but also often insufferably patronizing" ("Audiences" 470). Some of these reviews are collected in Tausky's *The Imperialist: A Critical Edition* (312-29).

6 Writing in 1903, Duncan could not know the fate of Joseph Chamberlain's campaign for imperial federation in England, which was decisively defeated by the Liberal election victory of 1906 (Tausky, *Novelist* 160-61).

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Attending to the Garden

Edwinna von Baeyer and Pleasance Crawford, eds.
Garden Voices: Two Centuries of Canadian Garden Writing. Vintage Canada $18.95

Douglas Chambers
Stonyground: The Making of a Canadian Garden. Vintage Canada $17.95

Reviewed by Laurie Aikman

With the rapid growth of ecocriticism, concisely defined by Cheryll Glotfelty as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment," and with continued public concern over environmental issues, writings on nature and natural history are of increasing interest to literary scholars. Garden writing stands in an intriguing relationship to the broader genre of nature writing. Although garden writers take as their subject "the physical environment," it is an environment that they are actively working to change or "cultivate." Garden writing, then, should provide particularly rich material for the work of ecocriticism, given that it offers unique insights into the discursive strategies through which human beings describe, celebrate, defend, and propagate their transformation of nature through gardening. Two recent publications provide fascinating glimpses into the history and practice of gardening in Canada, and the ways in which it has been textually defined and socially or politically constructed.

Garden Voices is an anthology of excerpts from some of the works that have been written over the past two hundred years by people attempting to describe and sometimes promote particular visions of the Canadian horticultural landscape. Edwinna von Baeyer, co-author of two popular gardening books, and Pleasance Crawford, a landscape historian, bring to their editorial task an undeniable mixture of expertise and enthusiasm. As with any anthology, one may find oneself critical of the editors' criteria for selection and inclusion. The absence of French-Canadian texts, for example, although justified by the editors on the grounds of space, is a lamentable omission, and one which calls into question the use of the word "Canadian" in the title. The perspective of the anthology is also overwhelmingly Euro- (or even Anglo-) centric, with the few descriptions of non-English gardens seen as charmingly "other." Within these limitations, however, the richness and variety of the selections included in this anthology offer a testimony to the editors' efforts at inclusiveness. From a short excerpt from Elizabeth Simcoe's diary of 1792, to a lively internet discussion on how to control pests in 1994, *Garden Voices* spans an impressive array of historical periods, geographical areas (each province and territory is represented to some extent), climates, seasons, cultures, and gardening styles. Part of the anthology's charm comes from juxtapositions such as that between Ray Guy's humorous yet not frivolous 1987 exhortation to plant pineapples in Newfoundland, and F. E. J. Lloyd's bleak

and pessimistic observations in his 1886 *Two Years in the Region of Icebergs and What I Saw There.* These parallels and contrasts are highlighted by the editors, whose own "voices" enter into lively conversation with those of their collection.

The excerpts that make up *Garden Voices*, with their meticulous attention to the kinds of details that are essential to the activity of gardening, are of interest not only to gardeners and garden-lovers. They can also be read for the insights they provide into the rhetorical construction of the art of gardening, and the many political and ideological agendas such rhetoric has been made to serve. Slowly and cumulatively, over the course of the anthology, various discourses on Canadian gardening begin to reveal themselves. The vocabulary that recurs with greatest regularity is the language of "culture," "refinement," and "taste," that equates gardening with civilization, with the imposition of order and beauty on an unrefined landscape. It is instructive, however, to learn of the many other aspects of gardening that have been promoted by its fervent evangelists over the centuries: the City Beautiful movement of the early twentieth century, the Victory Vegetable Gardens of World War II, city gardening that allows urban dwellers to reconnect with the natural world, plant hybridization as a way of creating hardier species for the Canadian climate, and the capacity of gardening to enhance both environmental awareness and inner peace. Overall, *Garden Voices* is a useful introduction for anyone wanting to delve into Canada's textual garden landscape.

Garden Voices provides an interesting historical context or backdrop for *Stonyground,* the particular story of one gardener's relationship with the changing landscape of his own creation. Douglas Chambers, an English professor at the University of Toronto, recounts the long process of turning his grandparents' farm in Bruce County, Ontario, into a veritable "history of the history of gardens." At the same time, *Stonyground* is also Chambers' own critical reading of that history. The book is filled with the factual and chronological details so dear to the garden writing genre ("Bonfires and chain-saws: in the spring of 1987 we cut down eight trees near the house to let the light in"), yet these are interspersed with personal and philosophical reflections that demonstrate Chambers' keen engagement with debates about the relationship between art and nature, between the wild and the tame, between the local and the exotic, not to mention the question of that which is "authentically Canadian." He is almost as likely to make references to books with titles like *The Culture of Nature* or *Ecological Imperialism* as he is to mention Beatrix Potter or *The Wind in the Willows,* or to quote from Milton or the Romantic poets. These reflections ultimately resolve themselves in an unwillingness to separate concepts into discrete categories that have little to do with actual experience. Chambers is as critical of our culture's determined separation of work and play as he is of "the desire for closure and neatness and discreteness" that leads to gardening practices that discriminate between utility and beauty. His own story offers an example of how the two can be combined, by illustrating how his academic work and his gardening both inform and complement one another.

Just as many of the writers in *Garden Voices* promote their particular vision of gardening with passion and eloquence, there is a repeated refrain running through *Stonyground.* It is the call for quiet meditation and attentiveness to one's surroundings. Such focused awareness is a way of opening oneself to what Chambers calls "rival knowledge," or knowledge of "the things that a mechanical culture has suppressed." For Chambers, it seems, the links between reading and gardening go much

deeper than the monumental quotations and visual puns that are as much a part of his cultivated property as the flowers and trees. He demands of his literature students, and indeed of us all, the same quality of attention to our own lives and to the world around us that he requires of the visitors to his garden. Perhaps this is the unique contribution of garden writing to the broader genre of nature writing: the awareness that as we engage with, work on, and transform the natural landscapes of our gardens, we transform our inner landscapes as well.

A Ruined Institution

David Bercuson, Robert Bothwell, and J.L. Granatstein.
Petrified Campus: The Crisis in Canada's Universities. Random House $29.95

M. Patricia Marchak
Racism, Sexism, and the University: The Political Science Affair at the University of British Columbia. McGill-Queens UP n.p.

Bill Readings
The University in Ruins. Harvard UP n.p.

University of Toronto Quarterly 66.4 (1997) Special issue on Bill Readings's *The University in Ruins.*

Reviewed by Jennifer Lawn

Petrified, in ruins, robbed, intolerant, bankrupt: such is the state of Canada's universites today, according to titles published on the subject over the last few years. The authors of the three texts under review take up familiar discursive positions within this articulation of crisis and catastrophe: Bercuson, Bothwell, and Granatstein play the diagnostician who dares to tell the painful truth to the ailing institution, Marchak delivers a post mortem, and Readings is left to ruminate in the settling dust.

Although packaged as a courageous exposé of the Canadian university system, the claims and conclusions of *Petrified Campus* are hardly audacious. Directing their findings towards a general, non-academic audience in a journalistic style, the authors argue that today's universities are underfunded and slow in adapting to trends toward distance learning and life-long education. Policies of open access are lowering academic standards. Tenure protects incompetence. Political correctness is choking research. Administrators are reeling under planning exhaustion. Academic journals publish hyper-specialised knowledge increasingly alienated from the public sphere. And academics are unworldly, timid, and uninformed.

Petrified Campus struck me as having more facts than evidence. For example, the authors admit that a key claim—the decline in standards at university—can't be conclusively backed up, in the absence of reliable research to date. The major piece of evidence they adduce, the lowering of entrance requirements at some universities, is off-set by the fact that many of the entrants with low qualifications fail to complete a degree. In search of funding, tertiary institutions are swelling first-year numbers, with the cynical knowledge that many low-ranked entrants will fail in their first year—evidence of unethical entrance policies, but not necessarily of declining standards.

Nor do the authors follow up on some of the contradictions that their own recommendations would produce. They argue, for example, that tenure should be replaced with a system of regular contract renewals dependent upon a sufficient record in publishing, teaching, and administration. Yet in other chapters they mock the mounting numbers of arcane articles and books published by academics struggling desperately to meet research output requirements set for them by an ever more demanding phalanx of administrators. The current trend toward quantitative rather than qualitative administrative assessment of research outputs would surely only worsen were tenure to be abolished.

The claim that academic freedom is secured by the Constitution and does not require tenure to sustain it seems undercut by an apocalyptic chapter warning that academic freedom is actually under dire siege by the forces of political correctness. I would have found a discussion of Human Rights Commission cases in this field helpful (assuming there are some). Nor do the authors sufficiently relate the endangered security of academic freedom to changing university funding structures. Bercuson *et al* approve of suggestions that funding bodies withdraw support from universities as a check against the perceived excesses of political correctness. Under these circumstances universities will be forced to yield to community values that are frequently as virulently "conservative" as the university equity quotas and anti-racism measures attacked by the authors. For example, Yale recently rejected a $5 million endowment to establish a Chair in Gay and Lesbian Studies, fearing that a greater amount of funding would be withdrawn in homophobic protest against the Chair.

The tensions evident in *Petrified Campus* need not be fatal, given the rich contradictions and ironies obtaining in university structures, but they do call for a sharper, more thoroughgoing, and more self-aware analysis on the authors' part. Particularly disturbing is a telling misogynist slip when the authors cynically write that reform-driven women in Candian universities envision a female-dominated university free of "hierarchy, patriarchy, authority, racism, and sexism," in which "ideology will remain . . . but everyone will feel comfortable, and no one will learn anything." Even Patricia Marchak, whose analysis of systemic sexism is sometimes lacking, has the feminist *nous* to speculate that the funding squeeze on universities may be symptomatic of misogynist retaliation against the perceived female "takeover" of campuses.

An image that came to my mind while reading Marchak's *Racism, Sexism, and the University* was the scene from the *Simpsons* episode in which America's favourite cartoon family attend family therapy together. In a drastically failed test of trust and vulnerability, the members of the family end up seated in electric chairs, angrily sending retaliatory electric shocks to each other. The UBC Political Science débâcle likewise indicates that universities—not least that giant dysfunctional "family" that is UBC—are terribly ill-equipped to deal with internal criticism and conflict.

Marchak documents the events that lead from accusations of racism and sexism against the UBC Political Science Department made in 1992 to the 1995 publication of a report by labour equity consultant Joan McEwen, who criticised the intellectual and interpersonal climate of the Department. Marchak acknowledges that "if these incidents [within the Department] occurred as reported, they constituted sexism as this is defined within current university policies and in human rights legislation applicable in British Columbia." However, she concludes that the McEwen Inquiry allows no final decision as to whether the incidents did indeed occur as reported, owing to McEwen's failure to corroborate complainants' statements. More broadly, Marchak situates the "affair" in the context of a manichean clash of ideologies and methodologies, pitting the rationalist tradition of scholarship, in which truth is posited to exist independently of human perceptions and biases, against postmodernism, which holds that "all knowledge is political, gendered, and ethnocentric, and that all pursuits [of truth] reflect the social values and status of the seekers."

Through inadequate analysis and factual elisions, Marchak does a poor job of defending the disinterested rationalist tradition she wishes to uphold against the ravages of postmodernism. Some slip-ups are simply irritating; for example, the table used to determine whether women and students

of colour suffered grade discrimination from a certain professor fails to specify the grades achieved by men and white students, information necessary to make a valid comparison. Other faults are more damaging. As already noted by previous reviewers, an inappropriate language of criminality pervades Marchak's text, which also suffers from inadequate definitions of key terms (including "racism" and "sexism") and a minimal appeal to scholarly support (see Jill Vickers, "Thinking Seriously about Difference," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 32.2 [1997]: 175-82). For example, Marchak suggests that the plurality of racial and ethnic identities—in contrast to the supposedly binary nature of sex—renders the debate over racism "more difficult to decipher." Marchak seems to deduce, though it is unclear, that racism must therefore be a more ephemeral and legally indeterminate category than sexism. Her approach downplays the fact that even a fiction—the idea of "race"—can bear devastating societal consequences, for in a racist society, it matters not what one "is," but rather what one is *seen to be.*

Having been a member of the UBC Graduate Student Council in 1995, I am fairly well-placed to judge Marchak's analysis of the McEwen inquiry's procedures. Marchak rightly criticises the terms of reference, but elides significant details that raise doubts about the competence of Marchak's office at the time. Whether by design or not, McEwen was clearly placed in an impossible set of double binds when entrusted with the inquiry. Forbidden from naming individual offenders or recommending disciplinary action, she was constrained to the mere confirmation of a tautology: student discontent with Departmental pedagogy and course design was evidence of a chilly climate for students, that is, evidence of a studying environment that provoked discontent. Students, however, were not consulted about the terms of reference, but merely alerted to them only twenty-four hours prior to their adoption.

It was also clear that the charge to investigate "*pervasive* racism and sexism" in the Department would prove problematic. On the one hand, pervasive discrimination is impossible to prove: no academic process, however egregious, is discriminatory all of the time and in every way. On the other hand, pervasive discrimination is unnecessary to prove: even those who are antipathetic to feminism tacitly agree that male organization and power are *foundational* to institutions of Western civilization, while on the issue of sexism Marchak herself writes that "there is probably sexism [in the form of unwanted flirtations and comments] in every university department where there are both men and women."

The much-maligned anonymity of the Report and the requirement that no faculty member face disciplinary action were requested by the UBC Faculty Association, as evidenced by a notice in the faculty newsletter expressing satisfaction that the Assocation's submissions for the terms of reference had all been adopted. However, the factor of anonymity was later held against the demonized McEwen, even though subsequent events gave compelling reasons for not publicly identifying individuals. In one case, in an act of intimidation the President's Office threatened to sue the person who anonymously penned a satirical cartoon against Marchak; in another, a student involved in the inquiry was subjected to repeated telephone harassment after her name and work telephone number were "inadvertently" published in the *Vancouver Sun.*

In arguing that the inquiry flouted due process, Marchak fails to explain precisely what due process ought to involve, given McEwen's understanding that the inquiry had not been duly constituted as a quasi-judicial tribunal. Marchak identifies a certain legal confusion, but does not address

the obvious questions that arise. What exactly are the differences between a review board, a disciplinary panel, a quasi-judicial investigation, and a judicial inquiry? What are the standards and burdens of proof in these modes of inquiry, and the powers or obligations to subpoena witnesses and corroborate evidence?

Marchak brandishes all the banner words tossed around in the media scramble that followed the publication of the report—"due process," "anonymity," "academic freedom"—with a conveniently partial analysis of their definitions and applications. It is ironic that a text decrying postmodernism should itself be postmodern within the terms supplied by its author, for although Marchak claims to admit full responsibility for the actions that she took as Dean, one can nonetheless trace a strain of self-defensiveness, displaced into the realms of intellectual disagreement—hence the rhetorical virulence of her text.

Bill Readings's *The University in Ruins* refreshingly interrogates terms left unexamined by Bercuson *et al* and Marchak: "excellence," "flexibility," "meritocracy," "accountability," "responsibility." Readings offers a historico-philosophical analysis of the University's transition, over the past two centuries, from reason to culture to excellence as its motivating principle. Readings's death prior to final revision of the manuscript leaves his account overly-compressed and wayward at points, but there remains much that is rich, dense, and provocative, as evidenced by the proceedings of a one-day symposium on his work held at the University of Toronto in January 1997, published in the Fall 1997 issue of the *University of Toronto Quarterly.*

The University in Ruins opens with the proposition that the decline of the nation state consequent upon the transnational flow of capital and labour in late capitalism entails a decline of the modern University of Culture, which held as its mission the revelation of authentic individual and national consciousness. Elaborating upon the writings of Kant, Humboldt, Schiller, Schleiermacher, and Fichte, Readings establishes that "the University becomes modern when it takes on responsibility for working out the relation between the subject and the state, when it offers to incarnate an idea that will both theorize and inculcate this relationship." The University becomes "contemporary" or "posthistorical"—Readings rejects the term "postmodern" as implying simply that the University has become "*even more modern*"—when it enters into the régime of Excellence, under which students, or "customers," seeking value for money rather than the capacity to think, are processed into managerial-technical fodder for employers in technology, business, and industry. Readings's ostensible thesis is really its premise, however, for as Asha Varadharajan points out in a brilliant critique, Readings produces no direct evidence establishing how "global transformations come to manifest themselves in the quotidian lives of institutions." Consequently, "what often seems at stake [in Readings's analysis] is the Idea of the University rather than any particular institution"—a judgement corroborated by Readings's capitalization of the word "University" throughout his text.

Nonetheless, Readings's thesis remains intuitively powerful. Consider, for example, UBC's change in marketing slogans in 1997—from the sinister "You will leave a different person," to the vacuous "Think about it"—as exemplary of the shift from the University of Culture to the University of Excellence. The student-hero of the University of Culture becomes a "different person" through the "adventure" of the pursuit of self-knowledge—through "the basic university mission of promoting self-awareness," as Bercuson *et al* put it. By contrast, Excellence constitutes a vacant, "dereferentialised" category, meaningless

precisely because of an excess of meaning. One may "think about" anything, as long as one does so "excellently." Because "*everyone* has his or her own idea of what [excellence] is," the concept serves a strategic rather than semantic purpose, "[drawing] only one boundary: the boundary that protects the unrestricted power of the bureaucracy."

How, then, should members of campus communities respond to the epistemic earthquake rocking the modern University? Readings does not favour the leftish nostalgia for "culture" and "leisure" that proved ineffectual in combatting Thatcherism. Nor can the University proclaim itself any longer as the centre of cultural critique for, as the candidness and pervasiveness of the entire discipline of Marketing illustrates, contemporary culture is not structured by a subtextual, ideological truth to be exposed through critique. We creatures of postmodernity *know* we are being subjected to the machination of mass consumerism and we love it. And critique in the form of campus radicalism can be appropriated by the discourse of excellence "as proof of the excellence of campus life or of student commitment." The differentiation between "truth" and "falsehood" upon which critique relies has wholly yielded to the sole criteria of successful or unsuccessful performance.

The trick is to learn to "dwell in the ruins" of the modern university, refusing the dual certainties of "aesthetic sensation (nostalgia) [and] epistemological mastery (knowledge as progress)." The ruins trope Thinking as a placement within "the sedimentation of historical differences that remind us that Thought cannot be present to itself." Or more prosaically: "to dwell in the ruins of the University is to try to do what we can, while leaving space for what we cannot envisage to emerge." Educators must insist on the essential non-accountability of pedagogy and the radically dissensual nature of the University community, whose members must abandon the fictions of unity and transparent communication under which the University of Culture maintained cohesion. They must invite Thought, a continual opening of the question of meaning.

As my last paragraph shows, it becomes difficult to describe Readings's project without adopting his jargon, which is attacked by his more unsympathetic respondents in the *UTQ* special issue as abstruse and impractical. There are misreadings of Readings's text here, some deliberate and some instructive. For example, the subtle temporality theorised by Readings, owing as much to Freud as to Derrida, is misunderstood by those who enjoin a simple chronology upon his model. Readings is also accused of ignoring the endurance of nationalist movements, despite his contention, admittedly finely nuanced, that "nationalism, in places such as Bosnia and the former Soviet Union, is the sign of the breakdown of the nation-state (and not of its resurgence) precisely because no nation-state can be imagined that could integrate so many conflicting desires." Varadharan adds further glosses: nationalism may be seen as a compensatory but superficial and ineffectual reaction against the grinding advance of the global economic substructure; or, in yet another irony, contemporary universities may well embrace national projects in the service of globalization, not only as an act illustrating the "product differentiation" between tertiary education providers welcomed by Bercuson *et al*, but also to capitalize on what Varadharajan calls the "desire for affiliation" that follows "the absence of filiation."

One of the aptest readers of *The University in Ruins*, Shirley Neuman labels Readings's pursuit of "institutional pragmatism" a "paradoxically resigned Utopianism" and offers an alternative vision of a non-isolationist model of the humanities. Neuman draws Readings back to the local from his tendency to universalize, rejects

his over-simplified model of the "citizen-subject constructed in terms of national identity," regrets that his text doesn't elaborate upon the economic imperatives driving the "renovation" of the universities, situates the trend from the "education" to the "training" of students in the context of the post-World War Two democratization of tertiary institutions, and brainstorms on a few possible course titles that fruitfully integrate contributions from the entire palette of university disciplines. Keying her presentation on lines by Mary Oliver—"Tell me, what is it you plan to do / With your one wild and precious life"—Neuman combines the hard-headedness of the administrator with the passion of the humanities scholar.

Among other contributors, Ian Winchester relativizes Readings's thesis by locating it in an international and historical context reaching beyond the European eighteenth century. Ernest Sirluck remarks upon the fundamental problem skirted by Readings: "if the University does not even claim to be of service to the state, what motive would the state have to support the University?" L.M. Findlay offers the genre of "runes" in place of "ruins," playfully and querulously improvising on five fragments from Karl Marx to insist on dialectic over dialogism: declarations of the "end" or "death" of this or that "tend to function as hegemonizing versions of *The New*"; post-industrial society is a "modish and treacherous notion" which devalues the artisanal in the service of competitive nationalist claims to intellectual pre-eminence and first-world status; and Readings's enthusiasm for the empty category of Thought—including his caveat that "Thought" differs from the equally empty category of "Excellence" only by keeping alive the question of value—should be rejected "because it does the enemies' work for them." Clifford Orwin concludes the symposium by characterising Readings's text as a "strange blend of confidence and anxiety, dogmatism and despair" that falls short of its admirable promise and sheds little light on the praxis of teaching for which Readings himself was, apparently, well respected.

The cross-currents and ironies of the contemporary university bring about curious contortions of rhetoric, as indicated by the inter-play between the four texts reviewed here. The role and designation of the public intellectual, the university's obligations to society, and the relation between market forces and the cultivation of the mind are all up for grabs in a hash of redefinitions, new hostilities, and improbable alliances in universities across the industrialized world. I recently left the UBC English Department, where faculty were busy arranging tall heaps of publications in a Potemkin Village style display of "productivity" for the imminent fly-by visit of the university president, to arrive in Auckland, New Zealand, where students were protesting in the streets, not under the banner of "reform," but *against* it. The flexibility, strategic vision, and integrity called for by Readings and his commentators is certainly timely and urgent for the adaptive survival of the humanities.

Coarse Comparisons

Sarah M. Corse
Nationalism and Literature: The Politics of Culture in Canada and the United States.
Cambridge UP $14.35

Reviewed by Guy Beauregard

Sarah Corse's *Nationalism and Literature* promises a great deal: it addresses the intimate relationship between nation-building and literary canon formation; it compares the emergence of national literatures in the United States and Canada; and it pays specific attention to popular fiction in the United States and Canada to complicate any simple conclusions we may be tempted to draw from the "distinctiveness" of national canonical literatures. Corse finds that "while

elite valued, high culture literatures demonstrate a strong pattern of cross-national difference, widely read, popular-culture literatures do not." Such observations are likely to generate considerable interest and debate among scholars influenced by Pierre Bourdieu (on whom Corse draws throughout her study) and Canadianists engaged with the question of "Canadian canons."

To its credit, *Nationalism and Literature* provides concise and readable histories of national literature formation in the United States and Canada. While Corse's discussion of a national literature in the US (in Chapter 2) strikes me as truncated (moving from the 1890s to the 1980s in two short paragraphs) and overly reliant on secondary sources in citing primary materials, her discussion of the Canadian example (in Chapter 3) shows considerable energy in addressing the francophone/anglophone split, British Commonwealth connections, the "American threat," and the role of the Canadian state in supporting national "culture."

Corse's scholarship is compromised, however, by errors ranging from the trivial to the foundational. In the former category, Corse misspells Simon Fraser University, and refers to "a range of private and public universities" in Canada, where in fact such a distinction does not apply to Canadian universities at the time of writing (and hopefully in the foreseeable future). A more substantive set of questions arise from Corse's claim that "the subject of 'Can Lit' was barely raised until the mid-twentieth century," and that "Canadian nationalism, and thus the identification and development of a Canadian national literature, was a creature of the twentieth century." It strikes me that the fingerprints of Robert Lecker (whom Corse does not cite here, but whom she thanks in the Acknowledgments) are everywhere at the scene of this crime. While Lecker in his 1990 *Critical Inquiry* article sets up a late-blooming (i.e. post World War II) emergence of "Canadian literature" in order to lament what he perceives as its withering away, Corse follows Lecker's claims in order to argue for Canadian literature's historical distinctiveness from American literature. Corse unfortunately does not draw upon the scholarship by Frank Davey, Margery Fee, Heather Murray, and others on the long and complex history of "Canadian literature" in Canadian universities, and, as a result, readers (such as myself) looking for a fresh discussion of Canadian literary nationalism before the 1950s will have to look elsewhere.

Nationalism and Literature is a work of sociology of literature, and I'd like to conclude by commenting on its "empirical" methodology. In comparing canonical, literary-prize winning, and popular-culture novels in the United States and Canada, Corse marshals tables and percentages to produce literary analysis that often verges on triteness. To give but one example: under the rubric "Connection versus individualism," Corse writes:

> As a group, the Canadian canonical novels are marked by their attention to and emphasis on interpersonal connection and social identity. . . . American canonical novels, on the other hand, stress the dangers of social identity and social location, the constraints of interpersonal connection, and the potentially destructive power of the social.

Corse may be setting us up here—the later chapter on popular fiction shows that such levels of generalization are unsustainable—but the mere fact that she needs such banal readings to make this point makes me question the larger trajectory of her argument; it also makes me wonder how many literary scholars will follow her through such terrain. In the name of denouncing "reflection theory" and an assumed connection between a "national character" and a "national literature," Corse brings in through the back door a form of thematic

analysis (however "empirical") that would raise eyebrows in an undergraduate English term paper. Corse's study could have been a critical intervention in Canadian literary studies, but such forms of literary analysis make *Nationalism and Literature* a flawed look at issues of ongoing importance.

Nature's Grip

Wayne Curtis
One Indian Summer. Goose Lane $14.95

Robert Mullen
Americas. Coteau $14.95

Reviewed by Ruth B. Antosh

Wayne Curtis's *One Indian Summer* is a remarkable first novel by a promising writer. The work traces approximately six months in the life of a teen-age boy, Steve Moar, who lives on a remote farm in New Brunswick's Miramichi River Valley. During this period, his life changes in important ways: he falls in love for the first time and experiences the pain of rejection; he recognizes that although he loves the farm and the river, he cannot be content living there for the rest of his life; and he loses his father. Steve's decision to leave the farm after his father dies marks the end of childhood and the beginning of a new life. Narrated in the present tense by Steve, the novel has an understated, colloquial style that gradually draws the reader into the world of these proud, hard-working potato farmers.

Although the novel is set in the 1950s, the customs and traditions it describes often suggest a time much further back in the past. Tom, Steve's father, still does his lumbering and haying with a team of horses; the family has no indoor plumbing; and Katie, his mother, bakes her bread and molasses cookies on a woodstove. Folk remedies are preferred to a trip into town to see the doctor, and superstitions are still very much a part of people's lives.

At the heart of the novel is the Mirimachi River, which is closely linked to the characters' sense of identity and is never far from their thoughts. There is no glamour here, except in the rugged beauty of the surroundings. Nature's grip on the lives of the people is apparent on almost every page. Curtis's gritty descriptions of haying, logging, deer hunting and fishing show us how the seasons dictate the characters' lives. Steve participates in all these activities in the company of his father, Tom, surely the novel's most memorable character. Stubborn, hard-drinking and garrulous, Tom combines an earthy common sense with an almost mystical reverence for nature. He claims to believe, for instance, that birds are the incarnation of dead men.

> "They come outta nowhere when ya light a fire ta boil," Tom says seriously. "Spirits of the ol' woodsmen." The birds crowd closer and eat from our hands, and one pulls at the waxpaper wrapping our sandwiches. "That must be ol' George Cooper. He's sa greedy."

Tom is an accomplished story-teller and singer and can recite hobo poetry for hours, much to his son's embarrassment. In fact, the entire novel is steeped in oral tradition. The tension in the novel comes principally from Steve's growing sense that he is different from his family and neighbors, none of whom seem interested in leaving the land or changing their way of life. Steve, in contrast, aspires to go to university and become a writer. Only near the end of the novel, as his father is dying, does Steve realize the enormous influence the older man had on his life, by instilling in him a love of the land and a gift for words.

This novel is in places remininscient of Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*, but it is an original and compelling work in its own right. Curtis is not interested in creating a novel of epic proportions, but rather a true and affectionate portrait of poor farmers living in a harsh and unforgiving place. The

reader is not a bit surprised that out of this group of hardy, eloquent and self-sufficient people could come a gifted writer.

Robert Mullen's anthology of short stories explores the interrelationship between Native myths and contemporary, mainstream culture in North and South America. In his strange, elliptical style, Mullen juxtaposes the viewpoints of Native people trying to hold on to their traditions and urban non-Natives who are out of touch with themselves. A key theme of several of his stories is that Native mythologies offer strength and insight to modern city dwellers, as well as to the peoples who originally invented them. The reader is left to ponder what is being lost as these ancient traditions are gradually eroded by the forces of capitalism and technology.

Mullen depicts non-Natives as spiritually impoverished and anxiety-ridden. His characters (who are often nameless) are generally highly educated and hard-driving. Native American myths offer spiritual solace in "Monsters," as a group of neurotic yuppies meet in the desert for a group therapy session. Group members' descriptions of their personal problems are interspersed with narrations of the Navajo myths they are studying. As the participants read about Native beliefs and rituals, they begin to see that many apply to their own lives. "To heal a crooked life," reads the Navajo text, "first punch holes in it. Release the evil. If you see the container in which the evil is being collected is about to overflow, stop and empty it." At the end of the retreat, one politically correct member questions the ethics of taking Native religious beliefs out of context, to which another participant retorts: "They plug into our electricity . . . don't they?" Mullen, it would seem, is suggesting that cultural cross-fertilization, resulting in hybrid forms, is beneficial.

Perhaps the most memorable work in this anthology is the prize-winning "Reflections," in which Native and non-Native cultures meet in violent confrontation. In this story, a Native guide, Juanito, leads a botanist into the jungle to gather exotic plants. The scientific expedition is in fact a demonic quest, as the half-mad botanist, Don Federico, desecrates nature and blatantly disregards the jungle Indians' religious beliefs. His motivation is sheer egotism: he hopes to become famous by discovering a new plant species, and he destroys anything that gets in his way. First he shoots the guide's beloved pack mules; then he kills a snake that the Indians revere as sacred, and finally, he shoots the old magician who has been accompanying them. He is an example of modern "civilization" gone amuck, a specialist in plants who despises nature. Ultimately, Don Federico is punished for his arrogance: one night he is attacked by mysterious beings that leave him badly injured and unable to speak. We are left to wonder whether the mysterious assailants were, as Juanito believes, the vengeful spirits of the dead mules, or some wild animal. There are many nuances to this tale: it may be read, for instance, as a fable about the perils of ignoring the mysterious power of nature, or as a politico-cultural parable about the dangers of intruding into another culture's territory without proper understanding and respect. *Americas* invites readers to value and embrace the riches of diversity.

New Word Order

Margery Fee and Janice McAlpine
Guide to Canadian English Usage. Oxford $39.95

Reviewed by David Rampton

The history of English usage guides offers one more example of the gradual disintegration of authoritarian structures in our century. Fifty years ago, simply to evoke "Fowler" or "*The King's English*" was to conjure up notions of magisterial prescription, of rules not to be broken. Although

H.W. Fowler (along with his brother F.G.) spent a lot of time simply describing how people used the language, his name came to stand for those whose job was to tell us what to say and how to write. The appearance of *Webster's Third* at the beginning of the 1960s revealed just how extensively North American attitudes to the subject of usage were changing, and a flood of books since then have staked out various positions in a continuing debate. As the century draws to a close, however, the trend is clear: although prescriptions still abound and reactions caused by, say, the use of "hopefully" as a sentence adverb can still be violent, the grammar police are now something of a dispossessed minority. Their places are being taken by the social workers of the language, those who calmly assess human linguistic behaviour on a case by case basis and report their findings to the rest of us.

With the publication of the *Guide to Canadian English Usage*, Margery Fee and Janice McAlpine have provided a volume that will usefully hurry this process along. Splendidly comprehensive, beautifully organized, lucidly written, this book seems certain to become not only the standard reference work on its subject but also an important contribution to the ongoing debates about how language is used.

Among the many distinctive characteristics of Fee and McAlpine's guide is the extraordinary comprehensiveness of its database. Its contents are based on evidence drawn from the Strathy Corpus of Canadian English, 12 million words of complete texts, supplemented by some 650 million words of Canadian newspaper and magazine text. The 533 pages of entries are prefaced by an Introduction that constitutes an engaging essay in its own right and sets the tone and the agenda for everything that follows. Fee and McAlpine acknowledge on page one "the strong emotions that swirl around language use," cite diverse sources as proof that Canadians often associate questions of language with their national identity, helpfully position Canadian English in relation to its British and American counterparts, pay handsome tribute to their many predecessors, and clearly outline the set of pragmatic criteria that have guided them in putting together this book.

Of course their primary purpose is to answer questions about usage. In clear and accessible language this guide explains the problem, evaluates the precedents, summarizes the findings of other authorities, and makes its recommendations. If you are unsure about specific points of grammar—when to use the subjective case of the personal pronoun (is it "just between you and me," or "you and I?"), whether to start a sentence with "because" or end it with a preposition, or how to pronounce "nuclear," this book will tell you what you need to know. In the thousands of alphabetical entries devoted to such questions, the sensitivity to linguistic and lexical register is unerring and the topicality unmatched.

But the most attractive feature of the book for many readers will be the way it lends itself to browsing, long after specific questions have been answered. There is a fascinating account of the history of "ain't," for example. The "i" before "e" spelling rule is beautifully anatomized and found wanting. Dozens of entries devoted to the names for native Canadians read like miniature history lessons. The book even contains the clearest account I know on the subject of cousins, first, second, removed, and otherwise. The authors they quote from the Strathy Corpus—Margaret Atwood, Ken Dryden, Northrop Frye, Janice Kulyk Keefer, Ben-Z. Shek, Makeda Silvera, *et al.*—often make interesting reading in their own right.

The editors' adroit even-handedness in dealing with all the controversies created by their subject makes it a crucial source book for those wondering about where the "language mavens" stand on a given question.

In this respect, the commentaries are often small masterpieces of information/observation. And, paradoxically, the most authoritative book yet published on its subject is in some ways engagingly anti-authority.

All sorts of readers will be intrigued to learn: That the subjunctive is more common in Standard Canadian English than in Standard British. That in Canadian newspapers, *"begs the question"* almost always means raises the question or brings up the issue. (The editors' advice: avoid this usage because "it is completely at odds with the formal meaning of the expression.") That the spelling "accidently" is now in Merriam-Webster's, that "miniscule" is listed in some dictionaries as a standard variant (but there is as yet no sign of a breakthrough for all those who spell "accommodate" with one "m"). That "ad vur TIZE ment," which I have mentally clucked at for years, is now the predominant pronunciation in Canada and the U.S. That the use of "aggravate" for "irritate" is only "still disputed," i.e., on the way to becoming accepted. That "alot" is "beginning to creep into newspapers" (but before we all start to wax indignant, where, the editors rightly ask, were we when "amiss," "apiece" and "awhile" made their stealthy infiltrations?). That usage guides do not agree on which abbreviation, a.m. or p.m., belongs to which 12 o'clock. That Robertson Davies once wrote "to gain favor with people whom I temporarily believed knew better," and that "some commentators refuse to regard this as an error at all." That the British prefer "di li TAN tee" to "DILL uh taunt." That "try and" has been used since 1686 (Fowler approves it), that the use of *mighty* to mean very dates from the fourteenth century, that "everyone . . . they" constructions can be found as early as 1530, that "xmas" has been in use since the 1500s, that "practically" has been a synonym for almost since the mid-1700s, that "The OED lists citations for 'like' as a conjunction from the 1500s on, and this usage appears to be increasing," that "these kind of things" goes back 200 years, and so on.

The recommendations in other usage guides surveyed by Professors Fee and McAlpine provide some wonderful insights into the attitudes and procedures of would-be language legislators. We learn, for example, that some commentators still criticize the use of "epoch" to mean era (they want it restricted to beginning of an era). Some deplore the use of "decimate" to mean destroy (they want it confined to its original meaning, reduce by a tenth—as in "I am going to decimate your grade" perhaps). Some argue that "the noun form *obliquity* . . . should be used when referring to indirection in speech or conduct, while *obliqueness* should be used in descriptions of lines, angles, and so on." Some dispute the use of "transpire" to mean happen; for etymological reasons, they want it to mean to be emitted only. "Ongoing" is still disparaged as a vogue word. Some dislike the use of "exacerbate" to mean to make worse since its historical meaning is to embitter. "Unbeknownst" and "unbeknown" are routinely dismissed as "dialectal, slang, humorous, or pretentious." Some object to "venue" used in any context other than the legal one. Some contend that "stoic" should be reserved for the school of philosophers Zeno founded, although its general use as a synonym for impassive or uncomplaining is widespread. There are those who insist that "*prestigious*" implies deception (its seventeenth-century meaning) and should not be used to mean having a solid reputation. If you use "materialize" to mean be borne out, you are offending the critics who recommend restricting its use to its literal meaning, to give or take material form. Some would restrict "impeccable" to descriptions of people or their behaviour, presumably because only people or their behaviour can be described as sinless. Here then is pedantry's plenty, and the reasons

for ignoring every one of these rules, and hundreds of others, are as convincingly presented as the list of them is long and their strictures implausible.

The *Guide to Canadian English Usage* ranges so widely that it left me wanting even more. Since Fee and McAlpine handle the cantankerous traditionalist so well, I found myself wondering what they would do with the radical anti-grammarians, those who consider errors in usage to be an index of political engagement. It has been claimed, for example, that because "individual consciousness is necessarily heterogeneous, contradictory, and in process," the writer writes "at the site of conflict," a conflict that should manifest itself in one's struggles with the language itself. According to this line of argument, "We need to contest teaching methods which offer to 'cure' all signs of conflict and struggle which the dominant conservative ideology of the 1990s seeks to contain" (Min-Zhan Lu as quoted in Heather MacDonald, "Writing Down Together." *Dumbing Down: Essays on the Strip Mining of American Culture.* Ed. Katharine Washburn and John F. Thornton). Mere empty hyperbole from the tenured pseudo-revolutionary? Perhaps, but there are Directors of Freshman Composition in American universities who believe some version of this and are on record as saying that the very concept of error is repugnant to them. It would have been interesting to have the editors deal as quietly and decisively with this group as they do with the nostalgists for the old word order.

Another attractive feature of the book is the editors' disinclination to attribute nonstandard language to stupidity or lack of breeding, as seen in the many solicitous attempts they make to understand how a given usage has evolved. "Halley's comet" is often misspelled or mispronounced? Bill Hailey and the Comets are plausibly invoked in defence of the offenders. "Hoi polloi" is mistakenly used as a synonym for the great and good? Perhaps the explanation has something to do with the sound of "hoity toity." Impatient with those who say "taking a different tact"? "[N]ot everyone is a sailor, and taking a different tack often involves exercising tact."

The human voice comes through in other ways as well in this book. Fowler (whom the editors rightly single out as a splendidly gifted forebear) amused generations of readers with his wry asides. Of "electrocution" he wrote: "This barbarism jars the unhappy latinist's nerves much more cruelly than the operation denoted jars those of the victim." And Fee and McAlpine have their own brand of quiet humour: "In Britain *pro* is also slang for *prostitute.* This *pro* is probably a short form of *prostitute,* reinforced by a connotation of lost amateur status." After a discussion of the cases for and against ending a sentence with a preposition, they conclude: "those who oppose this usage on the grounds that good writers have characteristically avoided it haven't a leg to stand on."

In one entry, we learn that "An *epitome* is a prime example. . . . An *exemplar* is someone or something that serves well as an example or model." Epitome and exemplar, then, and look up "*acme,*" "*apex,*" and "*pinnacle*" while you're at it—the *Guide to Canadian English Usage* has a lot of words to recommend it. Buy it and keep it and use it until the green maple leaves on the jacket begin to yellow and fade.

Time Travel

Douglas Fetherling

Way Down Deep in the Belly of the Beast. Lester Publishing $24.95

Reviewed by Clara Thomas

Way Down Deep in the Belly of the Beast is Volume II of Douglas Fetherling's memoirs. *Travels by Night,* volume I, took him to the end of the sixties, leaving us with the wonderful line: "I had turned twenty-one, you

see, and time was passing me by." This volume, about the 70s, begins with an equally memorable line, an echo of the voice of Ishmael, fitting for Fetherling's self-image of the eternal outsider: "Sometimes when it rains I get nostalgie in my joints." A third volume, charting his course through the eighties, is in progress. Because my own short list of Canadian men of letters is extremely short—Hugh MacLennan, George Woodcock and Douglas Fetherling—I declare my interest immediately. My appreciation and enjoyment of these volumes rank especially high because I have seen no other works that bring back so satisfactorily the years that we who were in the Canadian Literature business call "The Golden Years.

When Fetherling came to Toronto and met Dave Godfrey in 1968, within a few weeks of the founding of the House of Anansi, he was in flight from a wretched childhood and youth as well as from an America he rejected and despised. He could not have arrived at a better time for one of his intense curiosity and aptitude for adventure, intellectual and personal.

This second volume opens on a different scene and to the voice of a narrator, decades older, who seems wonderfully at ease with himself. He is in London, this trip an exercise in nostalgia, "for this part of my past from the twilight of Swinging London." Fetherling is good at evoking and personalizing place and his walk around his former haunts, Fleet Street, Kensington Market, St. Paul's, is accompanied by a whole catalogue of random memories jostling for attention: men in bowlers and umbrellas, an anecdote about William Bligh recounted to him by Peter Ustinov, Red Lion Square, with its fiery Welsh Nationalists rubbing shoulders with the Diggers, who distributed clothes and food to clusters of hippies from Rotterdam and San Francisco. Of a dose of scurvy he says in characteristic low key: "I shouldn't think you'll be seeing this too often," said the doctor to his students as he examined Fetherling's bleeding gums.

Back in Canada with the War Measures Act still in force, he resumed his dogged, arduous self-education as journalist and writer. His book records a kaleidoscope of literary endeavours, a kind of "Snakes and Ladders" game of limited successes and disheartening reversals. Always throughout, however, the presence of the narrator, so much older now, his voice so calm, brings ultimate assurance and reassurance. He did conquer periods of crippling depression and a disabling stammer, and he did become, eventually, the respected journalist and writer that he set out to be.

The series of warmly affectionate portraits of good friends, Robert Fulford, Vera Frenkel and Charles Taylor, for instance, is one of the major attractions of the book. So is the Fetherling's benign and self-deprecatory analysis of his slow progress within, as he calls it, "the infrastructure of Canadian literature": "I couldn't help being marginalized—the painful slowness of my socialization as a person was alone enough to guarantee that. But I'd be damned if I would disappear." There were numbers of disillusioned young Americans who arrived here in the sixties: few of them worked so hard or with such singleness of purpose to carve out careers for themselves in the literary life of Canada. No one, I believe, has testified as Fetherling has, to the shifting faces and fortunes of two decades of our cultural history—with, fortunately, at least one more decade's adventures to come.

Not Immortality, Dust

Timothy Findley

Dust to Dust: Stories. HarperCollins $28.00

Reviewed by Donna Palmateer Pennee

Dust to Dust is Findley's third short fiction collection, featuring nine stories, five of them previously or simultaneously published in

Prairie Fire (1997), *Descant* (1996), *Blood & Aphorisms* (1997), *Exile* (1997), and *Quarry* (1991). The layout of titles in the table of contents suggests that the stories are grouped for some purpose, though a logic or thematic did not obviously emerge as I reread the volume, other than that implied by the title for the collection as a whole. *Dust to Dust* is not the title of any one story, though all of the stories deal with death of some sort or other—they are accidental and expected, real and faked, suicidal and murderous, vengeful and merciful. One is committed in the name of country and metaphorically marks the customary fate of innocence. Death is found at the bottom of a pool in Greece; out a chic hotel window in Paris (yes, someone leaps) and inside other hotel rooms in the same gay town; in a concentration camp and a nursing home, both in the south of France; at the Hilton in Queenstown, Jamaica; hidden in the walls of a Victorian house in Toronto and in the psyche of a woman convinced that her sister's death was caused by her mother's negligence. All of which may make this collection sound quite bloody and macabre, though Findley locates the bloodiness and macabre as much in the realm of personal relationships and chance observations of the private in strangers' lives as in the larger canvas of France's complicity in the internment of more than Jews, or of North America's continued complicity in the history of racism and slavery in the form of luxury vacations in the Caribbean.

Once again, the volume lifts the curtain on scenes familiar to Findley readers, and includes return engagements by Vanessa Van Horne (from *The Telling of Lies*) and Bragg and Minna (from *Stones*) as well as a certain histrionics in style that seems to suggest less a particular sensibility than a need for editing. For example: "One *brilliant* evening"? "poise *abetted* by a walking-stick"? "*greatly* old"? "pale *as a bar of Ivory soap*"? There are also some analogies that strike me as maudlin generalizations, for example the use of the phrase "The slaughter of the innocents" to cover an unwanted baby papered into the walls of a house, the extermination of perceived sexual, political, and racial threats at Auschwitz, and a homophobic review of a "neophyte" writer. The title "Hilton Agonistes" seems inappropriately cute for a story about a race and class revolution at a resort in Jamaica (it might be appropriate as the title of a John Gardiner "couple" story). I also groaned at the title of the Vanessa Van Horne mystery, "Abracadaver," though it is a title already in venerable use for a Father Dowling mystery. Then there are simply the errors left uncorrected, such as "The stories . . . was getting out of hand," and the impossibility that "Alain, the father, went running" back to the pool to save his child when "Alain [he was the father, then, too] had taken no more than three steps" from the pool a few sentences earlier. For some reason, I don't expect to find such infelicities in the writing of someone with Findley's reputation (there were plenty in *Headhunter*, too, though I refrained from itemizing them; fandom can only extend so far, however).

Readers familiar with details of Findley's biography, including his move to the south of France (for part of each year), might also find it a bit much that in the exposé of the homophobic critic (who "hated everything French"), we are reminded that France "harboured" Gide and Genet (France has also knighted Findley in its Order of Arts and Letters). The collection does not express a singular view of homosexuality (or of France), however. Oliver Sher, in the story "Dust," is out to the reader, though he is publicly safe in mourning for his lover's death; learning to say "the D-word" aloud, he discovers his double in a man who has also lost his companion of fourteen years, a water spaniel named Kipper. Bragg the writer continues to be homosexual in desire and practice while hating homosexuals—

indeed, he draws attention to how close his own linguistic style is to the homophobic critic's; he explains that his own stories are about impotence, not about homosexuality, though he does not exclude the possibility that they might be read as about homosexuality, now that a gay reader has pointed that out to him. It's difficult not to read Bragg's response here as Findley's retrospective analysis of his own earlier Bragg and Minna stories. However, no matter how frequently Findley baits me, with a character speaking in elementary French phrases, or a writer-character dealing with the creative fallout from giving up smoking, I shouldn't assume any connections between Findley's life and his most recent art.

What I should do is comment on two stories in particular that strike me as very successful for the balance and fit of their scale, style, and subject matter. "Kellerman's Windows" is tightly focused through the conceit of an aging writer who has returned to Paris to the scene of his writerly youth, in order to finish a manuscript on his publisher's orders and in order to die. He spends his last night indulging in wine and cigarettes, and looking on the lives of others in the city, seen through their apartment windows from his own: a homosexual couple who quarrel and part; a heterosexual couple, the male of which Kellerman imagines as a younger version of himself, keeping his creative moments and energies to himself as long as he can; and an elderly woman rearranging mementoes in her spacious rooms. Kellerman is also rearranging his mementoes, in a way, including the death of his only son at the hands of gay bashers. One of the things that makes this story particularly effective is that it is not confused or over-written by Findley's habit of unnecessarily shifting between undifferentiated narrator and focalizer. The conceit of the window effectively organizes the story and creates a cameo-like consistency of voice and detail for every scene in the text (though even as I write this, I feel as if I'm commenting on a first publication). "Infidelity," though its scale appears quite out of sync with the other three stories marked off as the final cluster in the volume, is similarly organized by an innocent voyeurism and fabrication of lives imagined from overheard halves of telephone conversations. It is lightly humorous, with a gentle self-mockery of the writer figure who imagines an increasingly complicated web of sexual infidelities for others while committing his own infidelity—smoking while away from his wife, who is committing the same infidelity at home. It was refreshing to read a Findley story in which the writer figure is not taken so seriously. Similarly, "Kellerman's Windows" seemed a departure for Findley for its use of a father figure as focalizer. So often fathers in Findley's work are such damaging figures, known only through a narrative voice that speaks for the damaged.

Perhaps the coming to terms that aging—or dying—seems to require is also a coming to terms with *all* of the family, as the novella that preceded this collection seemed also to suggest. But please, let us have more coming to terms with an editor, too.

First Words

Elizabeth de Freitas
Keel Kissing Bottom. Random House $27.95

Susan Bowes
Crazy Sorrow. Polestar $16.95

Reviewed by Ruth Panofsky

Each of these début novels by Elizabeth de Freitas and Susan Bowes is set in Nova Scotia and is centred on a young female protagonist—of superior intelligence and keen intuition—who has been shaped by difficult childhood experiences. Both works are lucidly written and scrupulously detailed. Their drawn-out plots, however,

which defer the most interesting events until the latter part of each work, try the patience of the most persistent reader.

De Freitas's narrator, Mary Seeburth, is the precocious daughter of a demented mother and a passive, disabled father whose unlikely meeting occurs at a car accident. Throughout her dark adolescence, Mary is tormented by her sadistic brothers, the three "bad eggs," and struggles to come to terms with her mother's obsession with disaster memorabilia. Her father's inability to counter the cruelty of his wife and sons—and a world that dismisses his preoccupation with the marvels of the sea—leads to his own death by drowning. Hoping to come to terms with her parents' twisted legacy of pain and meaning to thwart her mother's penchant for doom, Mary leaves Nova Scotia for Toronto, a distant city she imagines as a place of refuge and riches.

While the sea dominates the first part of the novel—Mary's mother makes a scant living as a scavenger, navigating a shabby boat ironically named *Fortune Smiling*, and her father is an amateur oceanographer—it is replaced by land in the second part. Mary's journey across the Maritimes to Toronto is made on horseback and takes her through rural and urban terrain. Like his rider, JoeHow is a slow, plodding horse with an oversized rump. Mary's own ample *derrière* and large ears have been sources of shame for much of her life. In fact, much of the rollicking humour in this novel resides in the unusual but sensitive pairing of horse and rider. The oddly moving image of Mary seated comfortably atop JoeHow endures long after the close of the novel.

In Toronto, the characters of her cousin Sarah, who works as a topless mermaid in an oyster bar, and Henry P. Gates, a man Mary meets soon after her arrival in the city, bring together the two abiding concerns of the work: the sea and the world of finance. Mary's journey of self-discovery is undertaken out of necessity and a fierce determination to make sense of a life always on the brink of chaos. Mary's world is peopled by eccentrics who torment her, on the one hand, or promise a bizarre form of salvation, on the other. As she negotiates her way through the sordid maze of her life, she envisions solace in Sarah's friendship and Henry's companionship. When Sarah finally abandons her, she accepts Henry, a disturbing alternative.

De Freitas is an original writer whose meticulous craft, dark humour, and quirky vision will win her many readers. Despite her incisive intelligence and fine attention to detail, however, Mary Seeburth does not fully engage the reader. Much of the narrative takes place within Mary's mind and, interesting as her perceptions are, one yearns to move outside the claustrophobic vision that dominates the novel. The text is overlaid by its big-bummed protagonist and its final pages elicit a sigh of relief.

Rebecca, the 11-year-old protagonist of Susan Bowes's *Crazy Sorrow*, has neither the precocious understanding nor the range of experience of Mary Seeburth. She is, however, a keen observer of life in her small Annapolis Valley community. Like de Freitas, Bowes peoples her novel with unfortunate misfits. In contrast, however, to the contemporary setting of *Keel Kissing Bottom*, *Crazy Sorrow* takes place in the late 1950s and early 1960s and offers a compelling picture of a small town struggling with racism, poverty, and alcoholism.

In many respects, Rebecca's damaging childhood resembles that of Mary Seeburth. Rebecca's parents are alcoholics who work sporadically, earning sufficient money for liquor alone. Unable to fully separate herself from the grinding poverty and debilitating addiction that dominate home life, she seeks the protection of her aunt Marion. Rebecca adores her aunt as a surrogate parent and stays with her periodically throughout childhood.

Marion is at the heart of the novel's action. Late in the work it is revealed that she and Frankie—the town's only black man who occupies the cabin behind Marion's house—are having an affair. When Rebecca is 12, Frankie's mutilated body is found in front of the town church. Twenty years later, Marion is killed when she drives her car into a telephone pole. In an effort to quell her grief, she reads Marion's appointment book and sorts through her box of memorabilia, hoping to discover whether her aunt's death was accidental or deliberate. Soon flashbacks, presented as Rebecca's adult recollections, provide the structure for this otherwise sprawling narrative.

Bowes's fine attention to detail is matched by her seamless prose. Her evocation of time and place are particular strengths of this first novel. Like de Freitas, however, she taxes the reader's patience by introducing much of the important action late in her work. Some careful editing would have tightened and improved this lengthy novel, which nonetheless tells a powerful story with great skill. In fact, both novels—despite these reservations—deserve a reader's careful attention and introduce us to interesting and impressive new voices.

Selected Gallant

Mavis Gallant

The Selected Stories of Mavis Gallant. McClelland & Stewart $39.99

Reviewed by Ronald B. Hatch

That this book is beautifully produced, a fine selection of her stories, and a bargain at $39.95 for almost 900 pages is the crucial point to make in this review about one of Canada's most eminent fiction writers. Yet there are also a number of oddities about the publication that require mentioning. The volume appeared in late 1996 to the sort of hype we have come to expect from a major publisher like McClelland & Stewart, but within a short time many bookstores were complaining that they could not obtain stock. *Canadian Literature*'s copy arrived only recently. Part of the problem seems to have been that McClelland & Stewart opted for a split run with Random House in the United States, and the Canadian publisher apparently experienced problems in wrestling the required number of copies away from their bigger partner. In this regard, one can also note that McClelland & Stewart received funding for the publication from the Canada Council, money which the Council normally expects to be spent in Canada.

The split run between the two nations resulted in another anomaly, this time in the title. The US edition appears under the title, "The Collected Stories," which it clearly is not. While the size of the book—887 pages—might lead anyone to believe that it is a "Collected," avid Gallant readers will find a number of their favourite stories missing, and Gallant herself comments in the Preface that she was forced to omit many stories, some of which she said she no longer liked, but also a dozen or so stories which she still liked, which had "stood up to time," but for which there was not sufficient room. Clearly the Canadian title of "Selected Stories" is much more accurate.

Another feature that will at first strike many readers as curious (perhaps even annoying) is the ordering of the stories. The volume does not print the stories chronologically or by theme, but begins by arranging them by the decades of their setting. Thus the first group of stories is set in the 1930s and 1940s, the next set in the 1950s, and so on. Beyond the 1990s this method of organization breaks down, and we are presented with four sets of linked short stories: the "Linnet Muir" series, the "Carette Sisters," "Edouard, Juliette and Lena" and the highly satirical "Henri Grippes" series. Moreover, the "Linnet Muir" stories are

largely based on events in Gallant's own life and take us back into the 1920s. This ordering assumes much more significance when Gallant explains in her Preface that the editors left the selection and ordering of the stories up her. That being the case, it is evident that Gallant wanted to draw attention to her historical settings.

Why this should be so is not difficult to determine. For years now, reviewers in magazines and newspapers have stressed Gallant's superb stylistic abilities, but have had little to say about her content. Indeed, of all our major fiction writers it would seem that Gallant is the most difficult to label. Occasionally a reviewer will mention the large number of expatriates in her world, might even go on to mention a few of the well known facts about her life, such as the many schools she attended, or the fact that she was brought up speaking both English and French in Montreal, or that she was a successful journalist for the *Montreal Standard* for many years. Yet there is little mention of Gallant's topics or themes.

In drawing attention to her historical settings, it is likely, then, that Gallant is pointing her readers to an important feature of her work: that her characters are immersed in history and time. In saying this I am not suggesting the old canard about foreground and background—brilliantly lit characters in the foreground set against a darkly shadowed background of time and place. In a Gallant story, characters embody as part of their own individual personality, their will, if you like, historical public forces—or the lack of them. Often, in fact, Gallant shows protagonists drawing on ideals and motivations from the past that do not relate to the present, and leave them unable to deal authentically with the present, as in the early story "The Other Paris" or in her brilliant novel composed of linked stories *Green Water, Green Sky* (not represented here).

In other Gallant stories, she portrays characters who continually recreate their own versions of the past to take advantage of present circumstances—as in the story based lightly on the life of Jerzy Kocinzski. In other stories—and especially in her superb series about post-war Germany—Gallant portrays characters who are part of a collective national amnesia, as when Germany in the Adenauer era embraced a philosophy of "no experiments." As Gallant saw it, the result was an entire nation of people living as though the past had been passed over, even though it continually erupted in their post-war lives in nightmare and, more importantly, in the sorts of social patterns that had led to the Hitler years. In this respect, it is good to see that the novella "The Pegnitz Junction" has not been omitted because of its length, for it represents Gallant at her most experimental and her most telling in the presentation of the past-in-the-present.

As always with Gallant, her prefaces are to be treasured, for it is here that she allows us a glimpse of her formative influences and her method of writing. Of particular interest is what she says of her present editor at *The New Yorker*, Daniel Menaker, who replaced William Maxwell. In this context, she explains that it was because she and her new editor shared the same sense of humour, and that she knew she "could make him laugh," that she began to "write straight satire, which gradually evolved into stories, such as the stories about Henri Grippes, the Montparnasse author and slum landlord." This connection not only helps to explain the many short-shorts that Gallant wrote for a brief period in *The New Yorker*, but also something of her satiric intention in the Henri Grippes series with which she ends this "Selected Stories."

The Grippes stories are some of the most densely written of all Gallant's work. They contain both a sadness and brilliant wit that sit ambiguously side by side. It is in these stories that she tackles the plight of the artist who discovers that his deepest

thoughts are quotations from earlier authors. Nowhere can he find the originality that he so desperately seeks. Indeed, much of the time he does not know what are his own thoughts, for he lives in a world of recurring media images and has been "carried along the slow, steady swindle of history and experience." In her creation of the writer Henri Grippes, Gallant both delineates and satirizes the postmodern historical condition. Equally important, she points to the weaknesses of its origin.

The Selected Stories of Mavis Gallant was undoubtedly a mammoth undertaking, but it is clear that an even larger edition, multi-volumed, is required: a "Collected Works" that will include all her stories, her novels, her play and her non-fiction pieces. Mavis Gallant has shown time and again that she can unpack our history and our lack of history, in language that is both nuanced and funny; we need all the works of a writer of this stature in print.

Truth and Convention

Don Gutteridge
Winter's Descent. Oberon $34.95/17.95

Christopher McPherson
Everything but the Truth. Arsenal Pulp $14.95

Ken Sparling
dad says he saw you at the mall. Knopf $28.95

Reviewed by Lawrence Mathews

Don Gutteridge dedicates *Winter's Descent* to his grandsons, and there is indeed something grandfatherly about his endeavour, especially when his book is compared to the other two under review here. *Winter's Descent*, set in rural Ontario, September to January 1945, is a first-person novel narrated by an eleven-year-old named Will. His father is off at war; Will and his mother have just moved to a new house, and for him this means a new school—S.S. No. 9, twenty-six students and one teacher, the redoubtable Miss Neilson. The school is the focus of most of the novel's action, as Will describes his new world in meticulous detail.

I don't wish to be dismissive here. Gutteridge has taken on a tough challenge. How many Canadian fiction writers of the last few decades have written memorably about boyhood? (My own short-list would consist of Clark Blaise and Wayne Johnston.) I'm sure that if I were one of Gutteridge's grandsons, listening to oral versions of parts of *Winter's Descent*, I would be enthralled. But Gutteridge is not in the Blaise-Johnston league, and as an adult with no personal connection to him, I found the book tedious going.
There's simply too much pedestrian description of the children's games and other activities (fighting, hanging out in the washroom, preparing for the Christmas concert, and so on). Here's a sample paragraph about a school-yard ball game:

> I am to hit third. Hawg affects a fancy windmill style, but he's all motion and no zip. Coop, batting first, just sticks out his bat and rolls the ball to Mo at second, who tries her one-two-three-a-Laura underhand to Ted at first, and sails it over his head. Coop ends up on second. Hawg bears down and whips one into Mugs, who promptly pops it into left field, where one of the weasels has been banished. Blakie, daydreaming no doubt of Leopard tanks and death-dealing bazookas, lets it drop in front of him.

I'd rather read the box score. The game goes on for several hundred words, ending with a carefully contrived significant moment in the tradition of modernist meaningfulness. Will scores the winning run by crashing into Effie, the sensitive, "different" girl who is clearly destined to become his girlfriend but has the misfortune to be playing catcher at the time. He jars the ball loose from her grasp, knocking her "senseless, blood erupting from her nose and mouth." From this point on, Will is at last fully accepted by the other boys. (And one wonders what moral Gutteridge's grandsons

might draw from this sort of anecdote.)

Here (as elsewhere) Gutteridge is playing by a set of narrative rules that, from the perspective furnished by the books of Ken Sparling and Christopher McPherson, seem as remote in time as the events he is describing. Sparling and McPherson worship at the altar of a more contemporary orthodoxy. McPherson's short fiction has appeared in a wide range of Canadian literary journals, while Sparling, more impressive on this score, has published in *The Quarterly*; one of his novel's dedicatees is Gordon Lish himself.

Sparling's *dad says he saw you at the mall* comprises forty-eight short chapters, each consisting of several short unrelated sections (rarely longer than a page and a half each, often much shorter), the whole constituting a smug denial of the sort of meaning that Gutteridge so earnestly strives to reveal. Here's an example of one section, a paragraph which bears no relation to that which precedes and follows it:

> Some of us used to go there when we were teenagers. Most of the time we went to this other place, but sometimes we went there. And there was this other place downtown. They were always having this guy named Lorne Lofsky, who played the guitar. The place was called Somebody's Spaghetti House. I can't remember whose. You didn't have to eat spaghetti.

No, there is no further mention in the novel of Lorne Lofsky, the Spaghetti House, or, indeed, spaghetti period. How uncool of you to inquire.

Some threads do tie this package of non-sequiturs together. The voice is consistent and occasionally refers to itself as "Ken Sparling." Ken has a wife named Tutti, apparently borrowed from Leon Rooke's fiction: "Tutti looks at me for a minute, then does that rolling thing where disgust comes shooting out of her eyes." They have a two-year-old son named Sammy, whose presence provides the book's funniest moments. But *dad* might have had for its epigraph "Abandon hope of narrative, all ye who enter here." In narrative's absence, we have Ken commenting randomly on the banalities of his reasonably comfortable life as a librarian in North York ("I get that letter they send every year from the hospital, asking me to send them money") and presenting his studiedly pointless substitutes for what used to be called imaginative insights into the human condition: "God was sitting in a movie theatre. It was the early show. The guy sitting next to God was eating popcorn."

Of course part of Sparling's project is to debunk the mindset exemplified by that last phrase of mine, as if that were required at this point in literary history. If *dad says he saw you at the mall* had first appeared thirty years ago, what an astonishing, disconcerting breakthrough it would have been. But today we've all been there and done that. The species of truth that such fiction implicitly claims to explore is as ready for the glass case of the museum as Gutteridge's brand. The landmarks in Sparling's world are too familiar to inspire the sense of excitement that I read new fiction hoping to feel: "First I had a milk shake. Then I went to bed. Then I got back up. I had raisin toast. Then I got a yogurt and stuck a spoon in it. I listened for any sounds from the bedroom." Sorry, Ken—but the real question today is what comes *after* this sort of thing. Show me something new or don't ask me to pay $28.95.

dad is an easier read *Winter's Descent*, and the conventions are different, but both novelists appear to be saying the same thing: "There. I've told you the truth. Isn't that enough?" But in fiction, it never is.

In such a context, Christopher McPherson's title, *Everything but the Truth*, seems promising. The book collects seventeen short fictions in its 143 pages, and it appears entirely free of the shadow of auto-

biography that looms over both novels. But leaving out the truth, it seems, can be counter-productive, too. There are few satisfying stories; a major part of the problem is that, having no "truth" to deliver, they tend to conclude lamely, with a sense of missed opportunity.

Examples abound. In "Richard's Secret," the narrator solves the mystery of what is in his dead brother's computer files. "Hitchcock Diary" chronicles its narrator's reactions to having accidentally killed a man, as he desperately makes plans to leave town before the police find him. "Hydroponics" is a cop's tale about a sting operation that goes awry when the young woman employed to manage a store set up to sell supplies to marijuana growers falls in love with a customer. All of these are viable ideas for stories, but none of them does enough with characters or theme to justify publication. The dead brother's computer files turn out to contain homemade pornography; the narrator reflects that he didn't know his brother as well as he thought. The fugitive may or may not escape successfully, but there's nothing interesting enough about his character to make us care one way or the other. "Hydroponics" ends with a cheap-trick plot twist that doesn't paper over the story's thematic emptiness.

McPherson's style is a ray of hope here. He shares Sparling's sense of play, but his prose tends more to exuberance, and the worlds of his protagonists (often first-person) are made to seem bizarre or exotic:

> Michael has gone with his pennywhistle and his juggling rings to a country where it never freezes. There are snakes in the jungle, carrying death like a rare gift, and soldiers who deliver it as routinely as junk mail. The nights are lit by burning villages. Michael juggles now for the children who sleep in the jungle. He writes to me; his letters burn my hand; they are onions to my eyes. But lately his letters do not reach me. The soldiers intercept them, to wipe the blood from their hands.

Such passages demonstrate McPherson's command of one idiom of contemporary literary fiction; sentences like this one, another: "Mom was sitting in the living room when I got home, watching *Donahue* and cleaning her gun." He's like a figure-skater who has mastered compulsory figures but hasn't developed a decent free-style program. In his case, a dose of truth—however spurious by someone else's standards—could only help. In contrast to both Sparling and Gutteridge, McPherson appears to be saying: "I know the moves. Isn't *that* enough?" No, it isn't.

Death on the BC Coast

Beth Hill
Moonrakers. Horsdal & Schubart $13.95

Keith Keller
Dangerous Waters: Wrecks and Rescues off the BC Coast. Raincoast $28.95

Ed. J.R. (Tim) Struthers
On Coasts of Eternity: Jack Hodgins' Fictional Universe. oolichan $18.95

Reviewed by Joel Martineau

In a Thomas Love Peacock poem three crafty Wiltshire yokels fool the tax collectors by raking the reflected moon from a glimmering pond. For Beth Hill (1924-1997), moonraking involves reflecting upon life's experiences with a view toward meeting, rather than avoiding, the ultimate collection. She calls moonraking "the quintessential spiritual quest," the search for the boatman who will ferry her across the river of death.

Hill's life was filled with great accomplishments: she raised a family, read voraciously, travelled widely, became an expert on pictographs, and wrote seven books, including *Indian Petroglyphs of the Pacific Northwest* and *Seven-Knot Summers.* She prepared the eighth, the posthumously published *Moonrakers,* by surveying her life

as a long journey—in fact, she repeatedly refers to herself as a tourist carrying a camera. Tourists typically recall and make sense of their travels by thumbing through the photos they took en route, yet two features set Hill's recounting above the ordinary: her methods of capturing the moments, and the places she visited. Indeed, Hill often carried a camera, and *Moonrakers* includes a score of snapshots. Far more striking are the fifty-plus prose snapshots. More introspective than mere sketches, they are better understood as *récits*, instances of the short French form so adept at glimpsing moments of autobiographical or historical experience. Hill weaves these moments into a more or less chronological progression that illustrates her adoption of Jung's concept of *synchronicity*—the belief that events in the outer "real" world mirror events in the inner world of the psyche. Yet doubts remain. At one point Hill asks "Why am I writing this book and why should anyone want to read it?" She fears that her comfortable, easy life does not justify autobiography, that she has been a minor writer who has earned no major awards. One answer lies in the second exceptional aspect of Hill's narrative, the sites she visited.

Many are intertextual. She reflects upon her engagements with the writings of Morris Berman, Joseph Campbell, Loren Eiseley, Vaclav Havel, Jung, R.D. Lawrence, Bill McKibben, Robin Ridington, Rupert Sheldrake, and Lyall Watson, and so on. Other sites are more traditional touristic destinations: Jung's Tower, Les Eyzies, Delphi, and Wenceslas Square. And especially the pictographs of the Pacific Northwest coast. The selection of sites is never arbitrary and neither is Hill's path through them. The very nature of moonraking requires that the glimmers reflecting from our pools of experience be held, analyzed, and shaped into stories.

Preparing to die requires courage. As Jahan Ramazani and others have demonstrated, in this century our Western cultures have progressively devised ways to hide the inevitable. Consider "homes for the aged"—the euphemism of the term, the segregation of the inhabitants. I too regard death squeamishly. I read *Moonrakers* only because I was asked to review it. The story affected me deeply. Beth Hill was a remarkable woman. She left us a remarkable book.

Dangerous Waters is also concerned with facing death. In the introduction Keith Keller tells of a day late in 1995 when CBC radio broadcast an interview with a member of a US Coast Guard helicopter crew. The night before the crew had "snatched a stranded Canadian fisherman from his precarious perch in the aptly named Graveyard of the Pacific, off the southwest coast of Vancouver Island." Keller was so taken with the story that he contacted, through CBC, the crewman. One thing led to another until he had accounts of twenty-four wrecks and rescues, at which point he approached Howard White at Harbour Publishing. Keller recalls "a pathetic attempt to bribe" White "with all the free coffee or beer he could drink in exchange for his hearing my idea." White replied: "I get a thousand book pitches a year; I can't drink that much; write it in one page and drop it in the mail." Keller did. White bought it.

I read those two anecdotes and the others comprising the introduction *after* I read the twenty-one true stories in *Dangerous Waters*. (Three of the original stories ended up on the editing room floor.) My reason for reading this book back to front was simple: the first half consists of "South Coast" stories, the second half "North Coast" stories. I have lived all my life on the BC coast, variously owning a few rowboats, several runabouts, four commercial fishing boats, one log salvage tug, and a kayak. Some sank, and I feel fortunate to be here to tell the stories. I have a strong preference for the *North* coast.

Keller is such a natural storyteller that his introduction reads like the twenty-second

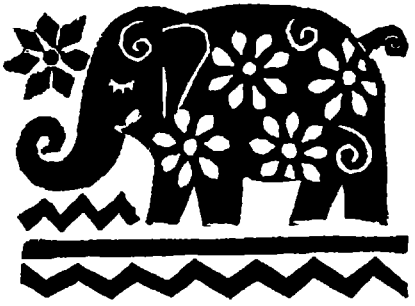
(or first) story. Keller has the gift, as do most great oral storytellers, of letting the characters speak for themselves. He collects, he edits, he quotes, and he (re)shapes so unobtrusively that we hear—or, more precisely, believe we are reading—their own stories, in their own words. The one vital ingredient which separates compelling wreck and rescue stories from the flotsam is survivors. The use of shipwreck survivors has a long tradition in literature—we find ourselves going back as far as we care to look, beyond the World Wars, to Conrad and Stevenson, to Crusoe and Prospero, to the Viking sagas, and Homer, and further. Occasionally someone survives through sheer luck, but most survivors have faced death and continued to believe. Many who survive the hypothermic waters off the BC coast attain depths of introspection and wisdom that make them ideal subjects and voices for Keller's techniques. Interestingly, Keller is a kayaker who has never fished commercially, yet sixteen of his stories involve fishers, doing what fishers always do, redlining their luck the way the industry demands. Two accounts tell of small tugs sinking; in a third a cruise ship catches fire; in another, one occupant of a pleasure boat falls overboard and the second occupant *dives* in to attempt a rescue while the boat drifts away in the wind—the stupidity underpinning that incident perhaps indicative of why Keller otherwise avoids pleasure boaters in his accounts. The remaining story tells of a man standing on a windswept wharf who looked out at a foaming sea and saw a flare. Or, maybe he saw a flare. With difficulty he convinces the owners of a large boat to head out into the fury where, several pages on, they pull two swamped kayakers from the waves. They rush the man and woman to the hospital, narrowly thwarting death by hypothermia. Years later the woman recalls: "That was about the doom of our relationship. . . . It was interesting seeing our responses, how we dealt with it when we got back. . . . It started my search for the meaning of life."

On Coasts of Eternity is of an entirely different genre, one familiar to most readers of this journal. It collects ten critical essays on Jack Hodgins' writing, four interviews of Hodgins, a review (by Margaret Laurence) of an early Hodgins' short story collection, and brackets them between an introduction by an esteemed Canadian scholar and a bibliography of Hodgins' works. The project is published by a local press renowned for the quality of its books, and the editor has had a long involvement with Hodgins and his works. As for Hodgins, he remains prolific, and has told this reviewer that he feels his recent writing is his best. The collection would seem to be an opportunity to make a significant contribution to Canadian literature.

After years of struggling to get his short stories published, Jack Hodgins burst onto the Canadian literary scene. *Spit Delaney's Island* was widely and glowingly reviewed, and nominated for the 1976 Governor General's Award. *The Invention of the World* intensified the favorable critical reception; *The Resurrection of Joseph Bourne* won the Governor General's Award for 1979. Critical acclaim was unstinting: in a typically laudatory article Viveca Ohm introduced Hodgins as the new "golden boy of Canadian literature." Looking back from our present vantage point at this period in Hodgins' literary career and reception, several observations obtain. First, Hodgins was being constructed as new and fresh and innovative, as a magic realist, as a Messianic mythologizer, as *different*, as *exotic*, as *our* version of Borges or Faulkner. As we now well understand, exoticizing and othering inevitably convey more about the perpetrators than about the subject. Second, the fascination developed along a centre/periphery axis in Canadian literature, with the centre located primarily in Ontario. By combing these observations we

realize that the attention was faddish, not only in the customary connotation of temporary, but also in the sense of being followed by a group. Hodgins could have met these expectations only by producing what that group desired—anything less than *One Hundred Years of Solitude* would have failed. Hodgins' ensuing major fictions—*The Barclay Family Theatre* (1981), *The Honorary Patron* (1987), *Innocent Cites* (1990), and *The Macken Charm* (1995)—have in the main been received indifferently in the bastions of Canadian literature. Unfortunately, these biases are reproduced and reinforced in *On Coasts of Eternity.*

The collection is introduced by W.H. New, who provides a pleasant and personal overview of Hodgins' life and literary achievements, then mentions some of the customary avenues toward interpreting Hodgins' work, and finally glances toward the pieces in the collection. The four interviews are from 1977, 1981, 1990, and 1995, the latter three conducted by Tim Struthers. Struthers takes a conversational, talkative approach in his interviews, and he demonstrates considerable rapport with Hodgins. The 1990 and 1995 interviews, focussing on recent Hodgins works (including the travel book *Over 40 in Broken Hill* and the sublime guide to writing fiction, *A Passion for Narrative*) are worthy contributions. The concluding bibliography, also by Struthers, is a fairly comprehensive checklist of works by Hodgins. That leaves the ten critical essays, the most disappointing aspect of the collection. One makes a significant contribution to Hodgins scholarship, when Lorna Knight takes us into the archives in order to glimpse Hodgins' literary papers held in the National Library in Ottawa. The remaining nine recycle old Hodgins criticism. A piece by David Jeffrey first appeared in 1978 and was previously reprinted in 1989. Essays by W.J. Keith, Ann Mandel, and JoAnn McCaig appear here in revised forms. The other essays are by William Butt, Struthers, Louis MacKendrick, Lawrence Mathews, and Wayne Grady. The "Works Cited" lists for these nine essays point to the problems: references that would lead to the foremost critical concerns of the 1990s are nowhere to be found. McCaig's essay nods toward gender issues, that exception emphasizing the dearth of contemporaneity. When Frye is the most recent theorist cited in essay after essay the result is shopworn criticism. As editor Struthers has cast his net in an unimaginative way over a debilitatingly restricted range. Alan Lawson in Australia, Ludwig Deringer and Waldemar Zacharasiewicz in Europe, Linda Hutcheon in Ontario, Stephen Slemon in Alberta, and Robert Bringhurst and Iain Higgins in BC are among the critics who have brought fresh approaches to Hodgins' work. Or, consider Bill New. His introduction to this collection disappoints me. It is an informative essay fulfilling an assigned task within a limited space—but, oh, what might have been. In 1997 New delivered the McLean Lecture series at UBC (just published as *Borderlands: How We Talk about Canada* by UBC Press). For three evenings he interlaced threads concerning nationalism, power relations, gender, spatiality, environmentalism, voice, representation, and contact zones. The literary touchstone for his arguments was Jack Hodgins' oeuvre. *On Coasts of Eternity* misses the opportunity to engage Hodgins' writing in a similarly powerful manner.



Queer Looking and Listening

Chris Holmlund and Cynthia Fuchs, eds.
Between the Sheets, In the Streets: Queer, Lesbian, Gay Documentary. U of Minnesota P
US$54.95/$21.95

William L. Leap
Word's Out: Gay Men's English. U of Minnesota P
US$44.95/$17.95

Reviewed by Stephen Guy-Bray

Between the Sheets, In the Streets is a collection of essays about (mainly recent) documentaries about lesbians and gay men. Holmlund and Fuchs divide the book into four sections—Markers, Memories, Marriage and Mourning, and Mirrors—and end with a useful videography and a list of distributors. The divisions never really work (neither does their sheets / streets dichotomy, but more on that later); fortunately, many of the essays are very good and I think the book would be useful both for experts and for people who would like to know more about queer documentaries.

My preference was for essays that observed the films closely rather than those that concentrated on making theoretical points. It is not that the theoretical points were not valid: I just feel that when discussing a visual medium critics should try to give some sense of the experience of watching the film itself. Some of the writers—like Chris Straayer and Lynda Goldstein—seem never to have considered this point and their essays bog down in clichés. On the other hand, Thomas Waugh's essay, although it raises some interesting points about performance, turns into little more than a list of films; some theory might have helped him to pull his observations together.

The most interesting theoretical essays were by Beverly Seckinger and Janet Jakobsen and by Justin Wyatt. Seckinger and Jakobsen consider the central question of how documentarists construct reality in relation to *Silverlake Life*. I did think they should have dealt with the impact of watching this film, surely one of the most harrowing documentaries ever made. Wyatt's piece is on Derek Jarman and his use of home movies, particularly in *The Last of England* (a film almost as harrowing as *Silverlake Life*).

Each editor makes a strong contribution. Holmlund writes on the "dyke docs" of Sadie Benning and Su Friedrich; Fuchs on *Without You I'm Nothing, Paris is Burning,* and the films of Cheryl Dunye. Both essays are well-written and theoretically sophisticated while still managing to give a clear sense of what it is like to watch these movies. I should add that the essays by Ronald Gregg, Marc Siegel, and Kathleen McHugh are also good, and for much the same reasons.

The main problem with this collection is its relentlessly American focus—a focus which is, of course, never commented on because, apparently, everyone is American. The worst offender in this regard is someone called Linda Dittmar, whose essay is on representations of old lesbians. Dittmar shows her American bias in her discussion of *Strangers in Good Company* (she even refers to the Native woman in this film as "Native American") and *Forbidden Love.* She never mentions that these films are Canadian, perhaps because these appear to be her favourite films and to do so would be disloyal. This is not the first time I have noticed that American celebration of diversity does not extend to recognizing other countries.

The editors of this collection explain their unfortunate title by saying that they are interested in documentaries which make connections between sexuality (the sheets) and public life (the streets). This distinction is rather old-fashioned, both in its separation of the two spheres of activity and in its spatial definitions of those spheres. In *Word's Out: Gay Men's English,* William L. Leap implicitly criticizes such distinctions in his development of a theory of gay male

speech as operating more or less everywhere.

Leap is a linguistic anthropologist who has only relatively recently begun to combine his academic interests and his private life. He has published numerous papers on gay men's English. Although there have been other studies on this topic, Leap's book is unique in its emphasis on "action, place, and audience" rather than on vocabulary. He looks at gay speech in a variety of contexts: shops, airplanes, health clubs, and dinner parties, among others.

Leap works from examples, in many of which he was himself a participant. He uses fiction, bathroom graffiti, and oral autobiography as well as conversational speech. Many readers will find his examples maddeningly brief and many straight readers will probably find his analyses unconvincing. That may well be one of Leap's main points: gay speech relies on nuance and assumed context to a degree which is very uncommon among heterosexuals and, as a result, what appears gay to gay listeners (or readers) will go unremarked by straight ones.

The most entertaining examples are his charting of the evolution of an exchange on a bathroom wall and his discussion of the role of speech in health club cruising. In the latter discussion, I thought he could have acknowledged the humour of the situation more. The picture of the intrepid researcher, clad only in a doctorate in anthropology and a towel, carefully listening to men arrange to have sex is funny, isn't it? Nevertheless, his comments on the situation are illuminating and his discussions of queer space and what he calls "suspect gays" (men whose sexuality is not immediately apparent) are very interesting. His identification of the identifying characteristics of gay speech—in particular, the pause, which he rightfully sees as crucial to any gay discussion—may well be the most original and helpful aspects of the book.

Apart from a few minor disagreements with some of his analysis, my only real problem with the book is with the order of its chapters. In the introduction, he stresses that gay speech must be acquired, yet the only chapter on this acquisition is the penultimate one. It is followed by a discussion of AIDS and personal ads, which is the weakest chapter. Interesting and informative as the book is, it would have profited from a reorganization and some attempt to tie the chapters more closely together.

Matriarch of Manakawa

James King
The Life of Margaret Laurence. Knopf $34.95

Reviewed by Susan Sheridan

When I first read Margaret Laurence's novels in Australia in the 1970s, it was as a young feminist hungry for stories of women's lives, and so I read them without knowing how famous she was, by then, among her fellow Canadians—'the matriarch of Manawaka', as she was once referred to. On the contrary, the energy of her writing, at once passionate and ironic, made her seem a youthful figure, only a little older than myself, one who had managed to survive the trap (as I saw it) of marriage and family that formed the substance of those novels. I read in her work the stories of female resistance and self-making that I wanted to find. I read her along with her younger contemporaries—Alice Munro, Marian Engel, Margaret Atwood—without any sense of the isolation in which she had worked in order to produce her powerful fictional portraits of small-town women in rebellion against the conditions of their patriarchal lives.

James King's biography provides rich materials and structures for the contextualising my earlier readings had lacked. He details Laurence's role in the emergence of Canadian literature onto the world stage and its proper recognition at home, as well as her personal pilgrimage from childhood

and youth in Manitoba through early marriage, sojourn in Africa, separation and sole motherhood in England while she established herself as a writer, only returning to live in Canada when her final great novel, *The Diviners*, was almost finished. It was 1973 and she was just forty-seven. He sympathetically recounts many of the doubts and the demons (including alcoholism) that plagued her later years, although not even the cancer diagnosis that apparently drove her finally to despair could adequately explain the decision to take her own life at the beginning of 1987.

Such an action always has terrible consequences—a vast sense of loss for all those who loved and admired the famous writer, but an especially terrible loss for those closest to her. It is surely not so surprising that it was kept a secret until now. But her great gift to the world is by no means diminished by this necessary truth-telling. While King does not attempt a literary-critical study of her writing, his respectful account of Laurence's life delineates the conflicts she suffered in such a way that one is grateful again for work she forged out of them, the fiction that remains her best memorial.

King understands her as a woman who often made demands on life that exceeded not only her society's norms for femininity, but her belief in her own entitlements. His interpretation owes more to feminism than the language of grace and faith with which Laurence habitually described the aspirations that derived from her Calvinist world-view. Yet that feminism which sometimes seemed to her harshly judgemental is used here as the framework on which her biographer has built a more generous and forgiving account of her than she would ever have given herself.

Dépasser le passé

Gilbert Langevin
La voix que j'ai. vlb éditeur $24.95

Yolande Villemaire
Céleste tristesse. l'Hexagone $14.95

Reviewed by Estelle Dansereau

Le passé continue de hanter la littérature québécoise. Il surgit ici dans la synthèse d'une oeuvre complète suite à la disparition d'un créateur de note comme Gilbert Langevin (1938-1995) et dans la réflexion très personnelle sur l'identité et l'appartenance de Yolande Villemaire. Entre temps, les courants actuels de la littérature québécoise contemporaine annoncent une production artistique plus mûre, complexe, plurielle, allant au-delà de l'interrogation nombriliste des années 60 et 70.

Quoique provenant de générations différentes, Langevin et Villemaire ont chacun parcouru une voie solitaire. Souvent associés à la contre-culture (l'*Underground* dans le cas de Langevin), ils apportent à la modernité québécoise des textes ludiques qui sont à la recherche de nouvelles mythologies. Les moyens diffèrent, certes: le laconisme parodique caractérise l'oeuvre poétique de Langevin tandis que le mysticisme oriente celle de Villemaire. Ainsi la construction du sujet lyrique par le discours devient-elle fondamentale à la vision communiquée. "Troubadour anarchiste" (Brochu) qui fusionne révolte et tendresse, Langevin chante la conscience capable d'espoir devant un "monde ravagé." Dans sa quête d'un univers pacifique et unifié, Villemaire réexamine le passé illusoire afin de tracer une voie qui répond à l'inquiétude devant la "catastrophe."

Au cours de ses trente-cinq ans et plus d'expression poétique (1959-1993), années fondatrices capitales au Québec, Langevin a écrit un nombre indéterminé de paroles de chansons. Dans l'anthologie *La voix que j'ai*, André Gervais rassemble cent dix

chansons écrites entre 1966 et 1995 dont trente-sept ont été enrégistrées par une dizaine d'interprètes y compris Pauline Julien, Offenbach, Marjo ainsi que Langevin lui-même. Présentées par décennies, les chansons recueillies sont mises en contexte dans un avant-propos indispensable qui décrit le travail d'archéologue nécessité par la dispersion des textes et le manque de documentation sur la composition. En fin de volume, Gervais fournit d'autres renseignements très précieux sous forme de notules, de discographie et de bibliographie. Si ces chansons n'ont pas la densité et la beauté expressive des poèmes, elles manifestent un grand nombre de leurs qualités: vers simples, langue dépouillée même laconique, tendresse qui sous-tend la parodie, sagesse existentielle.

Comme son contemporain Gaston Miron, Langevin adopte une voix populaire traversée de sagesse devant les déceptions de la vie, une voix par laquelle il construit un sujet lyrique qui dit les trivialités du quotidien et qui sait en extraire toute sa profondeur. Les rapports fraternels configurent les relations humaines, le plus souvent avec la femme, la compagne, l'amante, mais aussi avec les confrères, partout présents dans le "on" des chansons. Rarement simple, la configuration de ce partage est captée dans de nombreux vers: "Ange-animal ange amical / tu me consoles tu me désoles"; "enfant délice femme et complice / tu mets l'feu à mon paysage / pitié folie vengeance oubli / mon seul pays c'est ton visage." Dans son introduction, Gervais souligne le besoin d'une analyse critique de la chanson langevinienne. De fait, cette anthologie facilite de beaucoup une telle enquête.

Céleste tristesse, publiée dans la collection "La rose des temps" qui est dirigée par Yolande Villemaire à l'Hexagone, constitue le récit d'une enquête identitaire à travers quarante-sept fragments en prose. Relevant vraisemblablement d'une poétique villemairienne déjà connue, ces poèmes en prose construisent un sujet lyrique qui médite à partir de Paris sur son héritage québécois et français, personnel ainsi que collectif: "Les loups hurlent dans notre mémoire, même quand nous nous trouvons assis au café de Flore dans l'effort d'inscrire notre peu de réalité dans l'histoire littéraire de la Ville lumière." Le passé colonial est inséré dans un temps et un espace qui redéfinissent l'ici et l'ailleurs ainsi que la relation je-autre caractérisée ici par le rapport de l'enfant à la mère.

Il y a superposition d'expériences partagées par l'auteure et la narratrice, certes, mais distinctes aussi lorsque cette dernière se donne l'allure d'une enfant abandonnée qui interpelle la mère, parfois représentée par "les reines en robes de pierre" du jardin du Luxembourg, plus souvent par l'apostrophe dans un échange interlocutif. Dans l'ici, une rumeur de voix confuses qui bavardent, brament, chuchotent, gémissent, hurlent, murmurent, encercle la narratrice tandis que lui viennent d'ailleurs des fragments de chansons, de clichés, de textes qui se faufilent dans son discours. La France mère devient une matrice dans laquelle circulent le passé et le présent, l'ailleurs et l'ici, la voix de soi et de l'autre. Quel rôle joue cette imbrication des discours et des histoires? Que veut dire une mémoire libérée de ses attaches dénaturantes? Difficile de savoir quand *Céleste tristesse* se termine au moment de la délivrance: "Mon *âme noire* s'est dissipée. Tournant sur elle-même, énigme réconfortante venue du plus profond de notre céleste tristesse, la rose des temps m'a délivrée."

Le livre de Villemaire réussit tout comme les chansons de Langevin à dépasser le passé en ce qu'ils effectuent une arrivée par le discours, réalisation décrite par Pierre Nepveu dans *L'écologie du réel*: "L'ici n'est pas un lieu, c'est une pratique, s'organisant, se configurant non pas seulement contre, mais aussi à même la perte, le non-sens, la fragmentation."

Riding the Waves Ashore

Kevin Major
Gaffer: A Novel of Newfoundland. Doubleday $24.95

Raymond Fraser
Rum River: Stories. Broken Jaw $16.95

Lesley Choyce
Dance the Rocks Ashore. Goose Lane $17.95
Trapdoor to Heaven. Quarry n.p.

Reviewed by Heather Sanderson

The recent tide of fiction from Atlantic Canada shows no indications of ebbing. Instead, writers continue to claim wider ground, building on the dominant traditions of realism and historical romance and adding a dimension of fantasy to the representations of the region, increasingly constructing it as an imagined space as well as a literal one. Kevin Major's *Gaffer: A Novel of Newfoundland,* is a good example of this new direction in Atlantic fiction. It is a mythic imagining of Newfoundland through the figure of Gaffer, a boy who takes to the sea in rejection of the state of his home in what appear to be its final days, after the disappearance of the codfish. He resurfaces in various epochs, including his own future, and witnesses the stages of human colonization and the planting of the seeds of the destruction of the fishing industry and a traditional way of life. Bitter and angry, he defends his home and traditions, but through his leaps back and forth through time, the implications of continual exploitation on all sides become visible.

Beginning in 1997, Gaffer swims as far back as 1497 and as far forward as 2041—including back to the moment of the sinking of the Titanic and to the eighteenth century beginnings of a permanent settlement of fishermen and forward to the establishment of a gigantic amusement park on the site of the now-defunct fishing community. Along the way, he encounters cod at their height in the waters and a strange, talking goat named Buckley, who periodically gives him clues and encouragement: "You do what you see fit. It's you what got to live, the best way you know how." In the last chapter, he is captured by Caboto's men as they claim the land for the King of England and the Pope, wakes up in the hold of the reconstructed ship in St. John's harbour during the 500-year commemorative celebrations, and makes a spectacular exit with the Newfoundland flag, bringing the saga full circle as he returns to the Cove, presumably to reenter normal life with what he now knows to guide him.

The narrative is entertaining but sparse, employing Newfoundland idioms and touches of lyricism in the descriptions: "It was his heart that set him free into all the depths of brine, so when he swam, wild and loose and with a showman's twist of his leg, he rejoiced like a fingerling burst free from its egg." Much is left out, including an explanation of the mysterious blond girl, Gudrun, who is waiting for Gaffer's return in every time period. Called "one of the first to come to this place" by Buckley, she seems at once a spirit of the island itself and a representation of the first European discoverers, the Vikings. This partially explains Gaffer's initial hostility toward her, as a competitor for his role as protector and heir to the same tradition of settlement and exploitation that has resulted in the present-day outmigration. Equally mysterious are Gaffer's apparent agelessness and the degree to which he comprehends the history he becomes a symbol of. Certainly the terse dialogue between these two is not very helpful, and there are significant gaps that detract from narrative coherence, such as why Gudrun and her hut continue to be protected in 2027 by the nameless agent who has converted the entire cove into a preserve and established Skidder, Gaffer's old nemesis, and his gang as guards. The ending, too, contains a mystery—while Gaffer returns to the initial moment of the narrative, he receives

a welcome from those who remain of "You be careful Gaffer. Need you. We do so."

Far less poetic and elliptical is Raymond Fraser's *Rum River*, a collection of stories all but two of which are narrated by the alcoholic writer Walt MacBride. Fraser makes good use of first-person narration to create a strongly-realized character in MacBride and explore the world of the drunk. The first story, "What It Was Like," is a novella divided into four titled sections chronicling stages in MacBride's slide from hard drinker to confirmed alcoholic, beginning with a party and progressing through a graphically depicted episode of kidney failure to end with a view of his failing marriage on an unhappy trip to Spain, during which he falls off the wagon yet again. The narrative is both comic and horrifying, while the reader witnesses the antisocial and destructive behaviour of MacBride, an articulate and off-hand narrator.

The lack of a normal perspective on a world seen through the self-deceiving, rationalizing eyes of the habitual drunk is claustrophobic. This is true from the first episode, where he dismisses and ruins a father's attempt to get his mentally unstable daughter dried out, making a drunken assignation that he later fails to keep, thinking "My heart wasn't in it. It was too much work and too risky and a crazy idea to begin with. That's what it was. I wasn't aware of too much else about it that bothered me," before he passes out on his boat for the evening. Not surprisingly, "Lady Luck," the last story in the collection, begins: "*This was back in the summers when my former wife Eva and I were living on our thirty-eight foot converted fishing boat, the* Black North." The intervening stories give glimpses of the younger Walt, revealing the unrealized potential lost in repetitive cycles of behaviour. The last story is about Tommy Waggoner, another alcoholic, who appears in the first story, providing a sense of closure to the collection, and broadening the focus more generally to alcohol abuse in the area. This is not to say that the book makes moral judgements; the limited perspective of the first-person narrator does not allow for such a commentary, revealing instead the distortions of reality seen from within a journey down Rum River.

Lesley Choyce's *Dance the Rocks Ashore* demonstrates an impressive versatility, joining fifteen stories from his earlier collections with four previously unpublished ones. Connected by the ever-present ocean and shoreline, the stories range from dealing with the impending death of a loved one in the title story to other emotional losses and gains, including a coming-of-age story, "Losing Ground" and a fantasy about taxes on dreams, "The Dream Auditor." Several of the stories suffer from occasional over-writing, as in this fanciful description from "Eye of the Hurricane": "...when the bite of the North Atlantic off New England reminds the hurricane that this is far enough, that above here the land is still pure, the glaciers have just barely left, the people are not quite as confounded and corrupt as southerners, then the hurricane usually veers east toward Iceland into a humble retirement of dissolution and repentance." One of the best stories is "Coming Up For Air," about a man who works at a phone-in distress centre and who prides himself on never having lost a caller although he knows he is faking his empathy. A failed academic and poet, he uses surfing as a way to avoid emotional contact, until one winter day he nearly drowns. This story effectively combines vivid descriptions of surfing with traditional water symbolism to convey both Dan's physical salvation and his spiritual rebirth out of detachment into "a feeling of great need." The collection provides an overview of a long and prolific career.

Choyce's *Trapdoor to Heaven* is a less successful work of speculative fiction. Organized around the premise of a recy-

cling of souls through human history to the end of the world, the narrative is fragmented and discontinuous and the sections are uneven in their coherence and interest. The central image—of a nameless servant, the last living being on earth, forming sand into strands of singing glass on the last of the dry land as the sun begins to fade from red to black—is evocative and lonely, and the concept of time traveling through human history provides some interesting glimpses into various peoples and cultures, such as the Mi'kmaq. In this book, Choyce merges several of his interests, in literature of the fantastic, the borderline between land and sea, and the history and culture of Canada's Native peoples, but the connections between the chapters are not always clear, making the central concept seem contrived.

Au delà des Frontières

Madeleine Monette
La femme furieuse. L'Hexagone $24.95

Judith Messier
Dernier souffle à Boston. La courte échelle n.p.

compte rendu d'Aurélien Boivin

La femme furieuse de Madeleine Monette et *Dernier souffle à Boston* de Judith Messier sont deux romans fort différents qui témoignent de la richesse de l'imaginaire des auteurs et du débordement des frontières de plus en plus fréquent de l'espace romanesque québécois.

Lentement mais sûrement, Madeleine Monette construit son œuvre d'une grande richesse et d'une non moins grande intensité dans le brouhaha de la ville de New York où elle a choisi de vivre, il y a bientôt vingt ans. Son quatrième roman, *La femme furieuse*, comme son premier, *Le double suspect*, qui lui a valu le prix Robert-Cliche, en 1980, explore la complexité des rapports humains pourtant nécessaires pour atteindre l'équilibre et découvrir sa propre identité.

Deux femmes, la mère et la fille, se retrouvent après une longue séparation. Camille, la mère, chef de rayon des bijoux dans un grand magasin situé dans une ville du nord, qui ressemble à Montréal, profite, en l'absence de son mari Lambert, victime d'un profond traumatisme qui l'a isolé du reste du monde, de ce séjour d'une semaine chez sa fille, danseuse de ballet contemporain dans une troupe renommée, pour renouer avec son passé et reprendre contact avec Bello, son ex-amant, dans le quartier pauvre de cette ville presque inhumaine où se sont déroulées son enfance et son adolescence. Cette fugue réveille chez elle une suite de pulsions refoulées qui modifient son comportement et qui choquent, voire scandalisent la fille, découvrant alors, à sa grande surprise, une toute autre mère, provocante et sensuelle, habitée par la passion et le désir, au mitan de la vie, qui « rayonnait d'une indépendance heureuse et d'une liberté retrouvée », mais qui « n'avait pas encore d'yeux pour sa fille ». Pourtant, Juliette n'a rien négligé pour se rapprocher de sa mère, pour redevenir, le temps de cette visite, « la petite fille à sa mère » revenue « faire la loi dans sa vie ». Car, avoue la narratrice, « il était difficile de rester une femme auprès de sa mère, si douloureusement tentant de retomber en enfance ». Négligeant la danse, Juliette a nettoyé et astiqué son petit appartement d'où elle a chassé son amant Oleg, craignant « de paraître négligente aux yeux de sa mère, pourtant pas facile à tromper ». Elle s'est même astreint à une drôle de chorégraphie en récurrant « le ventre du fourneau de ses mains gantées de jaune, les imaginant phosphorescentes dans une cage de scène obscure, mains dansantes tenant lieu de tout le corps ».

Par un habile renversement dont seule Madeleine Monette a le secret, Juliette s'estompe peu à peu en présence de sa mère qui a besoin de toute la place et qui devient, contre toute attente, « la femme furieuse ».

Camille, en effet, devenue Mia pour sa fille et Milly pour son ex-amant, décide de sortir de sa torpeur, où l'a contrainte un mari névrosé, pour refaire le plein d'énergie, par la reconquête de sa liberté, par la redécouverte de l'amour de sa vie qui lui permet ainsi de jeter des ponts entre son passé et son avenir de femme rebelle, bien décidée, après trente ans de renoncement, de sacrifices et d'effacement, à se reprendre en main, contre vents et marées. D'où la symbolique du pont qui unit les deux quartiers opposés de cette banlieue défavorisée au prise avec la misère, la pauvreté et la violence.

C'est donc dire que *La femme furieuse* n'est pas qu'une belle histoire d'amour entre une femme d'âge mûr et son ex-amant, homme engagé socialement dans son quartier, qu'il a toujours refusé d'abandonner par amour des siens, sa grande famille humaine. C'est aussi le roman de la ville inhumaine, pour reprendre un titre du contestataire Laurent Girouard, qui dénonce avec vigueur, à coups de métaphores, d'énumérations, de poétiques descriptions et de phrases musicales ciselées avec rigueur et précision, le sort des petites gens des quartiers défavorisés et des ghettos au prise avec le terrible quotidien qui les empêche de vivre décemment. Madeleine Monette n'est pas insensible au triste sort des démunis que nous découvrons tantôt à travers le regard de Milly, tantôt à travers celui de Bello, qui a tout sacrifié, même l'amour, pour secourir ces êtres qu'il aime profondément, au point d'attirer l'attention des médias et, de ce fait, de toute la population. En compagnie de Milly, il se livre à un coup d'éclat, ainsi que le révèle la surprenante cinquième partie du roman, « Les deux pendus ». Spécialiste des harnais de sécurité dans une importante manufacture de parachute, Bello convainc Milly de l'accompagner dans cette redécouverte de l'amour, des désirs et des jouissances charnelles trop longtemps refoulés. Ce coup d'éclat n'est pas inutile: les médias sont sensibilisés, par un étonnant fait divers, et Juliette, profondément décontenancée, redécouvre une mère sensuelle et charnelle, habitée par le désir, combien différente de cette mère nourricière qu'elle a pourtant connue.

Roman de quêtes parallèles de deux femmes qui se cherchent mais en même temps qui se fuient sans se l'avouer, *La femme furieuse*, dans lequel l'écrivaine néglige tout à fait les dialogues, est aussi un roman sur l'art, thème récurrent chez Madeleine Monette, qui, cette fois, a investi la danse classique pour insister sur la beauté du corps et le charme de la poésie, tout en dénonçant, au rythme vibrant des sons et des mots, l'indifférence et l'isolement des humains vis-à-vis de leurs semblables. *La femme furieuse* est un roman qui donne à réfléchir, un grand roman, un très grand roman, à lire à petites doses. Il est d'une telle qualité et d'une telle intensité qu'il aurait pu (dû ?) retenir l'attention du jury du prix du Gouverneur général. Il y a eu, sinon manquement grave du moins oubli majeur, à mon humble avis, car voilà une œuvre réussie et réfléchie qui aurait mérité de figurer parmi les œuvres finalistes de ce prestigieux prix.

Dernier souffle à Boston de Judith Messier n'a ni la portée ni les qualités de celui de Madeleine Monette. Mi-roman policier, mi-roman intimiste, il a toutefois en commun avec celui de Monette qu'il se déroule aussi aux États-Unis, mais à Boston cette fois. L'intrigue s'amorce avec la découverte d'un cadavre : celui d'une jeune femme trouvée étranglée dans une chic villa abandonnée. Dans son sac, une clé de consignes à bagages qui mène l'enquêteur, Harry Ostling, récemment abandonné par sa femme et par sa maîtresse, à moins de deux semaines d'intervalle, à la gare la plus proche où il fait la découverte d'une valise préparée à la hâte contenant un journal, celui de la jeune fille, écrit en français, que l'enquêteur, heureusement (?) d'origine

francophone, parvient à déchiffrer à l'aide d'un bon dictionnaire, à l'insu de ses supérieurs qui, croyant à une mort naturelle, l'ont pourtant forcé pour avoir la paix à prendre des vacances. Grâce au journal de la jeune femme, institutrice dans une école primaire de Montréal et violoniste à ses heures, en vacances à Kennebunk puis à Boston afin d'oublier son profond mal de vivre, il parvient (mais combien difficilement ?) à remonter la filière jusqu'au meurtrier, un Italien névrosé et narcomane qui a déjà servi comme infirmier au Viêt Nam et qui, pour se venger d'une arrestation, s'en prend aux femmes de plusieurs policiers qu'il a violées, dont encore plus sadiquement la maîtresse de Harry, une Malgache qu'il a même excisée triomphalement. Violences inutiles si les policiers avaient eu le flair d'un jeune spécialiste de l'informatique, à l'emploi du corps policier depuis peu, qui parvient sans peine aucune à recouper les indices pourtant cousus de fil blanc qui auraient dû attirer l'attention de fins limiers. Vraiment Colombo est dans une classe à part !

Le roman est bien construit, la narration alternant entre un narrateur omniscient et les pages du journal de la victime. Les dialogues sont vivants et plus crédibles que les descriptions et analyses, même intérieures, auxquelles se livre le narrateur. Les nombreux hasards et les non moins fréquentes coïncidences étranges, voire tirées par les cheveux, diluent toutefois l'intérêt et gênent la lecture. Un mystère demeure : le narrateur n'explique pas pourquoi, après s'en être pris uniquement aux femmes des policiers, le meurtrier a soudain choisi de s'attaquer à une musicienne en vacances qui ne se gêne pas pour rapporter, dans son journal intime, dans les moindres détails ses nombreux ébats intimes (jusqu'à cinq bien comptés dans une seule nuit !) avec des inconnus qu'elle rencontre au cours de ces deux semaines pour le moins mouvementées, tant pour la victime que pour l'enquêteur, dont le destin est intimement lié aux cahiers de la jeune femme. Ce qui fait défaut, à mon avis, à cette œuvre, c'est que le lecteur adhère difficilement à ce qui est raconté, ce que réussit avec art et talent Madeleine Monette.

Larger Than Seeing

P.K. Page
The Hidden Room: Collected Poems. The Porcupine's Quill Vol. 1 $18.95, Vol. 2 $18.95

Reviewed by Diane Stiles

> And choir me too to keep my heart a size
> larger than seeing, unseduced by each
> bright glimpse of beauty striking like a bell,
> so that the whole may toll,
> its meaning shine
> clear of the myriad images that still—
> do what I will—encumber its pure line.
> (After Rain)

These lines could be P.K. Page's poetic manifesto, a declaration of the philosophy behind an artistic career spanning more than half a century. Her "pure line" is woven through a richly varied oeuvre that has evolved through a lifetime, shifting and adapting to new circumstances, always engaged and always engaging.

As a young poet in the 1940s, Page discovered the aesthetics of such modernists as T.S. Eliot and W.H. Auden, as well as the socialist politics of the Montreal *Preview* group, which included F.R. Scott and Patrick Anderson. Some of her early poems illustrate both the potential and the perils of combining these influences, as a sophisticated poetic sensibility competes for attention with the suffering of workers consigned to mindless drudgery:

> In the felt of the morning the calico-
> minded
> sufficiently starched, insert papers, hit keys,
> efficient and sure as their adding
> machines;

yet they weep in the vault, they are taut
as net curtains
stretched upon frames. In their eyes I
have seen
the pin men of madness in marathon trim
race round the track of the stadium pupil
(The Stenographers)

Of her own poems, Page has said she is most interested in those which are part of a "journey of discovery," and which "uncover new psychological ground." This psychic exploration often involves the twisting of conventional imagery to reveal the paradoxes contained within a personality. Asociations with whiteness, for example, are pushed to apparently contradictory extremes in "Photos of a Salt Mine," as "a child's/ dream of caves and winter" becomes a hell in which "men struggle with the bright cold fires of salt/ locked in the black inferno of the rock." Similarly, in "Stories of Snow" unexpected associations with whiteness create a kind of reverse exoticism:

And stories of this kind are often told
in countries where great flowers bar the
roads
with reds and blues which seal the route
to snow—
as if, in telling, raconteurs unlock
the colour with its complement and go
through to the area behind the eyes
where silent, unrefractive whiteness lies.

In this poem self-knowledge, if you are from a snowy part of the world, comes from passing through tropical attractions and returning to what is most familiar and central in your own experience, recognizing in this all the strangeness and exoticism of foreign territory.

During the seventies and eighties some of Page's poetry reaches beyond psychological models of the self to represent spiritual experience, often through the kind of concrete physical imagery used both by Sufis and by the 17th century metaphysical poets, two sources of inspiration for Page. In "Another Space," for example, the speaker describes a dream of spiritual renewal in which she is struck by a mystical arrow:

And something in me melts.
It is as if a glass partition melts—
or something I had always thought was
glass—
some pane that halved my heart
is proved, in its melting, ice.

And to-fro all the atoms pass
in bright osmosis
hitherto
in stasis locked
where now a new
direction opens like an eye.

Spiritual experience remains an important theme through *Hologram*, published in 1994, although in that collection it is represented in a very different form and style. These poems are *glosas*, from the medieval Spanish tradition, each based on a quatrain from one of Page's favorite poets. Here the last line of Page's poem "The End" is taken from a poem of the same title by Mark Strand:

We are the sea's, and as such we are at beck.
We are the water within the wave and the
wave's form.
And little will man—or woman, come to
that—
know what he shall dream when drawn
by the sea's
or what he shall hope for once it is clear
that he'll never go back.

Here the often short, spare lines of the eighties poetry have become longer and more lyrical, while concrete, intellectually appealing conceits have given way to more romantic imagery. In these remarkable poems Page is simultaneously looking back at some of her formative poetic affinities, and moving forward in her transformed aesthetic approach.

The Hidden Room: Collected Poems celebrates Page's work in an attractively designed two-volume set that includes reproductions of some of her drawings and paintings. Although admirers of Page's

work will be grateful for this collection, my one wish on reading it was that editor Stan Dragland had provided some information regarding chronology, thereby allowing readers the opportunity to experience her artistic evolution. This information would have been particularly desirable in view of the publication history of Page's poetry, because many of her poems have already been published several times and are ordered differently in each "selected" volume; a few pieces have also been re-titled through the years. Instead of clarifying the confusion, Dragland has arranged all of the previously collected work plus about eighty other poems in a non-chronological order, in a dozen sections which are not conceptually parallel with each other. Two sections reproduce previously published volumes, three are thematically based, and the rationale underlying the others is not obvious. Dragland describes his ordering of Page's poetry as "sometimes logical, sometimes not, but never random," and sees himself as a "sculptor" who creates "an order in which each poem is linked to its immediate neighbours in such a way as to augment them." He could, however, have achieved his purpose of giving "significant shape to the whole" while still at least including dates of publication, for those readers who believe a life has its own way of shaping a body of poetry.

Two B.C. Writers

Holly Rubinsky
At First I Hope for Rescue. Knopf Canada $26.95

Barry Kennedy
Through the Deadfall. Doubleday Canada $19.95

Reviewed by Rebecca Raglon

Holly Rubinsky is an admirable writer who is able to cast an uncompromising glance over human suffering. Without sentimentalizing her subjects, she nevertheless conveys the integrity of the lives of people marginalized by poverty, mental illness, or bad luck. She is the author of *Rapid Transits and Other Stories* and has won both the *Journey Prize* and a *National Magazine Award Gold Medal* for her work.

Her new collection, *At First I Hope for Rescue,* is a loosely linked series of stories with a common anchor found in the imaginary interior town of Ruth, B.C. (All of the characters are in one way or another "connected" to Ruth, even though the settings of the stories vary.) The first story in the collection, "Necessary Balance," is Rubinsky at her best. This is a very strong, almost perfect piece of writing. Bet Harker is experiencing an extending mid-life crisis, fed up with her run-down resort, her ineffectual, alcoholic husband Clarence, and the unchanging life in small-town B.C. Her friendship with Nan is threatened when Bet discovers the incestuous relationship between Nan's husband, Larry, and her oldest daughter, Karen. As Bet confronts Nan, it is possible to see the integrity in Bet, and her life, particularly when contrasted to the corruption at the center of Nan's world. (Nan is ready to sacrifice Karen, and eager to save Larry, Larry's business, and to avoid any "embarrassment" the family might face if the scandal becomes public knowledge in Ruth.)

By the end of the story, Bet is able to reassess her own life, and her dissatisfaction with it. "I remember longing for something. I remember being sad about the ordinariness of life, I guess. I didn't know, then, that there would come a time when I wouldn't have my closest friend any more, that Larry would grow distant and Clarence never understand why, that the kids would lose people they thought were family. Ordinary is maybe *it,* it's what we should be grateful for." Even Clarence is reassessed, as Bet realizes that in her husband there is a "harmlessness that I guess I can be thankful for."

What makes this story so powerful is the many levels it works on. The idea of an "ordinary" life is reassessed though a

glimpse of a corrupt domestic scene, private and public concerns are measured, friendship is tested. The whole story works to describe what might be a "Necessary Balance" in terms of human relationships, and in that sense, suffering is shown to have some sort of significance.

The stories that follow, however, are less successful in that they do not work with the same scope. Once again suffering is Rubinsky's concern, but now it becomes individual, private, and hellish. A woman is burned to death—her daughter is bulimic. A mentally ill woman has horrific dreams of roasting her lost baby. A young father, married to an incest victim, is caught fondling his twin babies. A man finds his employee practicing self-mutilation. It is difficult to maintain sympathy for this parade of horrors, even when the author is as skillful as Rubinsky. Her assertion, at the end of the book that "it was possible to be crazy as loons and happy as larks at the same time" is not convincing in the way that Bet's modest epiphany is in "Necessary Balance." Furthermore, Bet is likable—outspoken and funny—in a way that the Rubinsky's other characters simply are not. Believable they may be—just as their agony is believable—but in the end, their misery remains theirs alone, and they flounder in an isolated atmosphere of unrelieved suffering. Any one of these stories might have worked in another setting, but as a collection, this book brushes perilously close to a horrific kind of monotony.

Barry Kennedy's novel *Through the Deadfall* deals with the story of Jack Thorpe, a small town on Vancouver Island (Salish Spit), and a proposal to build a tunnel from the mainland. Kennedy's book makes it clear that in order to understand any one of these three stories, they must all be considered together.

Kennedy affectionately portrays life in Salish Spit, without idealizing it. This is a world of permanent under-employment, modest needs, and close-knit relationships. Life in Salish Spit is composed of a round of drinking, talking, squabbling, and playing softball, against the spectacular natural backdrops of both glacier and beach. The people in Salish Spit know they aren't "going" anywhere in a worldly sense, and that's just fine for many of them. They like life the way it is, and have no intention of buying into the latest round of alluring promises made by the outside interests promoting the tunnel (promises of jobs, higher standard of living, etc.). Jack, whose life is plagued by a number of mysteries concerning his murdered father, a marriage breakdown, and a possible incestuous encounter, is galvanized into action by the needs of the friends and neighbors who collectively make up his community. At one point Jack addresses a meeting concerned with the new development and says, "This is our town and our lives. We can and should fix it ourselves. I don't want to live anywhere else, and by letting other people transform Salish Spit into their idea of what it should be like, we will find ourselves living somewhere else without ever leaving home."

Kennedy has had numerous careers, including one as a stand-up comic. The humour in the book is both a strength and one of its weaknesses. When Jack's wife, from whom he has been separated, says she wants to come back and cook for him, he responds by saying he can get along without her help—"When I get hungry I can plug in the curling iron you left behind and stick it into a can of spaghetti." A local environmental group refers to itself as BAT GUANO (Bridge and Tunnel: Growth Underway Amid Noisy Opposition). On the other hand, when a character named Bernice falls on her "ass" four times running, the slapstick wears a little thin. There's also a lot of broken glass in this book as pool cues, shoes, lamps, even trucks go hurtling through windows and doors with an alarming regularity.

Picturing BC Landscapes

Howard White
The Sunshine Coast: From Gibsons to Powell River. Harbour $29.95

Ian Gill
Haida Gwaii: Journeys Through the Queen Charlotte Islands. Raincoast $24.95

Terry Glavin
This Ragged Place: Travels Across the Landscape. New Star $24.00

Reviewed by Joel Martineau

Howard White has seen a half-century of local history unfold since his family moved to the Sunshine Coast to operate a gyppo logging camp, and he proudly describes the area—the east side of Georgia Straight, angling northwest for 100 miles from Howe Sound—as an "oddball sort of place." At first glimpse *The Sunshine Coast* seems an oddball sort of coffee-table book, with the 157 photos by several local residents threatening to overpower White's 45 pages of text. But White has an intriguing thesis. He believes that the area has long attracted two broad types, two pioneer strains distinguishable by their reasons for being on the Sunshine Coast. There are the "loafers," who come for the love of the place and are indifferent to economic prospects, and there are the "muckers," who come for economic reasons and are indifferent to the *placeness* of the place. Even as the population mushrooms to 40,000 and ferryloads of muckers commute to Vancouver, the "fine art of loaferdom" thrives.

Consider, for example, Sammy Lamont and Ann Clemence. Sam grew up in a cedar shack behind Powell River and spent most of his working years salvaging escaped sawlogs. Ann is an ex-nurse trained in England. They lived in a waterfront home, with all the furniture made by Sam. They ate well from the sea and from their seaweed-rich garden. White writes, "They lived great lives and they worked hard for it, but not in a pulp mill. To Statistics Canada they were loafers."

White's family were muckers. He "was brought up with the impression it was really all happening someplace else," and if he had any brains he should use them to get away to one of those places at the first opportunity. In White's view such attitudes typify those who follow jobs to the area. Muckers tend to support clearcut logging and wide-open development while showing less concern for the preservation of rural values, although he himself is "living proof that the longer one stays, the more his motives tend to get confused."

White's ability to blend the rustic with the worldly—in one sentence he links D.H. Lawrence, Kurt Cobain, and Peter Trower—suffuses *The Sunshine Coast.* There is a balance in both the prose and the photos that respects the muckers while celebrating the loafers, honours the settlers while acknowledging the newcomers, and advances White's bucolic philosophies while situating the area and its population globally.

The balance and frankness are equally evident when White turns to the area's Aboriginal peoples: "The Coast Salish have never enjoyed the renown accorded by white Indian-fanciers to the Haida and Kwakiutl, probably because the Salish didn't erect forests of totem poles, didn't carve sea-going war canoes, and didn't produce world-class art except on one notable occasion. On the other hand, they didn't use the bodies of freshly killed slaves for boat bumpers." We read that the Salish did create a profoundly democratic social order, and that they did excel at commerce, and continue to do so.

Haida Gwaii: Journeys Through the Queen Charlotte Islands is a troubling book. It is the second collaboration between photographer David Nunuk and writer Ian Gill—the first, *Hiking on the Edge: Canada's West Coast Trail,* has sold more than 10,000 copies—and they have contracted to pro-

duce a third. Clearly they are doing some things right. In *Haida Gwaii* 52 lambently artistic photos combine with some 90 pages of prose to provide glimpses of Canada's northwest archipelago. In the introduction Gill states that he and Nunuk "have drawn together words and images in the humble wish that people who are curious about Haida Gwaii will learn enough here to want to find out more on their own."

Text and photos from a number of brief visits to the islands are distilled into accounts of three journeys in order to form a narrative progression. We read first of our intrepid adventurers being put ashore on the exposed west coast of the islands in the midst of a spring snowstorm, with tent and kayaks and perhaps insufficient food to last until the storm abates and the local outfitter hopefully returns. Their second "journey" features a rented van and bed-and-breakfast. It is essentially a quest to Nai-Kun, a.k.a. Rose Spit, which they initially believe to be the site of the Haida creativity myth that inspired Bill Reid's sculpture "The Raven and First Man." The third "journey" tells of a package tour aboard a 22-metre ketch, with three fellow ecotourists and a crew of three, to South Moresby/Gwaii Haanas National Park Preserve.

Gill travels rapidly, and relies upon the mainstays of Haida Gwaii literature to lend depth to his accounts. His favourite source is Christie Harris's *Raven's Cry*, first invoked to relate that during the maritime fur trade "10,000 sea otter were killed for their pelts on Haida Gwaii alone. This profligacy was the first 'rush' in a string of depressing resource grabs that would come to afflict all of British Columbia, revolving mostly around gold and . . . timber." He concludes, "So the Haida learned quickly the white man's ugly tendencies toward rapaciousness and unsustainability." Which provokes me to ask, How benign and sustainable is ecotourism? Is Gill's book not yet another resource grab?

Complex questions, perhaps best approached in this review by addressing the ethics and poetics of the travel writing genre: If travel writing is essentially autobiographical, and if introspection on the part of the artist is a primary requirement for aesthetically satisfying autobiography, how do Nunuk and Gill measure up? Discomforting answers are suggested by Nunuk's photography. In my visits to Haida Gwaii I have been overwhelmed by the devastation wreaked by clearcutting (and I grew up immersed in BC logging). The scars are everywhere, geographically and spiritually. Gill, in his text, fleetingly mentions clearcutting. But *none* of Nunuk's 52 photos shows a clearcut. The photos consistently project a pristine wilderness, bathed in soft light, that is but one very idealized aspect of Haida Gwaii. Similarly, there are virtually no people in the photos—in particular, few women and fewer youth. In fact, Gill and Nunuk see with imperial eyes devoid of introspection. They produce a picturesque Haida Gwaii for urban consumption. Ultimately, Nunuk's and Gill's construction of landscape is a 1990s visual and verbal reenactment of the European painterly tradition, fraught with the same privileges. Put another way, these textual *Journeys Through the Queen Charlotte Islands* feel like a special issue of *National Geographic.*

In *This Ragged Place* one small black-and-white photo introduces each of nine Terry Glavin essays. The essays first appeared as feature articles in the Vancouver entertainment weekly *The Georgia Straight* between 1993 and 1996. Glavin takes his title from Howard White's stunning poem "Oolachon Grease," in which the antipathy of the Euro-American palate toward this Native staple measures

> . . . how far
> Indian is from White how far
> learning is from knowing how
> far we are from this ragged place
> we've taken from them. . . .

The relations between Native and land, between Euro-Americans and land, and between Natives and Euro-Americans are Glavin's concerns. He examines these variously strained relations by riding the Via Rail passenger train through the Skeena valley, by telling how the residents of Finn Slough in the Fraser estuary are battling the developer who would evict them from their homes, by relating how year after year advocacy groups for the fishing monopolies orchestrate "missing salmon" scares in order to scapegoat Aboriginal fishing, by writing of the tensions between spirit dancers and subdivisions, by describing "land-claims hysteria," by reporting on Gustafsen Lake, and by recounting the importance of oolichans in Aboriginal cultures. And my personal favourite, "Last Day at Alexis Creek."

In it Glavin accompanies BC provincial court judge Cunliffe Barnett to the dusty roadside settlement of Alexis Creek in the Chilcotin Valley, west of Williams Lake. Judge Barnett is retiring at age sixty after presiding over the district for twenty-two years. His last day at Alexis Creek is unexceptional. Glavin's account begins with Judge Barnett striding into the community hall and seating himself behind a plywood table to deal with a typical assortment of cases, involving several Natives and a few Euro-Americans charged with everyday offences, embroiled in custody battles, and so on. As we meet the defendants we find that most have appeared before Judge Barnett more than a few times throughout his tenure, and that both defendants and Judge have come to expect that they will be treated equitably by the justice system, regardless of race. Which scandalizes local conservative factions, especially the Chamber-of-Commerce types in Williams Lake, who were much more comfortable in the good-old-days, harking back to Judge Begbie, when they could assume that Natives were automatically guilty as charged. Glavin uses the Judge's relationships with the individuals as windows into twenty-two years of legal history in the Interior of BC. Glavin's essays tend to move toward glimmers of hope. So, Judge Barnett is able to say, late on his last day at Alexis Creek, "You know, the hostility I used to hear expressed so openly about Indians, in the Chilcotin country, I haven't heard that in a while."

Three books, three approaches toward BC landscapes. Howard White and his many photographers show us a varied, anecdotal history of the Sunshine Coast; Ian Gill and David Nunuk portray Haida Gwaii in postcard-perfect glimpses that will indeed point us toward further investigations; Terry Glavin reads our ways of relating to the land as complex, personal narratives.

McLuhan Redux

Glenn Willmott
McLuhan, or Modernism in Reverse. U Toronto P $19.95

Robert Markley, ed.
Virtual Realities and Their Discontents. Johns Hopkins UP $20.50

Reviewed by Christopher Keep

Marshall McLuhan has emerged as the John the Baptist of cyberculture, the prophet who foretold the wonders to come only to be banished to the desert of critical obscurity. Today, however, his books are back in print, and, amongst a new generation of media-savvy cultural critics, his name has once again acquired the vatic authority it enjoyed in the late-sixties.

Glenn Willmott's *McLuhan, or Modernism in Reverse* is, then, a timely reappraisal of McLuhan's place in contemporary criticism. The first part of the book details the development of McLuhan's thought out of the New Criticism of the thirties. While many New Critics attempted to withdraw the poetic object from all that was "extrin-

sic" to the internal organization of its linguistic effects, McLuhan followed I.A. Richards in emphasizing the points of mutual exchange between art and society, text and reader, by which meaning is produced. In this regard, Willmott persuasively argues for the importance of the visual arts to McLuhan, and, especially, the Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein's ideas concerning "montage." *The Mechanical Bride* was the result of this interest, a "montage of popular-commercial images and texts, which uses the 'form' of advertising and modernist poetry alike to interrupt the montage of commercial culture."

The second part shifts from McLuhan, the rebellious but largely unnoticed New Critic, to "McLuhan," the carefully orchestrated, media-produced image of the pop philosopher that lit up the cultural firmament of the late sixties. And it is here that Willmott's book makes its most significant contribution not simply to an understanding of McLuhan's ideas, but to our understanding of what it means to be a critic in an electronic age. While he himself may have retained serious reservations about the coming of the "Global Village," McLuhan's public persona adopted a mask of cool indifference that was, he felt, the only appropriate means of engaging an audience that was in the throes of becoming retribalized by the kinds of intense involvement brought on by satellites, television, and computers. Thus, Willmott concludes, McLuhan's value today lies less in what he had to say, or even the manner in which he said it, than in his "symbolic self-sacrifice to the problem of the critic itself—of the critic's body and medium—in relation to the already-produced nature of itself and others." This is a compelling thesis, one which, in light of Judith Butler's and others' work on identity as performance, has considerable relevance today, but, unfortunately, this aspect of McLuhan's legacy is only lightly touched upon. McLuhan is largely explicated here on his own terms, or in reference to those who had a direct influence on his work. The result is a lucid and sophisticated exegesis, but one which seems to leave McLuhan firmly within the enclosure of the history of ideas, as if he never left the ivory tower he in some senses deplored. Charlie Chaplin, detective fiction, Sunday comics, Jack Parr, popular dance crazes like the Twist—all these were as crucial to both the development of his theories of media and his process of critical self-fashioning as were the writings of Eliot, Pound, Leavis, Richards, Lewis, Mumford, Innis, and Grant. But perhaps this is only to indicate the extent to which McLuhan demands reassessment. *McLuhan, or Modernism in Reverse* is an important contribution to that process

The return of McLuhan to critical legitimacy is evident in Robert Markley's collection *Virtual Realities and Their Discontents.* For those who haven't seen *The Lawnmower Man* or read a novel by William Gibson, Virtual Reality (or VR) uses high-speed graphics computers to create immersive "environments:" the cybernaut wears a stereophonic helmet and a sensor-equipped body suit which allow him or her to move about a digital space and experience a physical sense of "being there." Drawing on McLuhan's axiom that every new medium has as its content the medium that it has replaced, Markley argues that VR has not, as many critics have claimed, disposed of print culture. Indeed, VR seems to have engendered more books than actual machines, a fact which, for Markley, is symptomatic of the extent to which the technology remains ensconced within a metaphysics of embodiment. The six contributors to this collection each seek, in their different ways, to articulate the nature of this relationship, and to avoid the tendency of earlier critics to present VR wholly in the context of scientific innovation and

individual genius. They focus, instead, on the cultural, political, and intellectual contexts in which cyberspace has emerged as a new object of study: "To historicize and theorize virtual realities, then, is to enter into a wide-ranging investigation of technology, mathematics, economics, gender politics, and psychology that resists any simple sense of narrative or conceptual closure."

To this end, the individual essays are less concerned with what VR is capable of today than with its place within the cultural imaginary. N. Katherine Hayles, for example, provides a careful analysis of the sedimented history of such crucial VR concepts as embodiment, reflexivity and positionality, particularly as they were developed over the course of the Macy Conferences on cybernetics between 1946-53. Others, such as David Brande and David Porush, attend to its representation in the "cyberpunk" fiction of Gibson and Neal Stephenson, using literary texts indices of the ideological matrix in which VR is still forming. In a salutary paper on electronic authorship, Richard Grusin largely sidesteps the subject of VR altogether to ask how it is that the discursive logic of cyber electronicculture tends to accord agency not to the individuals or institutions which use the new technology, but to the technology itself. Michelle Kendrick, in the only previously unpublished essay, rounds out the volume by returning to the subject of VR and its relationship with western logocentrism. She calls for a turn away from current fascination with data processing speeds and image definition, and toward an understanding of the ways in which computers increasingly intervene in the complex process of cultural identity formation. Only in this way, she concludes, will we see "subjectivity as created in an always interactive environment, in which whatever we experience as true, real, and fundamental is inseparable from the technologies through which we are continually reinscribed."

McLuhan would have heartily agreed, but would have no doubt found a more memorable way to say it.

On Atwood

Sharon R. Wilson, Thomas B. Friedman, Shannon Hengen, eds.
Approaches to Teaching Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale and Other Works. Modern Language Association of America $37.50

Reviewed by Sandra Tomc

Sharon R. Wilson's preface to *Approaches to Teaching Atwood's* The Handmaid's Tale *and Other Works* informs us that Margaret Atwood's works are widely taught in world literature, comparative literature, humanities, women's studies, Canadian studies, emerging English literatures (formerly Commonwealth literature), American literature, English literature, science-fiction, and communications courses in universities, colleges, junior colleges, and secondary schools not only in the United States and Canada but throughout the world. In addition, *The Handmaid's Tale,* currently the most widely taught Atwood text in the United States, is used in economics, political science, sociology, film, business and other disciplines outside the humanities. Because of Atwood's popularity, Wilson goes on, individual works, especially *The Handmaid's Tale,* are often taught outside the context of the Atwood canon, Canadian literature, or even the field of literature.

It is this decontextualization of Atwood that the present volume, part of the MLA series, Approaches to Teaching World Literature, wants to remedy. The book is divided into two sections, "Materials" and "Approaches." The first section provides a sketch of relevant Canadian cultural and political history, a survey of Canadian feminist criticism, an annotated bibliography of Atwood's works, and a brief survey of Atwood criticism since the late 1970s. The

second section, "Approaches," includes essays that each pose a pedagogical or theoretical entrée into specific Atwood texts, from individual poems to *The Handmaid's Tale*. Here we find essays that discuss Atwood's works in accord with various literary/critical models (feminist, postcolonial, Canadian canonical, folkloric); other essays that, in Wilson's words, "offer practical advice on teaching Atwood's works in a variety of courses and institutions and to varied students," and that, further, document the experiences of teachers who have made Atwood part of their regular classroom fare. Here also is a "Case Study" section devoted exclusively to *The Handmaid's Tale*, wherein we find essays penned by teachers working in a variety of disciplines and representing a wide cross-section of institutions. And finally, a section titled "Pedagogical Challenges and Opportunities" suggests innovative and creative approaches to teaching Atwood, offering a range of theoretical paradigms, from feminist psychoanalysis to deconstruction. *Approaches to Teaching Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale* provides the teacher of Atwood with a trove of useful and diverse information about the author, her oeuvre, her critics and her position as a writer in Canada. For my part—as a Canadian who studies and teaches American literature but who has published on and sometimes teaches *The Handmaid's Tale*—I found most useful those portions of the volume that focus on Atwood's texts as either mediations of or comments upon contemporary Canadian and North American culture, particularly in its gendered, national, racial and ethnic formations. Especially illuminating in this regard are the essays by Donna Bennett and Nathalie Cooke (on Atwood and the Canadian canon), Diana Brydon (on Atwood as a postcolonial writer), Thomas Friedman (on *Survival*), Garry Leonard (on popular culture and gender construction), Patricia Merivale (on *Murder in the Dark and its intertexts*) and Arnold E. Davidson (on *Wilderness Tips*).

However, I have to say that some of the essays in this volume left me puzzled as to its overall mandate. On the one hand the volume's mandate, as Wilson's preface specifies, is overtly pedagogical: the volume wants to fill in current gaps in information and theory, gaps that in many classrooms deracinate Atwood's texts from the national, historical and literary conditions of their determination. And yet a number of the essays in this volume merely recapitulate by example the deracinating procedures that the volume as a whole protests. One teacher, for example, describes teaching *You Are Happy* in a course on British and American women poets; another explains how she teaches Atwood in a course called American Women Poets. Now, personally, I would submit these inclusions of a Canadian writer—ironically, for much of her career, an aggressively nationalist Canadian writer—in courses on American and British literature as examples of exactly the sort of pedagogical blind spot that this volume hopes to fill up. And yet here are these essays, presented without criticism or comment—presented, in fact, as the purveyors of a pedagogical model that other teachers of Atwood are invited to follow.

I also found myself puzzled by the absence of scholarship in some of these essays. Granted, the book targets teachers of Atwood who may not necessarily be versed in Atwood scholarship or in literary and cultural theory generally. But at one or two points I had to wonder whether these same teachers had been asked to contribute to the volume. Several essays that document the teaching of *The Handmaid's Tale* as feminist text, for example, seemed unfamiliar with the significant history of debate in both reviews and criticism over whether the novel can properly be called feminist. It seems to me that this would have been the place to introduce this debate, if only to

offer teachers a wider selection of readings from which to choose.

In sum, I think this book provides a valuable resource for teachers of Atwood, even though at certain points it seem to sidestep its own mandates.

Viewing African Canada

Robin W. Winks

The Blacks in Canada: A History. 2nd ed. McGill-Queen's U P $29.95

Reviewed by George Elliott Clarke

To amend Ezra Pound, history is bad news that stays news. The point applies perhaps most vigorously to histories of disenfranchised polities, such as Québec (before 1960, or before 1976), or the First Nations, or Transplanted Africans, especially where constituted as minorities. Robin W. Winks takes this view in his epochal, almost impeccable tome, *The Blacks in Canada: A History*, where he opines that African-Canadian history is "depressing" and "petty." Winks offers several reasons for his judgment. Accounting for three per cent or less of the Canadian population, African Canadians have been numerically insignificant and, from the perspective of the white majority, economically and culturally insignificant. Disempowered, scattered across a vast expanse, and internally divided by varying religious, ethnic, and linguistic affiliations, African Canadians register in collective celebrations of Canadian identity only as once-upon-a-time, fugitive U.S. slaves or as generic Caribbean immigrants. African-Canadian history is a mystery in Canada.

The chief benefit of Winks's substantial volume is that it sets a repressed chronicle before us in clairvoyant detail. Replete with cinematic documentation and exquisite quotations, Winks's text, republished in a second edition in 1997, remains as crucial to scholarship on African Canadians as it did when it first appeared, in 1971. Though other works have revised or elaborated aspects of *The Blacks in Canada*, it is still the most comprehensive treatment of its subject. The 500-page narrative spans three continents, four centuries, and umpteen *régimes*. It is prodigally erudite, prodigiously literary. It is not, alas, persuasive.

The infuriating insufficiency of *The Blacks in Canada* resides in its infelicitous interpretations. A Euro-American liberal, Winks discounts the distinctive context—French, British, and *Tory*—in which blacks had to make their way, first as colonial slaves (in the Maritimes, Nouvelle-France/Lower Canada, and Upper Canada); then as U.S.-born Loyalists and refugees (in the Maritimes), fugitives (in the Canadas), and pioneers (on Vancouver Island and the Prairies); and, lastly, as urban-bound immigrants from the Caribbean, the U.S., Africa, and South America. Wedded to the liberalism of a "rude Jacksonian democracy," Winks criticizes African Canadians for always seeming "to be perhaps a generation behind [their] American counterparts" and for lacking "the cumulative pride, energy, enterprise, and courage that the catalog of individual acts of defiance would lead one to expect." Canvassing the records of their potential "sources of strength"—their schools, churches, newspapers, and voluntary societies, Winks finds illiteracy, impoverishment, futility, and self-segregation. In short, Winks' African Canadians are failed African Americans, *sans* shared history, *sans* unity, *sans* leaders, *sans* much hope (lest they unite, somehow, with their sub-49th parallel sistren and brethren). He even argues that, by seeming quarrelsome and indolent, refugee and fugitive blacks *fostered* white Canadian racism in the nineteenth-century. Sneering declarations like "Begging ministers, poverty-stricken churches . . . all these hurt the Negro in his slow climb toward acceptance" are

deplorably abundant. But their prevalence stems from Winks's implicit belief that assimilation is one desirable 'solution' for the 'Canadian Negro problem'.

In his six-page preface (the only new item in the putatively new edition), Winks denies that he believes that "Blacks themselves, not White racism, were responsible for their unequal position in society." Damagingly though, he acknowledges "the ambiguities of my language and analysis." He also concedes that one chapter exhibits a faulty understanding "of Black culture or of economic and class realities." But his failure is grander than he knows. He misses a prominent intellectual thrust of African Canadians, one that is apparent from 1608 to 1970, namely, the allegiance of many of them to conservativism and to, at least until the 1960s, the (Progressive) Conservative Party. Winks ignores this aspect of African-Canadian culture, even though he notes, scrupulously, their hostility to parliamentary reform, their formation of Tory bodies and presses, and their preference for British institutions over Yankee republicanism. Yet, Winks fails consistently to assess the vitality of the conservative ethos for African Canadians, as he does the attractiveness of Canadian anti-Americanism. (Winks feels, for instance, that a "generalized anti-Americanism . . . limited the effectiveness of the [slavery] abolition movement in Canada.") But it is the adherence of African Canadians to classical Canadian values—community, tolerance, order, etc.,—that makes them, despite the countervailing forces of white supremacism and their own Pan-Africanism, profoundly un-American.

Winks asserts that Canadian, anti-black racism stems more from "indifference" than from economic competition, fears of miscegenation, or simple Negrophobia. But his research uncovers multiple instances where legislative and social violences against blacks were prefaced by whites' expressions of concerns over 'race mixing' or class conflict or both. Even so, to describe black-white relations in Canada, Winks must resort to adjectives like "confused," "uncertain," "haphazard," and "ambivalent." At all times, official support for African-Canadians has tended to resemble regional development programs: inadequate, patronage-riddled, and calculated to win maximum—if ephemeral—political gain. Hence, though hobbling, Canadian anti-black racism has always been lacklustre, lacking the volcanic, fundamentalist energies that animate American phobias. (In British North America, then, slavery withered away because it was economically irrelevant; in the U.S., it could only be extirpated through civil war. In Canada, legal racial segregation ended because it became an embarrassment that no government wanted to enforce; in the U.S., it fell only through protest and Federal policing.) Without realizing it then, Winks renders a postmodern history, one shaded by irony and contradiction, one that is, therefore, stubbornly Canadian in narrative, however American in its pretensions. Read against himself, Winks reads like Linda Hutcheon.

There's hardly a paragraph in *The Blacks in Canada* that cannot be transformed into a scholarly thesis or academic book, or even into a novel, or poems, or a play. In fact, Winks's text has served as a Holy Bible—that is to say, a source book for ideas—for two-generations of African-Canadian writers. (Lawrence Hill's second novel, *Any Known Blood* [1997], makes use of an incident that Winks records.) Perhaps this remains its golden, ironic fate: to assist all the refutations of African-Canadian "insignificance" now occurring in Canadian literature and in many other fields. The Blacks in Canada are at home, renovating it.

Tracing C.D. Shanly's "The Walker of the Snow"

Lisa Chalykoff

Over the last few months I have been researching the poem that inspired *The Phantom Hunter* (1888) by Canadian painter William Blair Bruce (1859-1906). Although it was clear to me from the outset that Bruce's painting was inspired by a poem called "The Walker of the Snow" by Charles Dawson Shanly (1811-1875), my efforts to confirm where and how Bruce came across Shanly's poem were complicated by a surprising number of editorial and bibliographic errors.

Resolving these errors has uncovered information that will be of particular interest to scholars of nineteenth century Canadian painting and poetry.[1] The *process* of resolution itself should, however, speak to a wider audience of scholars about the dangers that accrue from placing too much faith in the editorial accuracy of published documents. Not only has the research trail I recreate below taught me that publication is no guarantee of editorial accuracy; it has also demonstrated to me that the legitimacy we invest in published documents encourages the multiplication of errors that, with the passing of time and the expansion of our text-bound universe, can easily harden into seeming 'facts'.

Although Sherrill Grace provides a detailed comparison of Bruce's painting and Shanly's poem in her work-in-progress, *Canada and the Idea of North*, a brief description of both works will perhaps provide a fuller context within which to incorporate the ensuing editorial detail. Bruce's painting, which now hangs in the Art Gallery of Hamilton, depicts a man who appears to be either crouching in, or falling to, the moonlit snow about him. His arm is outstretched towards a departing, shadowy figure which closely resembles him. Shanly's narrative poem is a spine-chilling account of a deathly presence that accompanies a lone hunter as he crosses a frozen valley in the middle of a winter's night. The narrator, though temporarily overcome by the presence, lives to tell his tale. The second stanza establishes the narrative frame, and will perhaps give readers some sense of the poem:

> How the snow-blight came upon me
> I will tell you as we go,
> The blight of the Shadow Hunter
> Who walks the midnight snow.

Thus both "The Walker of the Snow" and *The Phantom Hunter* situate their audience in a nocturnal, wintry setting, both take a hunter as their focal point, and both depict a shadowy figure that, though human in form, seems distinctly otherworldly in origin.

Of course none of these similarities should come as a surprise. Bruce was forthright about his source for *The Phantom Hunter.* In a letter he wrote to his mother dated March 24, 1888 Bruce informed her that his newly completed painting (given the Salon title *The Phantom of the Snow*) took its impetus "from an old Canadian legend

which has had a poem written of it, entitled the 'Walker of the Snow'" (*Letters Home*, 162). He goes on to tell her, "Burrows I believe is the writer, as it occurs in his works" (*ibid*). The editor of Bruce's letters, Joan Murray, comments in a note that "Bruce borrowed a copy of *Birds and Poets* (1887) by John Burrows, the naturalist and writer, to paint *The Phantom Hunter*; the inspiration for the painting was 'The Walker of the Snow', a poem by C.D. Shanly. In 1896, he wrote his father to see if he could find him a copy. His father must have found one since the book is in Bruce's library in Brucebo" (163).

The 'Burrows' to whom both William Blair Bruce and Joan Murray refer is actually John Burroughs (1837-1921), an American naturalist with a keen interest in poetry, and the writer of many books, one of which is indeed entitled *Birds and Poets*. But this book was not published in 1887. Burroughs copyrighted *Birds and Poets* in 1877 and it was finally published by Houghton, Mifflin and Company in 1883. The six year discrepancy between these dates is explained by Burroughs in the preface to this work, in which he informs his readers that he "deliberated a long time about coupling some of [his] sketches of out-door nature with a few chapters of a more purely literary character." More importantly, although I do not doubt that *Birds and Poets* can be found in Bruce's library, it will not get the curious scholar far, because "The Walker of the Snow" is nowhere to be found in *Birds and Poets*.

Another false lead on the trail to Bruce's source for the Shanly poem is found in the notes to William Douw Lighthall's collection, *Songs of the Great Dominion* (1889), which includes Shanly's poem. The biographical note on Shanly found in Lighthall's Appendix informs us that "'The Walker of the Snow' appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*, and is quoted nearly in full by John Burroughs in 'Pepacton' [sic]" (*Songs of the Great Dominion*, 462). Lighthall is partly right here. Shanly's poem does appear in the May 1859 edition of *Atlantic Monthly* (pp. 631-2), but it does not appear in John Burroughs's *Pepacton* (1881).

After examining Burroughs's prolific writings, I at last discovered Shanly's "The Walker of the Snow," quoted nearly in full (as Lighthall suggests of *Pepacton*) in a volume entitled *Locusts and Wild Honey* (1879). Burroughs invokes "The Walker of the Snow," he tells us, because he finds it a rare example of a poem that "fits well the distended pupil of the mind's eye about the camp-fire at night" (*Locusts and Wild Honey*, 182). It is perhaps because the poem is being used to convey a feeling rather than to further an argument that Burroughs freely omits stanzas 3 through 5 of Shanly's poem. There are differences of punctuation between Burroughs's text and the poem as it appeared in *Atlantic Monthly* too detailed to chronicle here, but it should be noted that in two instances Burroughs alters the diction of the poem as it appears in the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Songs of the Great Dominion*, and *A Wreath of Canadian Song*. In the penultimate stanza of Burroughs's edition, the word "blight" is misquoted as "sight," and in the second line of the final stanza, the gerund "falling" is misquoted as "fallen."

In other words, Burroughs does not simply re-print "The Walker of the Snow" for scholarly analysis, but re-creates for his readers an oral performance of the poem that he gave to his companions around the camp fire one evening. This strikes me as a pleasingly appropriate presentation of the poem because Shanly's "The Walker of the Snow" is a didactic tale of misadventure, told in an outdoor setting by a near-victim to his silent interlocutor. In this light, Shanly's "The Walker of the Snow" appears as the northern counterpart to Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Both poems narrate an encounter with an indefinable force that, though not identical with 'nature,' seems aligned with it; both poems

demonstrate the need its victims have to domesticate their seemingly inhuman encounters through the act of narrating it to others; and both poems justify their narrator's (supposedly oral) reiteration of events by a didactic impulse.

A last point is worth noting for anyone interested in the web of influence at the centre of which sits Shanly's rather humble, if dramatically effective, poem. Burroughs tells us (correctly) in *Locusts and Wild Honey* that Shanly's poem "was printed many years ago in the Atlantic Monthly" (182). I think it highly probable that John Burroughs came across "The Walker of the Snow" around the time of its original publication in *Atlantic Monthly* and, having been impressed by it, waited some twenty years for the appropriate occasion to invoke it. I believe this to be the case because one of Burroughs's earlier publications, *Winter Sunshine* (1875), includes a chapter entitled "The Snow-Walkers" about the birds and animals who remain afoot throughout the winter months. "In what bold relief," he asserts, "stand out the lives of all walkers of the snow! The snow is a great tell-tale, and blabs as effectually as it obliterates. I go into the woods, and know all that has happened" (*Winter Sunshine*, 56). Significantly, the protagonist of the Shanly poem records being overcome with fear upon discovering that his mute walking companion leaves no tracks in the snow! It is this epiphanic moment that Bruce's "The Phantom Hunter" conveys with an impressive vividness. C.D. Shanly's poem apparently got around, but in marked contrast to its phantom hunter, those having utilized "The Walker of the Snow" have left a score of scholarly (if somewhat confused) footprints for us to retrace.[2]

NOTES

1 Sherrill Grace and I would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for their support of this research.

2 For those interested, Shanly's poem can be found in several sources. Its first appearance in the May 1859 edition of *Atlantic Monthly* (Vol. III, NO. XIX) was followed by subsequent publications in John Burroughs' *Locusts and Wild Honey* (1879; pp. 182-4), in W.D. Lighthall's *Songs of the Great Dominion* (1889; pp. 181-3), and in C.M. Whyte-Edgar's *A Wreath of Canadian Song* (1910; pp. 26-28).

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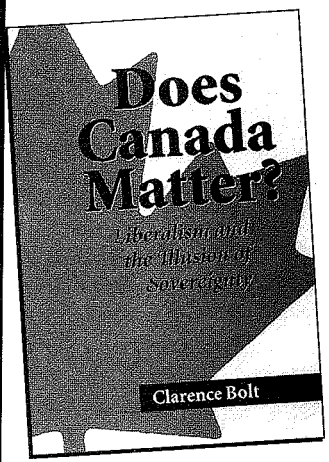

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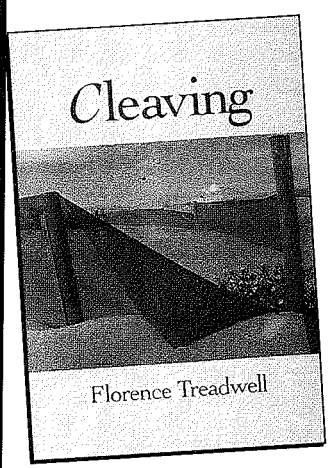

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